ABSTRACT

Wesley Tang, EQUITY WARRIORS: BUILDING PRINCIPAL CAPACITY TO ENACT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, May 2023.

The purpose of this participatory action research (PAR) study was to examine the extent to which elementary school leaders enacted culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices with the ultimate goal of serving students who have been marginalized (Khalifa et al., 2016). As a district assistant superintendent, I supported four school leaders in building their capacities to become more effective at creating culturally responsive school environments. In a 15-month study using participatory action and activist research methodology with the principals as co-practitioner researchers, we found that humanizing the leadership development space is an essential precondition for school leaders to effectively enact CRSL actions. The structure of the study afforded the principals a space to be vulnerable, examine their professional identities, form partnerships with each other, fortify their knowledge and skills, and move from the state of increased awareness about CRSL to enacting CRSL behaviors (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2010). Additionally, the leaders felt the network of support was the key factor in their critical self-reflection or praxis and ability to develop systems thinking. Educational leaders do not acquire new knowledge and skills alone; they need and benefit from a supportive and trusting environment of peers who share values and are committed to individual and collective growth as leaders. In such a space, they feel safe to talk about their misgivings, missteps, misfortunes, and worries so that they can enact their espoused values (Argyris & Schön, 1974). The study is significant for district leaders who supervise principals because the process is transferable to other contexts and provides a clear direction for district supervisors in supporting school leaders to be more effective culturally responsive leaders.

EQUITY WARRIORS: BUILDING PRINCIPAL CAPACITY TO ENACT CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP

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The antiracist power within is the ability to view my own racism in the mirror of my past and present, view my own antiracism in the mirror of my future, view my own racial groups as equal to other racial groups, view the world of racial inequity as abnormal, view my own power to resist and overtake racist power and policy. (Kendi, 2019, p. 215)

My early experience as an immigrant and a second language learner was analogous to many students of color in the public-school educational system—not because I did not have the academic potential, but because many of my teachers provided me with a lackluster learning opportunity and held minimal expectations of me as a student. I vividly remember that two White female middle-school teachers encouraged me to speak only English at school; I did not realize at the time that their actions were assimilationist and had an irrevocable and deleterious effect on my self-esteem (Kendi, 2019). Perhaps someone in leadership with an antiracist mindset might have prevented the actions of these teachers. Ironically, those teachers' actions were the impetus of developing my stance as an equity warrior and developing an antiracist mindset. As an educational leader, I am passionately committed to advocating and equalizing the opportunity gap for every student, especially the students who are most disenfranchised and underserved.

Our educational system continues to fail our Black, Brown, English language learners, and students with special needs. One can predict almost any students' academic performance based on their racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic background. According to the most recent 2018–19 California Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment results in English Language Arts and Mathematics, Black students continue to be the lowest-performing subgroup of students, scoring approximately between thirty to fifty percentage points lower than their White and Asian counterparts (cde.ca.gov). If we genuinely believe that all racial groups are equal, removing this predictability marker is a moral obligation. Educators must no longer remain neutral but must

onfront these racial inequities through antiracist leadership actions as they build their capacity as equity warriors (Leverett, 2002; Mitchell, 2018). For the purpose of clarity, I use the terms school leaders, site leaders, and school administrators interchangeably to include school principals and assistant principals.

As a progressive institution, San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is ripe to challenge the *status quo* and realize its mission: *"Every day we provide each and every student the quality instruction and equitable support required to thrive in the 21st century."* While classroom teachers have direct interaction to impact students' positive schooling trajectory, the school principals or leaders have equally significant influence on student learning and experience (Grissom et al., 2021a, 2021b). School leaders cannot be mere operational managers; they must be leaders who engage teachers and manage systems to achieve equitable outcomes. As antiracist leaders, they can influence systems and conditions that support success of the most vulnerable students. However, how can school leaders be influential as culturally responsive equity warriors when many have little exposure or minimal professional development in this critical area and are confronted with extant challenges? Superville (2020) asserted that most of the leadership preparation programs do not provide antiracist training. Therefore, in most cases, the onus in building the school leaders' capacity falls on the school district. Specifically, in this case, that becomes my role as I serve as assistant superintendent in the district and am responsible for supervising sixteen principals and three assistant principals.

> San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) has a working definition of equity: The work of eliminating oppression, ending biases, and ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants through the creation of multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic, gender equitable, multiracial, and inclusive practices and conditions; removing the predictability

> of success or failure that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor. (www.sfusd.edu, n.d.)

However, the institution still functions like many public or private organizations with a hierarchical management structure. The same way school staff report to principals, principals report to central office administrators. This hierarchical framework is the antithesis to equity-oriented structures and organizations. Therefore, how do school leaders increase their capacity to be culturally responsive, and how can we reimagine the central-office supervisor's role to promote more collaboration and equity and less evaluation and hierarchy? This question forms the basis of the Focus of Practice (FoP) for this Participatory Action Research study. Increasing the capacity of school leaders and creating the necessary conditions for them to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices is vital to the learning and outcomes of minoritized students who have been marginalized (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Narrowing the study's focus further and determining the local strengths and needs of the SFUSD, I describe the rationale for the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study and the assets and challenges related to the research. Additionally, I discuss the significance of the project and the connection to equity.

Rationale

Ostensibly, the central office supervisors' role is to support school leaders in managing the daily operations of managing a school: hiring and supervising the teaching and support staff, building parental partnerships, and creating systems to ensure quality instruction for students. However, the support from the supervisors is often limited and remote from fully understanding the particular school context, especially from an instructional standpoint. During my six-year tenure as a school principal, my supervisors visited the school fewer than 15 times. When they

visited, they either mediated a parent complaint, attended a School Site Council (SSC) meeting per request from the SSC chairperson, or participated in an instructional round that often felt like a compliance task. To evaluate principals, the supervisors determine the school principals' effectiveness based on evidence that school leaders produce corresponding to certain competency areas in the evaluation format. Some might call that a *loose coupling* approach in supporting the school leaders. Weick (1976) proffered this term to describe educational organizations. He asserted, "there is loose control on the work—the work is intrinsically uninspected and unevaluated or if it is evaluated it is done so infrequently and in a perfunctory manner . . ." (Weick, 1976, p. 11). In this vein, there was effectively limited supervision and accountability. A system organized like this produces the expected results; leaders operationalize their school and serve the needs of the majority of the students. When the school leaders receive limited support, guidance, and coaching, they remain underprepared to serve the most vulnerable and disenfranchised students, and the equity gap continues to widen. Therefore, I observed a real need to restructure my role of the central office supervisor to support and enhance the school leaders' culturally responsive leadership development.

School leaders' efficacy as instructional leaders is the biggest lever for improving student learning and outcomes (Grissom et al., 2021a; Leithwood, 2021; Leithwood et al., 2020). Therefore, a call for a different leadership approach in supporting site leaders is critical. "Leadership is a dynamic and interactive process where leaders become followers and followers become leaders, and oftentimes there are multiple leaders serving diverse purposes" (Benham, 2002, p. 138). This alternative approach to leadership supports the Focus of Practice of this study. Benham (2002) proposed a leadership approach in which shared power and inclusive decision-making are highlighted in solving complex problems like the equity gap within our

educational system. While school principal supervisors have other essential central duties, their role can be reimagined to include coaching support, partnership, and brokering of resources.

Most supervisor interactions with school leaders are transactional; the leaders do not receive the necessary instructional support they need to navigate and support teachers. In many cases, novice leaders participate in university-sponsored or local district or county office programs for professional learning. However, such programs for novice administrators typically end after the initial two years. Therefore, the central office supervisor's guidance and support become even more critical in furthering the site administrators' leadership development, especially their culturally responsive instructional leadership. Even experienced school administrators need continuous guidance and support as demands and challenges evolve. They need what has been identified repeatedly in the literature: support networks in which they can work together with other leaders to tackle issues and get support through critical friends consultancies and targeted support for their identified goals. In a 2008-10 professional program for SFUSD site administrators, educators met in small groups to tackle their school dilemmas, identify equity actions, and support their fellow leaders; the evidence was conclusive that administrators valued this form of learning and support (Spain, 2009). Despite evidence of effectiveness, the district disbanded this form of professional development and returned to large monthly principal meetings. I wanted to re-establish a format such as this Equity-Centered Professional Learning community structure for principals with whom I work. To study this effectively however, I would need to work with a small group of principals.

Through a partnership approach and established relational trust, the supervisors can gain a deeper understanding of each school community's unique context. They can assess the instructional needs, leverage the leaders' assets or strengths, and identify the school leaders'

knowledge and skill gap to address issues of equity. Further, the supervisor must embrace a continuous improvement approach (Yurkovsky et al., 2020). They must strive to be learners and be willing to build their capacity as a leader who adopts a coaching approach. While the supervisors are not expected to know everything, they can be resources for the school leaders.

Therefore, the Focus of Practice in this area can potentially yield greater insight on how we can encourage school leaders' capacity building in the area of Culturally Responsive School Leadership as a potential vehicle to close the achievement gap for the most vulnerable students and do this through a reimagined role of a central office supervisor.

Assets and Challenges to FoP

To better understand the assets and challenges across the system in enacting culturally responsive leadership that addresses racial equity, I gained input from eight school leaders. I had conversations with seven principals and one assistant principal and incorporated their perspectives to the existing assets and challenges that inform the study. At the micro-level perspective, the schools and their community engaged in the district's antiracist initiative. While professional development and tools are available to the teaching staff, a mindset shift is a more arduous transformational process better addressed through the systems at the district level. At the meso level, the different departments within our district have prioritized their policies and resources to foster leadership development within the antiracist framework. The district prioritized antiracist professional development, messaging, programs, and resource alignment across the system. However, individual school contexts and leadership approaches differed, thus posing an additional layer of complexity. At the macro level, the district's senior leadership members were committed to the work. However, individualistic interests often drove state and

national policies, and educational policies are determined based on who is in power at a given time and space and reflect their political drives and motives.

Micro Assets and Challenges

At the school level, assets included the school leaders' commitment to implementing Culturally Responsive School Leadership as a set of practices. The common approaches to this commitment included a robust instructional approach that was inclusive, rigorous, and intentional to provide all students access. The second was the need to build alliances with families and other staff members for the common goal. Based on my conversations with the school leaders who participated in this initial analysis of assets and challenges, the school administrators were well-aligned with the focus on equitable culturally responsive leadership.

The site leaders created the structures and conditions that foster a collective approach to implement standards-based instruction and reflect on their instruction that ensures students gain access to quality teaching and learning opportunities. The school leaders were generally adept at creating a culture where most of the teaching staff are eager to implement a rigorous curriculum in all subject areas and where the staff engage in professional development during staff meetings and further refine their instruction through data analysis at their weekly grade-level meetings. The school leaders felt optimistic about forming Instructional Leadership Teams (ILT) at their schools to carry out the school improvement plan or its priorities, including a targeted focal group of students who might not be meeting grade-level standards.

Leaders had formed authentic partnerships with parents, especially the families who were disenfranchised. In most instances, the leaders stated that they could leverage the diversity and the orientation of the support staff who were willing to support the students and their families. Many of our schools have added a Coordinated Care Team (CCT) or rebranded their Student

Assistant Program (SAP) that prioritizes family partnership. Creating a CCT is part of the board resolution. In general, the parents, including the disenfranchised, are eager to support our district's antiracist vision. Finally, the school leaders made space for staff to discuss race-related issues, learn about racial consciousness, and reflect on their practices that might have contributed to the marginalized students' opportunity gap.

However, the transformation of the mindsets proved to be more challenging. To engage in a successful transformative process as a faculty, the staff would reflect on their prejudices and racist beliefs or actions. According to Kendi (2019), "racism is a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities" (p. 18). Until the individuals perceive that racism is systemic, the mindset shift might be protracted and have limited results.

Further, the site leaders often observed that the espoused beliefs and the actual practices were a living contradiction. The teaching staff often did not fully hold each other accountable or demonstrate the willingness to call each other out for the sake of comfort. Until there was a critical mass willing to reflect on their practices, face uncomfortable truths, and choose to be culturally responsive antiracist teachers and leaders, the status quo remained steadfast. As a result, I chose leaders for the PAR project and study who exhibited the asset behaviors and mindsets necessary to be and become culturally responsive leaders dedicated to an antiracist stance.

Meso Assets and Challenges

The district's antiracist vision aligns with the priorities across the system and supports tenets of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa, 2018). This alignment provided a platform for the school leaders in enacting and realizing this policy. The antiracist framework began with the superintendent. During the tenure of the former superintendent, the district

launched the PITCH initiative, which stands for Professional capacity, Instructional guidance, Transformative mindset, Collaborative culture, and High-quality staff. The district identified 20 schools that demonstrated a vast disparity in the performance and opportunity gap for African American students who were historically underserved. This bold and ambitious multi-year plan focused on cultivating five necessary conditions of a high-quality instructional and learning environment.

The PITCH initiative was the springboard for the antiracist vision for all students who were disenfranchised. From the central office perspective, the commitment to cultivating leadership development across the system was evident. In the last few years, the senior leadership team prioritized this topic at the yearly administrative institute and district-wide organized spaces by tackling three critical racial consciousness areas -- the culture of White supremacy, implicit bias, and microaggressions. These deleterious components of racist practices are intertwined and permeate throughout our system.

To some degree, school leaders were more prepared to interrupt these racist practices as their racial consciousness increased. However clear the expected goals, the leaders found that clear guidelines about how to enact different practices in their schools was lacking. Quadros-Meis (2021) worked with four leaders from PITCH schools to understand how they took on the mantle of antiracism and created a brave supportive space so they could tackle what were often perceived to be intractable issues.

Due to the district alignment, the school leaders welcomed this shared vision. For example, our curriculum and instruction department developed modules that incorporated antiracist components grounded from the liberation educational model of Freire (2000) to the culturally and historically responsive literacy framework of Muhammad and Love (2020). There

was a sense of urgency that our marginalized students can no longer be empty vessels; educators must provide their students the opportunity and conditions to construct meaning through thoughtful engagement, inquiry, and dialogue that lead to reflection and action (Freire, 2000). Further, Muhammad and Love (2020) advocate for identity development coupled with *criticality*, where students learn to analyze power dynamics and oppression to become critical readers and consumers. With this antiracist laser focus, our school leaders are equipped with a consistent message and the resources to engage their teaching staff.

During this conversation, the school leaders referenced the shared focus among different cohorts within the elementary division as another asset. They appreciated that the district-wide organized space was consistent in the antiracist work. The leaders expressed that when every school community was collectively working on the same thing, the equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable students would likely be more profound.

At the same time, the different school contexts posed unique challenges for the antiracist vision. (Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity for the names of schools discussed.) For instance, Lombardi High School ranks #1 in San Francisco school, fifth statewide, and 68th in national rankings, and is a highly sought-after secondary school. The greater public interest attracts the White, other ethnic minorities of high socioeconomic status, the elite, and affluent families who leverage schools like Lombardi to preserve privilege for their children. Less than two percent of the two thousand plus student population at Lombardi are of African American descent. Due to this skewed demographic layout, many families spoke against the board proposals. The board policy to establish open enrollment caused significant disruption in the district from 2020-2022 (Billingsley, 2020; Heller, 2022). Many school leaders felt discouraged to enact antiracist policies due to political resistance and dissonance. Leaders often faced

resistance and discomfort, illustrating the need to increase their preparedness, knowledge, and skillset in addressing the political pushback from privileged parents and staff.

Macro Assets and Challenges

At the macro level, Tony Thurmond, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, launched the Education to End Hate initiative in September 2020. California school districts and schools can apply for grants to source training on various topics, including antiracist pedagogy, implicit bias to privilege, and systems of oppression. Another resolution highlighted as an asset in the initial CLE was the earmark funding for special education. Due to the current context, the state issued a directive to school districts to ensure that special education students receive Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) or continuity of learning even during periods of remote learning. Statewide or national resolutions on antiracist work and policies to ensure educational access for all students are imperative and laudable.

Even with the Board of Education's endorsement of an antiracist vision, equity-minded leaders felt challenged about how to enact the vision. For instance, federal mandates and legislation change with each presidential administration; for example, a concern is the expansion of school-voucher programs and the discrediting of public-school endeavors. Conservative politicians worked to stop a United States history curriculum that critically examines race relations. Politicians and other forces who are proponents of these mandates represent a source of peril for the antiracist efforts of the district.

The reality is that our district consists of a diverse group of school constituents, each with their interests and beliefs around topics of race and ethnicity, and their impact on schooling. Therefore, the school leaders were in the political crossfire as they attempt to enact antiracist

policies, practices, and ideas within their school community. While constituents had different interests, the leaders' emphasis must remain student-centered.

In sum, assets were abundant at the micro and meso levels supporting the culturally responsive and antiracist leadership work. The school leaders felt that curricular resources and tools could guide teachers in implementing a rigorous learning experience for their students and form authentic partnerships with families, both essential for their children's learning outcomes. Ostensibly, there was alignment for every constituent, including staff, site leaders, and central office leaders, to work individually and collaboratively to narrow the opportunity gap for marginalized students; however, the actual strategies for doing so were not always clear. As for the macro level, state, and national policies shifted slowly to cultivate a more equitable educational experience and outcomes for all students.

Significance of the FoP

The PAR project is significant to the context because the Focus of Practice can inform how the school leaders can build their capacity as culturally responsive school leaders with the support of their supervisors. Building the school leaders' capacity in CRSL practices is significant because they are among the strongest levers in promoting and supporting school-level reform, significantly improving the learning outcomes for minoritized students (Grissom et al., 2021a; Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2020). According to Khalifa et al. (2016), minoritized students are "from racially oppressed communities that have been marginalized—both legally and discursively—because of their non-dominant race, ethnicity, religion, language, or citizenship" (p. 1,275). Unlike the definition of minority, minoritized refers to systematic and institutional marginalization rather than labeling a group based on their inherent identity. Khalifa et al. (2016) asserted that minoritized students have rich histories of agency and resistance to

oppression. These sources offered a reminder for school leaders and all constituents to resist the continuing contexts of oppression. The findings can contribute to the emerging research on culturally responsive practices and policies in an urban district like SFUSD.

Practice

The PAR is significant to practice in many ways. First, building the school leaders' capacity to enact CRSL practices and policies aligned with and supported the district's antiracist initiative. The leaders' practice of enacting CRSL had great potential for improving the performance and learning outcomes of minoritized students where they are still performing behind their White and Asian counterparts. To best support school leaders in CRSL practices, the relationship between the school leaders and myself as the supervisor shifted from a hierarchical and evaluative one to a supportive coaching approach. As we explored a different working relationship, we fostered a potential set of practices of maximizing the school leaders and supervisory relationship. The reimagined relationship required a more thoughtful approach. By exploring a more supportive orientation that leveraged the school leaders' strengths and assets as I facilitated a small group of leaders, the study yielded insights into how we could enact more culturally responsive practices.

Policy

The emerging findings of this PAR validated the importance of CRSL practices. They could further inform the curriculum and instruction department team as potential CRSL professional development offerings to school and central office leaders. However, the most important policy outcomes were at the local schools in which leaders rethought school policies that were not supportive of minoritized students and families. Other findings may inspire policy

evolution on how central office supervisors support and guide school leaders in their leadership development.

Research

There is emerging research on how to fully enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership by reimagining the role and relationships of the central office supervisors with principals. The PAR aimed to investigate how school administrators increased their capacities to be culturally responsive leaders and how, as a central office supervisor, I reimagined my role and support the school leaders in their change efforts. The research might provide greater insight into the type of specific guidance and approaches most conducive to supporting school leaders in enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership.

Connection to Equity

Based on the most recent California state standardized testing results, Black students continued to be the lowest-performing subgroup of students, scoring approximately thirty to fifty percentage points lower than their White and Asian counterparts in English language arts and mathematics (cde.ca.gov). Many factors contribute to this reality. One factor that can improve minoritized students' learning outcomes is effective school leadership. Through leadership, we hoped to transform the collective mindset of each school's constituents and community to focus on student assets regardless of their racial, socioeconomic, or linguistic background. The philosophical and political equity frameworks significantly influenced the Focus of Practice (FoP) and guided us through three cycles of inquiry.

Philosophical Framework

"Effective school leaders are the connective tissue in school reform" (Rigby & Tredway, 2015, p. 329). Our site leaders have a professional obligation to examine racist school policies,

practices, and ideas that might obviate student access and equity. Mills (1997) in discussing the racial contract, describes the contract as epistemological, political, and moral. That means that our knowledge systems prescribe norms for cognition that privilege White dominant cultural forms and degrade the cultural and intellectual assets of people of color. White dominant persons are more powerful in the racialized system and they "categorize the subset of humans as 'nonwhites' and of a different and inferior moral status" (Mills, 1997, p. 11). As such, the persons designated as non-White have a subordinate and less powerful civil status as citizens.

Kendi, in his seminal text, *Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America,* describes how the historical system of racial inequity is supported by a belief in dual genesis—meaning two strands of human development. The White strain of human development is thought to be dominant while the persons of color are from an inferior strand of human development. In Kendi's (2019) discussion of taking on antiracism, he reminds us, "to be an antiracist is a radical choice in the face of this history, requiring a radical reorientation of our consciousness" (p. 23). He urges us to avoid trying to persuade others to live righteously and attend rather to policy; racism exists, he says, because of a system of power and only powerful changes in policy will undermine racial discrimination (Kendi, 2016). The school leaders' capacity to provide guidance through a coaching approach toward an antiracist vision is a delicate undertaking. The FoP intends to explore the culturally responsive leadership development of school administrators by exploring their epistemological understandings as Khalifa (2018) recommends.

Political Framework

One organizational factor that makes it challenging for school leadership to enact an antiracist leadership endeavor is the "loose coupling of the educational system . . ." (Labaree,

2008, p. 457). Labaree (2008) asserts that the American school system, at least in parts, often operates "as semi-autonomous segments rather than integrated components of a single entity" (p. 457). School leaders often operate autonomously and independently from the district. The working relationship between the central office supervisors and school leaders is likely to be a hierarchical frame.

Some researchers indicate that a distributed leadership approach is vital to the success of schools. Spillane et al. (2001) asserted that when leaders work collectively toward a common goal, their efforts will "lead to the evolution of a leadership practice that is potentially more than the sum of each individual's practice" (p. 25). This study, in contrast, aims to explore a more collaborative partnership between the school leaders and their supervisors. School leaders and central office leaders must work in tandem in a reciprocal relationship to foster a conducive learning environment for their students. For example, they can identify instructional and learning needs by conducting classroom visits or learning walks. The information gleaned would help refine the school priorities and illustrate the necessary changes to affect more significant student outcomes. By working in partnership with a common goal, the positional hierarchy would begin to subside.

Similarly, a less hierarchical and collaborative relationship between the supervisors and school leaders would allow supervisors to leverage the school leaders' assets more effectively. A more distributed leadership approach would create the space to realize that finding possible solutions lies within the constituents closest to the issue or problem at hand, specifically the school leaders at school sites. Guajardo et al. (2016) sum up this belief by offering this axiom: The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.

The hierarchical nature of leadership in institution bureaucracies often creates a palpable tension between school administrators and their supervisors. Whether it is the positional authority or the evaluative agency of the supervisors, there is an inherent perception of threat from the subordinates' point of view. These hierarchical relationships add another layer of political complexity. Having this awareness would remind the supervisors to be more cognizant in their interactions and approaches to mitigate the power dynamic. As part of the central supervisory team, we must focus more on developing relationships and supporting leaders in problem-solving rather than asserting directives and finding faults in their leadership. As leaders, we must be mindful of the political frame and approach problem-solving in a collaborative, humane, and just orientation.

Participatory Action Research Design

Herr and Anderson (2014) asserted that an "action research is inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them. . ." (p. 3) Working directly with a group of school leaders as co-practitioner researchers (CPR), we analyzed relevant literature and identified tenets of culturally responsive leadership and co-developed a supportive network of school leaders in enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. As Herr and Anderson (2014) indicate, "action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (p. 4). In the Participatory Action Research project and study of three successive cycles of inquiry, we studied how to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership and analyzed how a principal supervisor could reimagine his role to establish the conditions to support school leaders.

With the problem defined, the CPR team, including the lead researcher, participated in the Community of Practice (CoP) using the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) meeting

structure to reflect on culturally responsive school instructional leadership practices. In iterative cycles of action research, the CPR built Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) knowledge using an anchor text by Khalifa (2018), leveraged storytelling to form authentic relationships, and engaged in critical reflection via Critical Friends Group (CFG) structure. In describing the study design, I offer the purpose, research questions, theory of action, and a Focus of Practice that supported PAR study and detail the activities I undertook to address the FoP.

Purpose and PAR Research Questions

In the PAR project and study, the purpose of the study was to examine the extent to which school leaders identified and enacted Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices with the support of their supervisor. I engaged a group of four urban school leaders who I supervised as the district assistant superintendent. We used existing structures and agreed to meet regularly using CLE processes to co-develop our understandings of culturally responsive instructional leadership.

The overarching research question, followed by the sub-questions, was: *How do school leaders increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders?*

1. To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and dispositions to be culturally responsive school leaders?
2. To what extent do school leaders develop the skills to enact culturally responsive leadership practices?
3. How have I reimagined the role of supervisor and developed as a culturally responsive assistant superintendent?

These research questions guided the PAR inquiry and informed a theory of action.

Theory of Action

The academic gap for our Black and Brown, EL, and special education students continued to widen within our district and in many districts across the nation. The theory of action that guided the inquiry was: IF school leaders are supported in increasing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as culturally responsive instructional leaders through a reimagined relationship with the supervisor, THEN they enact culturally responsive leadership practices at their school sites.

Focus of Practice

My Focus of Practice is: Building the capacity of school leaders to enact culturally responsive practices. In order to explore this, I looked closely at the results of these activities:

- building or enhancing the knowledge and understanding of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)
- enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices
- reimagining the relationship between the school leaders and a district supervisor.

Supporting site leaders to build their capacity is the aim of the PAR project and study. The FoP is doable and contextual as our school district prioritizes access and equity for our most disenfranchised students. SFUSD has an antiracist vision where all departments and central office leadership are aligned in the planning and activities.

As a district supervisor, I reimagined my role and used a collegial approach in our meetings (Glickman, 2002) and a coaching approach in individual observations and conversations with the school leaders as they assumed the responsibility of managing schools and ensuring that they do so with culturally responsive lenses and actions.

In considering a coaching approach to support school leaders, I had to be specific about what coaches do. Gawande (2011) asserted that the "coach provides the outside eyes and ears and makes you aware of where you're falling short" (p. 16). Becoming an effective culturally responsive coach as a model for CRSL required careful assessment and reflection so that I could enhance the leaders' decision-making and problem-solving skills.

As the assistant superintendent, I supported a total of 16 elementary schools. From that group of schools, I selected and worked with four school leaders who acted as the Co-Participant Researchers (CPRs) for this study. Much of the support the four leaders received occurred within their typical existing structures, such as one-on-one check-ins and monthly cohort meetings. The CPR and I participated in Community of Practice meetings (CoP) to examine and reflect on the CRSL behaviors through iterative cycles of inquiry. I facilitated those meetings by leveraging the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) as a process and a methodology.

Research Activities

As mentioned, four school leaders within the cohort that I supervise agreed to join the co-practitioner researcher (CPR) group. The CPR team and I, the lead researcher, worked in partnership to engage in learning and reflection in CoP and CLE meetings and other existing collaborative structures. We prioritized collaborative learning to develop and reflect on our culturally responsive instructional endeavors during our monthly meetings. Other activities included observational sessions to ascertain how CRSL transferred to their school contexts.

Over three cycles of inquiry from Fall 2021-Fall 2022, the CPR members shared best practices and barriers they might have encountered in their school context during our monthly meetings. Through unstructured and informal open discussions, we engaged in reflective

conversations and practices to make meaning and determined the next leadership moves to sustain the culturally responsive instructional leadership.

As lead researcher, I adopted a coaching approach based on the Bloom et al. (2005) relationship with the leaders to engage them in constructing their identities as culturally responsive leaders and enact their beliefs in their work settings as we explored the epistemic, relational, and organizational aspects of culturally responsive leadership endeavors. The PAR's primary intent was to analyze culturally responsive leadership practices and apply our learning to the conditions that best supported the school leaders in their change efforts. As a group, we reflected on our development in knowledge, skills, and disposition as culturally responsive instructional leaders through personal narratives. I identified evidence that yielded insights that we could use to co-design next steps.

Confidentiality, Ethical Considerations and Limitations

The confidentiality of the participants and the security of the data collected were of the utmost importance in this study. Pseudonyms were used for the schools and all participants in the study. I stored transcription of meeting notes, interviews, classroom learning walk notes, and other documents in a secure location. Furthermore, none of the material collected or generated with the research participants was replicated or disseminated in any way. I will keep these materials for three years and then destroy these data.

To conduct the study, I made a formal application to the district's Office of Research, Planning, and Accountability and the ECU's Internal Review Board (IRB). Finally, an IRB consent letter of participation was signed and filed for each participant (see Appendix C for the study's consent forms).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted the importance of trustworthiness as the measure of a

qualitative study. I shared field notes and other analyses of data with participants, who conducted member checks periodically to assure the validity of the iterative analyses; therefore, trustworthiness was paramount and preserved throughout the study.

The sample size limits the PAR study. I secured consent from four Co-Participant Researchers involved in this study. Despite the potential practical implications for a wider audience, the conclusions and findings from this research are specific to this particular context. As a result, the feasibility and generalization in other settings are limited. However, the process in which the PAR was conducted may be transferable in our similar studies.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I discussed the rationale of the proposed PAR project. Effecting significant outcomes for minoritized students is an arduous but achievable endeavor, and, although outcomes for students was not the focus of the study, we kept that ultimate goal in mind as we examined how we could be and become culturally responsive school and district leaders. Working with a committed and dedicated group of school leaders who were the project's Co-Participant Researchers provided significant insights to building their capacity as culturally responsive leaders and reimagining the central office supervisors' role to better support their change effort.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature in which I discuss Culturally Responsive School Leadership, coaching models in education, and the role and efficacy of the central office leaders. In Chapter 3, I describe the research methodology of Participatory Action Research in greater detail. In Chapter 4, I describe the research context in more detail and the preliminary attempts at data collection and analysis. In Chapters 5 and 6 for PAR Cycles One and Two, I describe the

themes and findings. Lastly, in Chapter 7, I discuss the findings and present implications and a reflection on my leadership learning.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Participatory Action Research study is an exploration of how to build the capacity of school leaders in enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. The ultimate goal is to affect outcomes for minoritized students; however, before leaders could enact their espoused beliefs about culturally responsive leadership, they needed to engage in a professional learning community that supported them to be the leaders they professed to be. This endeavor is not only imperative at SFUSD but could have implications for other school districts and school leaders serving students who are marginalized. In the literature review, I analyze and describe the existing research in the areas of equity-focused leadership, specifically the components of Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Then I consider how to build capacity of school leaders, Lastly, I consider the evolving role of principal supervisors.

Equity-Focused School Leadership

When we envision a more equitable educational space for minoritized students, we must reflect on the historical actuality that led to racial inequities. In the seminal text, *The Racial Contract*, the philosopher Charles Mills (1997) discussed the political, moral, and epistemological factors in the racialized social contract. In explaining the normative contract that pervades our society and our interactions across racial boundaries, Mills said society was formed to reconstitute the state (political form) and establish a particular moral code that normalized White dominance and categorized other humans as non-White, inferior, and subordinated to White societal structures. As a result, the dominant group and state prescribed norms of cognition enforced White supremacy. As a result, inequities were an intentional by-product; viewed from a critical race theory lens, these norms established and constructed beliefs and perceptions of non-Whites as sub-persons.

As one of the most marginalized groups, Blacks have been subjected to various discriminatory acts, including slavery, voting rights restrictions, lack of employment opportunities, barriers to homeownership, and segregated schools. Structural racism is the residual effect of "a doctrine of white supremacy that was developed to justify mass oppression involving economic and political exploitation. In the United States through four centuries of oppression, [this] was premised on the social construct of race (Hardeman et al., 2016, p. 2,113). Kendi (2019) defined racism as " . . .a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities" (p. 18). He further asserted that racist policies are measures to sustain racial inequity between racial groups. Schools and other institutions are no exceptions to racial inequity. Schools are often the reflection or microcosm of our society, which many of our minoritized, primarily Black, students are situated to fail academically compared to their White counterparts (Burchinal et al., 2011; Yeung & Conley, 2008). Therefore, principal supervisors engage school leaders in building their capacity to lead with antiracist knowledge, dispositions, and actions. Kendi (2019) asserted that an antiracist supports "an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (p. 13). Educational institutions can correct the inequities faced by students of color in the context of their schools. To do this, school leaders first have to identify antiracist policies and actions of the day-to-day workings in our schools so that they can manifest as equity leaders.

Leadership Matters and Equity Leadership Matters More

Leadership matters. Bass (1990) asserted that the single most decisive factor that determines the success or failure of any organization is leadership. Grissom et al. (2021a; 2021b), in a meta-study on the connection of principal leadership to school outcomes, confirmed that principals are the critical linchpin. Diem and Welton (2021) described how school leaders

build their capacity as anti-racist school leaders in the fight for social justice and support leaders to apply that lens to policy decisions that they face. Extant research illustrates several theories and models: transformative, Applied Critical Leadership (ACL), culturally responsive leadership, and others. While these leadership approaches primarily apply to site-based leaders, understanding leadership approaches can inform central office leaders in their collaborative work with their site leaders.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) focuses on the values of liberation, emancipation, equity, and justice with the goal of fostering individual, organizational, and societal transformation. Shields (2010) asserted that transformative leadership:

> recognizes the need to begin with critical reflection and analysis and to move through enlightened understand to action—action to redress wrongs and to ensure that all members of the organization are provided with as level a playing field as possible—not only with respect to access but also with regard to academic, social, and civic outcomes. In other words, it is not simply the task of the educational leader to ensure that all students succeed in tasks associated with learning the formal curriculum and demonstrating that learning on norm-referenced standardized tests; it is the essential work of the educational leader to create learning contexts or communities in which social, political, and cultural capital is enhanced in such a way as to provide equity of opportunity for students as they take their place as contributing members of society. (p. 572)

Transformative leadership is highly influenced by Freire's (2000) concept of *praxis*. Freire (2000) called for dialogic relationships, critical reflection, and activism to transform and

undergird education. Similarly, the transformative leaders demonstrate moral courage and activism to address issues of power and privilege (Brown, 2004) and make equity and social justice central to their leadership practice, advocacy, and vision (Radd et al, 2021; Theoharis, 2007).

Applied Critical Leadership

Applied Critical Leadership (ACL), coined by two international scholars, is anchored "in practices that are framed by social justice and educational equity wherein leadership results from both professional practice and leaders' embodied lived experiences" (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015, p. 26). Similar to transformative leadership, ACL is a form of culturally responsive leadership in education in which the practice is grounded in the leader's identity and attributes (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Santamaria and Santamaria (2015) asserted that ACL leaders demonstrate the willingness to initiate and engage in critical conversations, assume a critical race theory (CRT) lens for decision making, and form partnerships with constituents in and outside of school communities as a means to address educational equity issues. Finally, their research findings illustrated that "indigenous leaders, leaders of color, and leaders who purposefully choose to align their practices toward cultural responsivity can be recognized as distinctly different yet working toward the same shared goals based on common challenges" (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015, p. 35). This research suggests that anyone, including white allies with a culturally responsive mindsets, can apply ACL practices to interrupt educational inequities within our schools and system.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Promising Approach

The two leadership approaches are not meant to be exhaustive but to highlight forms of culturally responsive leadership practices essential in addressing the racial inequities faced by the

minoritized students. Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) derives from the concept of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Johnson, 2014; Hammond, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995), which has primarily focused on classroom instruction and practices. Recent efforts on an applied culturally responsive framework to leaders, especially school principals, have yielded an emerging body of literature on CRSL (Gay, 1994; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lopez, 2015; Smith, 2016). CRSL encompasses aspects of transformative, antiracist, and social justice leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). According to Khalifa et al. (2016), CRSL goes beyond antiracist and liberatory, but " is affirmative, and seeks to identify and institutionalize practices that affirm indigenous and authentic cultural practices of students" (p. 1,278). In the empirical work of Khalifa et al. (2016), four salient CRSL behaviors emerged that yield critical insight and implications for school reform and improved minoritized students' outcomes: critical self-reflection, community engagement, culturally responsive context, and culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy (Khalifa et al., 2016; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

Critical Self-Reflection

The school leaders' self-awareness of their beliefs, values, and orientations regarding race and serving minoritized students is paramount. Critical self-reflection requires leaders to form critical consciousness (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; McKenzie et al., 2008). Khalifa et al. (2016) asserted that "leaders must have an awareness of self and an understanding of the context in which they lead" (p. 1281). Freire terms this *conscientização*, the process of analyzing current political, economic, and social conditions and taking action to interrupt oppressive conditions. In an empirical research study on how school leaders enact equity principles, Rigby and Tredway (2015) asserted that "without a firm self-examination of his or her own role in historically

inequitable structures, a school leader is not able to authentically engage with his or her school community (regardless of the level of sameness or difference in the principal's and school community's identities)" (p. 332). The consequence of not developing a critical consciousness can be dire. For example, Khalifa's (2015) research illustrated that Black principals devalued the social and cultural capital of Black students and blamed them for their low achievement due to the principals' own internalized racial inferiority and insecurities.

Further, professors in principal leadership preparation programs recognized the need to learn and design courses that engage future school leaders in deep reflection on different forms of racism (Young & Laible, 2000). They asserted that "the lack of understanding or awareness of different forms of racism and how White racism works is highly problematic" (p. 2). They expressed that awareness of racism is only the beginning and that "learning to be an anti-racist educator and/or educational leader is a continual (lifelong) process" (Young & Laible, 2000, p. 30). The constructive aspect of critical self-awareness can be developed in all levels of leadership, including central office leaders, argued Khalifa et al. (2016).

Community Engagement

Community engagement is an essential aspect of CRSL. According to Galloway and Ishimaru (2017), collaborating with families and communities is one of the ten high-leverage leadership practices for equity. Their research findings highlight the importance of community engagement as a means to counter systemic and structural barriers that maintain disparities. Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) offered that forming and maintaining meaningful and ongoing relationships with parents, families, and community leaders and engaging them in the educational process is central to the school improvement for equity. One example of leadership engagement is establishing "two-way communication to gain and build deep understanding of

the diversity of beliefs, values, practices, and cultural and social capital in community" (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 21). In a case study, Dugan et al. (2012) illustrated how a principal drew on community funds of knowledge to transform a failing school. The principal created a welcoming and culturally responsive environment for her students and families by visiting families at home and holding school meetings outside of schools. By ensuring that school meetings were resourced with language interpretation support "provided the community with a voice" (Dugan et al, 2012, p. 58). In a qualitative study of six urban principals, principals fostered community involvement by seeking and encouraging community groups to use school facilities as a way to form school and community connections (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). For example, at one of the schools, "prayers during Ramadan were held in the gym. A Jewish Passover Seder was held at the high school. Gospel singing from the Black Baptist Church could be heard from the neighborhood school" (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006, p. 576). The families and students who live and attend schools are the community, and this space provides school leaders and staff to gain deeper understandings of students and families. To sum up the importance of community involvement, Johnson (2006) expressed that the core of leadership is providing direction and exercising influence to uplift their communities collectively.

Culturally Responsive Context

Gaining a deeper understanding of the community and learning the funds of knowledge of the community members serves as an impetus or a reminder to building and sustaining an inclusive and culturally responsive school context (Moll et al., 1992; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2006). As Khalifa et al. (2016) explicitly stated, community advocacy and organizing are central to CRSL because students are a big part of the community. The school principals, equipped with community knowledge, play a critical role in accepting and validating indigenous student

identities (Khalifa, 2010). The leaders, steadfast with a vision of inclusion (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006), set the tone by structuring the school and guiding teachers to validate and form authentic relationships with students (Khalifa, 2010; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). As a result of such practice, the at-risk students in an alternative school were in a greater position to achieve academic success when they can maintain their authentic identities, according to Khalifa's (2010) ethnographic study findings. Khalifa (2010) attributed the school's success to the fact that "language, music, dress, hyper-ghettoized behaviors, and family structures were all accommodated by the school leader" (p. 631). In similar research in which the school leader and staff validated the students' Hip-Hop culture, the findings indicated that the students could be academically successful with such urban identifications. This type of school success can be achieved "if the school leader creates a comfortable place in which all students can comfortably exist" (Khalifa, 2013, p. 83).

School leaders set the tone by creating conditions and model inclusive and responsive behaviors (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Radd et al., 2021), such as demonstrating caring leadership for minoritized students. Such behaviors "motivated teachers to develop positive relationships with minority students, to help each other to develop those relationships, and improved the learning environment for those students" as indicated in a case study of a culturally responsive high school leader (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 199). Establishing and leading a vision in validating the social, linguistic, and cultural capital of minoritized students is an essential CRSL behavior in promoting inclusive school culture and environment (Khalifa, 2010, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culturally Responsive Curriculum and Pedagogy

The principals' priority in building the teachers' capacity for culturally responsive

teaching and learning is vital to improving the learning outcomes of minoritized students (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000). Harnessed with an equity vision (Khalifa, 2011, 2018; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017), the school leaders are primed to create structures and provide culturally responsive professional development opportunities for their teaching staff (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003). Ginsberg and Wlodkowski (2000) illustrated that the school leaders working closely with their school-based teams could be prepared to serve as staff developers in building support systems and skills for culturally responsive teaching. Similarly, Marshall and Khalifa (2018) asserted that principals could leverage their instructional team as a joint effort to support and develop the teachers' cultural responsiveness. For instance, a high-functioning culturally responsive school leader leveraged Collaborative Walkthroughs (CWTs) as a vehicle to "foster inclusive teaching practices by allowing teachers to observe such practices and find ways of incorporating those practices in their own classrooms" (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012, p. 191). The CWT team would share and reflect on the data they collected. This example illustrates the type of ongoing professional development and structures that CRSL school leaders can lever in building the teachers' capacity.

The school leaders who do not create the learning space for their staff to learn about how to be culturally responsive can experience deleterious consequences. In a study in which thirty-three teachers participated in culturally responsive professional development, the findings suggested that "many teachers feel unprepared to address the educational needs of culturally diverse students" (Voltz et al., 2003). That result is not uncommon for educators since pre-service and in-service professional development is often inadequate in preparing them to work effectively with culturally diverse students (Voltz et al., 2003). Therefore, the school leaders' priority for developing the staff's capacity for culturally responsive instruction and practices is

central to CRSL. The school leaders do not have to be experts in culturally responsive curriculum or pedagogy, but they do have become experts at recognizing inequitable practices. The extant research suggests that the CRSL leaders create the conditions, align resources, and foster a culturally responsive stance to improve the outcomes of minoritized students.

Bass (1990) noted that leadership is the single most decisive factor for the success or failure of any organization. However, the type of leadership that "centered on enacting social justice, and leadership that creates equitable schools" is paramount (Theoharis, 2007, p. 253). CRSL (Khalifa et al., 2016) is a promising leadership approach that addresses the core issue of the inequities that our minoritized students face within our school systems. Many of our minoritized, especially Black and Brown, students continue to fail academically (Burchchinal et al., 2011; Yeung & Conley, 2008). Khalifa et al. (2016) detailed the four CRSL behaviors; however, they are not meant to be exhaustive. Antiracist leaders begin with critical self-reflection, engage and learn the funds of knowledge of the community and its members, build an inclusive school culture and environment, and employ culturally responsive teaching and learning, so that minoritized students are situated to thrive and learn (Khalifa et al., 2016). A coaching approach relevant to building the school leaders' capacity to enact culturally responsive instructional leadership practices is vital.

Effective Capacity Building Through a Coaching Stance

Leaders who adopt a coaching approach are most successful in supporting and building school leaders' capacity in Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. A collaborative coaching approach based on relational trust to building school leaders' capacity is effective and sustainable, and school leaders can make fundamental changes (Bloom et al., 2005) and become systems thinkers when they are provided the appropriate conditions and support.

Central office supervisors are expected to supervise school leaders and function as a coach in developing them and their instructional leadership (Thessin, 2019). In its simplest form, leadership coaching is helping the leaders perform better (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). Hargrove (2008) further stated that the primary purpose of leadership coaching is to increase an individual's or group's capacity to obtain targeted results and maximize individual or organizational development. Similarly, Bloom et al. (2005) "consider coaching to be the practice of providing deliberate support to another individual to help him/her to clarify and/or to achieve goals" (p. 5). Regardless of the different definitions, educational leadership coaching can directly impact student achievement and is a high leverage practice to improve schools (Aguilar et al., 2011; Wise & Cavazos, 2017).

In a recent national study, 48.9% of the 1,349 principals from various public school regions and demographics received leadership coaching that averaged about one-two hours per month (Wise & Cavazos, 2017). Of those 659 principals, ". . . over 85% of principals receiving coaching indicated that the coaching had helped them become a better principal and over 71% indicated that student achievement had grown as a result of coaching" (Wise & Cavazos, 2017, p. 242). This research suggests that leadership coaching can have efficacious results for principals' development, school improvement, and student achievement.

Partnership/Collaborative Relationship

The teaching and learning approach places the supervisors in the most advantageous position to coach and support the schools and principals (Honig, 2012). For example, like all good coaches, they facilitate opportunities for school leaders to think and act in a way that builds their instructional leadership capacity (Aguilar, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005; Hargrove, 2008). When supervisors view their role as teaching and coaching the school leaders to grow as

instructional leaders, they are fostering independence and setting the groundwork for school leaders to model those same practices with their constituents, particularly teachers (Honig & Rainey, 2019; Honig & Rainey, 2020a; Wise & Jacobo, 2010). Rainey and Honig (2015) asserted that the "principal supervisors engaging in such moves was the extent to which they came to their role with a view that they should operate as teachers rather than directors, evaluators or more traditional supervisors" (p. 21).

In the review of the literature, the glue that maintains the partnership between central office supervisors and school leaders is relational trust (Aguilar, 2013; Aguilar et al., 2011; Bickman et al., 2010; Bloom et al., 2005; Thessin, 2019; Thessin, 2020; Wise & Hammack, 2011). Wise and Hammack (2011) "found that trust was considered an essential element, if not the most essential element, in successful coaching relationships" (pp. 452-453). Trust can be fragile, and it needs to be maintained and even repaired occasionally (Aguilar, 2013). Aguilar (2013) further asserted that a "coach needs to be able to reflect on his integrity, intentions, and communication skills in order to effectively build a relationship" (p. 78). A coach must have reflective practices because a good coaching relationship is hinged on a coach's ability to gain trust (Aguilar, 2013). Similarly, Bloom et al. (2005) asserted that trust is not static, and it has to be established and nurtured over time.

Inherent Tension

Due to the long-standing practice of scientific management in the central office, principal supervisors may not be able to provide intensive leadership coaching as described in blended coaching (Bloom et al., 2005). They asserted that a subordinate may not be totally open or vulnerable if they are in a coaching relationship with a supervisor. However, Bloom et al. (2005) noted that:

> [E]ffective supervisors can and do use coaching strategies and skills to support the growth of their subordinates. In fact, with the large majority of subordinates who are competent and who take responsibility for their own performance, the best supervisors work from a coaching stance most of the time. (p. 112)

Honig (2012) studied the work practices of central office leaders and determined that modeling, a form of coaching, was one of the effective practices employed by principal supervisors as they embarked on district-level reforms. Lochmiller (2018) noted that supervision and coaching behaviors are mostly compatible, "particular[ly] when supervisors adopt a growth orientation and thus strive to support their supervisees learning" (p. 79). The redesigning of the central office supervisors' role toward teaching and learning and instructional leadership would create the necessary and ideal conditions conducive for the supervisors to form coaching relationships with their school leaders (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2020; Goldring et al., 2018; Rainey & Honig, 2015). While the tension is always going to be present between supervisors and school administrators due to the hierarchical structure, supervisors who adopt a coaching stance and practice can be highly effective, especially when their coaching is implemented with the intention of growth, operated in relational trust, and grounded in improving student learning outcomes.

Collaborative Coaching Role to Develop Systems Thinking

Wise and Hammack (2011) offered a model of leadership coaching that leverages "coaching competencies to establish the coaching relationship, communicate effectively, and facilitate learning and performance of the leader" (p. 453). These researchers asserted that "the role of the coach is to clarify expectations and roles, develop an environment of trust, and mutually establish with the client a coaching plan that is results based" (Wise & Hammack,

2011, p. 456). Not only does the coach have to be an attentive listener, but they must demonstrate the ability to provide honest feedback and push the school leaders to new levels of thinking and understanding in order to act or act in new ways to achieve more significant outcomes for students (Wise, 2010; Wise & Hammock, 2011). Facilitating learning and performance is another critical component of leadership coaching. Principal supervisors working with the school leaders to set learning and performance goals and coach them to practice strategic behaviors and leadership moves that support and increase student achievement (Wise & Hammack, 2011; Wise & Jacobo, 2010).

The crux of the coaching work is capacity building because "learning is a leadership act and that leadership is at its best when it is in collaborative action" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 24). The function of the leadership coach is to help coachees lead their learning (Honig & Rainey, 2020a). Aguilar (2013) described this process as transformational coaching in which the coach supports the leader's transformation of behaviors, beliefs, and being. Transformational coaching is grounded in the belief that "people are capable of making fundamental internal changes" (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 83). While changing behaviors and exploring beliefs are a more common form of coaching, helping a coachee to be a certain way or develop a vision for themselves is essential to effecting greater learning outcomes for students (Aguilar, 2013; Bloom et al., 2005).

In order to achieve more significant student outcomes, a transformational coach helps their coachees see systems and guide them "toward an awareness of the systems that are interrelated to our problems, and then we seek high-leverage areas in which to take action" (Aguilar, 2013, pp. 27-28). Bloom et al. (2005) asserted that "our work as leadership coaches is about making a difference for students. In order to affect a lasting impact on student achievement, coaches have to help their coachees look beneath and beyond immediate problems

to identify systemic causes and opportunities" (p. 101). Bloom et al. (2005) provided a simple yet essential point about systems change through transformational coaching: "The role of a school leadership coach is to try always to move coaching conversations and interventions beyond the immediate issues to those underlying opportunities for systems improvement that are likely to have the greatest positive impact on students" (Bloom et al., 2005, p. 109). So why is systems thinking a vital element of transformational coaching?

In a study on systems thinking in school leadership, Benoliel et al. (2019) found that the enactment of the principals' system thinking positively impacts instructional leadership. Employing systems thinking to instructional leadership allows "principals to 'filter out' the less essential elements of the school's complex and dynamic reality, while analyzing the most important instructional issues that need to be addressed" (Benoliel et al., 2019, p. 178). Shaked and Schechter (2019) defined systems thinking as "rising above the separate components to see the whole system and thinking about each separate component as a part of the whole system" (p. 574). A school leader with a systems thinking approach can see the entire landscape of the complex organizations (Shaked & Schechter, 2020). To fully understand a system is to understand its parts in relation to the whole. School principals are required to make decisions ranging from trivial to complex issues; therefore, they could benefit from systems thinking (Senge et al., 2012). Systems thinking in school leadership "offers a new way to consider events, people, and processes, enabling principals to better understand complex situations that arise in their schools" (Shaked & Schechter, 2020, p. 107).

The primary purpose of leadership coaching is to help school leaders develop their capacity, learn new behaviors, thinking, and ways of being, and transform into systems thinkers to interrupt inequitable processes to effect more significant outcomes for students. Leadership

coaching creates opportunities for both principal supervisors and school leaders to form a more collaborative partnerships and relationships, moving away from a more hierarchical and transactional orientation. An effective leadership coaching model is grounded in trust as an essential element to form durable coaching relationships between the coach and coachee. As Bloom et al. (2005) reminded us, the work as leadership coaches is about making a difference in impacting the type of school leadership that would result in more remarkable and equitable outcomes for minoritized students. Further, underscoring the inherent tension of the principal supervisors' positionality is an important reminder for the PAR project and study as I am assuming the role of coach. But I am the district supervisor of the school leaders in the study. I wanted to ensure that they could be vulnerable in our collaborative spaces so that they could build their capacity as equity-minded antiracist school leaders. However, to fully inhabit a different role, I needed to understand the evolution of principal supervision and the benefits of reimagining the principal supervisors' role in supporting the school administrators' leadership development to enact more Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices.

Principal Supervision Role

Historically, central offices in rural and urban school districts prioritized managerial and business functions such as student enrollment, facility management, and staffing of schools and school leadership under their purview. With the advent and influence of the *scientific management* theory in the early 1900s, educational institutions adopted practices where performance efficiency was highly regarded along with a bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational structure, which is still the norm and preference today (Honig & Rainey, 2015; Steffes, 2008; Taneja et al., 2011). Honig and Rainey (2015), two of the leading researchers on central office leadership, described that principal supervisors often "devote most of their time in

monitoring principals' compliance with various central office directives" (p. 5). This organizational and bureaucratic nature forces central office staff such as principal supervisors to have limited time and resources to devote to teaching and learning tasks.

During the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) era, its policy increased the accountability of school districts and dialed up the pressure for schools to narrow the achievement and opportunity gap of minoritized students. As one of the consequences, the role of the central office supervisors has shifted to support the instructional leadership of school leaders. In this literature review, I discuss some of the seminal work commissioned by the Wallace Foundation that addressed the evolving conditions for reimagining the role of the principal supervisors at the district level. Next, I will highlight the research that addresses the types of approaches, practices, and structures that support principal effectiveness and instructional leadership.

Reimagining the Supervisor Role at the District Level

The growing demands of school principals and assistant principals to become effective instructional leaders requires an equally significant transformation of the central office supervisor role. This transformation is a critical endeavor to achieve more remarkable learning outcomes for minoritized students. During the past decade, the Wallace Foundation authorized several studies that specifically investigated this particular area. In one of the earlier studies, Corcoran et al. (2013) investigated the existing principal supervisory systems in six urban school districts and proffered recommendations for further enhancement. Those recommendations were similar to those from subsequent reports. In 2014, the Wallace Foundation launched the Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI), a four-year effort to redefine principal supervision (Goldring et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2020). Four core components of the PSI emerged that were aimed to achieve the goal of improving principal effectiveness. In relevance to the focus of my study, I

will leverage these recommendations as preconditions to inform my support of site leaders in enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership:

1. Revise the central office supervisors' job description to focus on instructional leadership.
2. Reduce central office supervisors' span of control (the number of principals for whom they are responsible) and change how supervisors are assigned to principals.
3. Train supervisors and develop their capacity to support principals.
4. Strengthen central office structures to support and sustain changes in the principal supervisor's role.

The core components that emerged from the Wallace Foundations research have strong implications and incentives for school districts to design or reimagine the principal supervisors' role. When the recommendations are considered and implemented, they have improved principal effectiveness, leading to more outstanding learning outcomes, especially for minoritized students (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2018; Goldring et al., 2020). The findings, explored in more detail below, are relevant because they form the necessary conditions and support systems required to position the principal supervisors to be effective in their role. For this study, I considered these recommendations but highlight how I would revise the principal supervisor's job description to focus on instructional leadership. The other three recommendations are pertinent but not under the purview or scope of control of this study.

Instructional Leadership Support

Several researchers indicated that the school district office leaders play an instrumental role in principal learning, instructional leadership, and student achievement outcomes (Honig & Rainey, 2015; 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019). Honig (2012) asserted that the central office

leaders who adopt a teaching and learning approach help principals build their instructional leadership capacity. For instance, when the supervisors and principals engage in joint work such as conducting classroom visits and discussing their problem of practice, the principals often observe those activity spaces as meaningful instructional leadership moves rather than compliance tasks. These types of practices differ and contrast with "some traditional supervisory relationships in which central office staff mainly monitor principals' work but do not engage in the work themselves" (Honig, 2012, p. 748).

Honig and Rainey (2020b) urged supervisors to take a teaching and learning approach, meaning that the principal supervisors are "helping principals lead their own learning - actively taking steps to continuously assess and improve the quality of their leadership" (p. 55). For example, the supervisors begin the year with school leaders in conducting self-assessments as a part of the district's principal performance competency standards to identify strengths and areas of growth. Together, they engage in goal setting or develop an agreeable plan where the supervisors regularly check in with the principals to reflect, assess progress and offer feedback and coaching when appropriate (Honig & Rainey, 2020b). Similarly, Goldring et al. (2020) strongly suggested that districts' senior leadership must reposition the central office supervisors' work to focus more on developing and supporting site leaders, with an emphasis on teaching and learning and instructional leadership. Part of these shifts requires the supervisors to increase their time working directly with school leaders at their sites rather than focusing on compliance tasks or directives. These practices are reminiscent of Honig's (2012) joint work. They included conducting classroom walkthroughs or learning walks and providing ongoing feedback and a coaching approach to increase the school administrators' instructional leadership capacity

(Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2019). However, they must be quite deliberate in these actions as typical walkthroughs have not been successful (Grissom et al., 2021a) and other methods of assessing teacher instruction as the supervisor and principal conduct learning walks have not been useful to teachers (Tredway & Militello, 2023).

Span of Control

In order to effectively build instructional leadership capacity for the principal supervisors, the researchers in several studies (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2020; Goldring et al., 2018) asserted that reducing the span of control or reducing the number of principals per supervisor is necessary so that supervisors can prioritize their time on instructional matters at the school sites. In these quantitative studies, the researchers suggest that the high ratio of principals to supervisors limits the principal supervisors' effectiveness in their development as well as supporting their school principals in their instructional leadership capacity building (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2020; Goldring et al., 2018). For instance, Goldring et al. (2020) conducted a survey that inquired about the number of times the principals met with their supervisors over three months. On average, the principals met 5.3 times with their supervisor, who has a caseload of three to eleven site leaders. In contrast, other principals met only 3.8 times with their supervisors with a caseload of twelve to fourteen and only 3.1 times with supervisors with a caseload over fifteen. Given the varied sizes of school districts, the research indicated that the principal supervisors' ideal or manageable load is to support between eight to twelve principals in a given academic year (Goldring et al., 2020; Rainey & Honig, 2015).

While the number of caseloads is important, Goldring et al. (2018) expressed that sustainability and continuity of the supervisor-principal relationship are equally significant. Goldring et al. (2018) stated that to best support principals and build authentic, trusting

relationships, the district should avoid reorganization or restructuring of principal supervisors' roles without good reasons. "Supervisors and principals noted they need stability to build relationships and trust with each other, and for supervisors to understand the specific needs of the principals and schools they supervise" (Goldring et al., 2018, p. 21). A conducive workload allows the principal supervisors to establish relationship building and focus on instructional leadership capacity development.

Preparation for Supervisors

Providing specific and dedicated training for central office supervisors on high-quality instruction enhances their instructional leadership capacity as they work closely with the site leaders (Corcoran et al., 2013; Goldring et al., 2020; Goldring et al., 2018). While most supervisors come with experience as teachers and principals, they may not have developed the coaching practices or other supervisory strategies to work with school leaders. Honig (2012) asserts "that districts should take care to assign or hire staff with a ready orientation to the work of principal support as teaching rather than monitoring and directing those interested in traditional area superintendencies" (p. 767). Typically, visiting schools involves calibrating classroom observations, reaching a common understanding about rigor and standards, and developing and utilizing tools to help develop these practices. Regardless of the prior knowledge of the central office supervisors, training that focuses on instructional leadership ensures supervisors procure the skills to effectively communicate and develop school administrators, especially through providing meaningful feedback and coaching (Goldring et al., 2018).

Central Offices Alignment

Finally, with the thoughtful alignment of the central offices to prioritize instructional leadership and student learning outcomes, the principal supervisors would be able to better

support the school leaders and their school communities (Honig & Rainey, 2015, 2019). Central office supervisors serve as liaisons for their school administrators. When everyone in central offices across the system is coordinated and understands the needs of schools, they can provide responsive services, improved communication, and consistent coordination (Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2015). As a result, the supervisors can devote more time and effort to instructional leadership with their school leaders rather than problem-solving operational matters (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2015, 2019). For instance, when the talent management team can prescreen the best teacher candidates that match the needs and criteria of the schools, the supervisors, administrators, and site-based leadership teams would be able to eliminate the legwork and focus more on the essential tasks of teaching and learning (Corcoran et al. 2013; Goldring et al. 2020; Goldring et al. 2018). Honig and Rainey (2015) similarly asserted that "strong, coordinated support from the district central office is essential to realizing deeper learning for all schools and all children" (p. 15). This assertion suggested that the more central office leaders and departments are aligned to meet the schools' structural and operational needs, the central office supervisors can devote more time to supporting the site administrators' instructional leadership development.

Each of these components of reimagining the role of the principal supervisor at the district level is essential and interconnected. Rainey and Honig (2015) and Corcoran et al. (2013) emphasized that the redesigning of central office supervision is vital to helping school leaders in their endeavors to high-quality teaching and learning. These studies on principal supervision suggest that the vision and action from the leaders at the highest district level are paramount in order to reimagine and for the principal supervisors to carry out their role accordingly. Reflecting on the Focus of Practice of this study, these considerations illustrate the many challenges

principal supervisors face, especially in creating spaces for collaboration and coaching of school leaders, rather than simply evaluating them, and ensuring they meet compliance measures. To reimagine the role of the principal supervisor, I focus on the first recommendation of the Wallace Foundation Report revising the principal supervisors' job description to focus on instructional leadership.

In supporting the mindsets of growth and learning in school site leaders, the principal supervisors occupy a unique and challenging space (Thessin, 2019). The principal supervisors must adopt a teaching and learning approach (Honig & Rainey, 2019) to work in partnership with the school leaders in facilitating their learning and growth as instructional leaders (Thessin, 2019). The learning partnership between the supervisor and a school leader is grounded in the sociocultural learning theory. Learning is a social process and maximized through participation in social context and collaboration with others who may be more knowledgeable in the targeted skill or content (Driscoll, 1994). Similarly, Honig (2012) asserted that when the principal supervisors and principals participate in the joint work or instructional leadership activities, the principals (learners) will come to see the value of those activities and view them as essential for their growth and development as instructional leaders. Their social or cultural contexts reinforce partnership and learning.

To facilitate the school leaders' development as instructional leaders, the supervisors are now functioning in a dual role, a coach and supervisor (Thessin, 2019). Traditionally, the supervisors' role includes overseeing, evaluating, and solving administrative issues and ensuring compliance. There is an inherent tension because the supervisors are charged with the evaluative authority. Therefore, the learning goals of the joint work must be emphasized, empathized, and defined so that complete transparency is observed (Honig, 2012). Thessin (2019) noted that

listening, understanding, demonstrating empathy, and being supportive are essential methods to fostering a trusting professional relationship. Trust is critical in establishing the partnership between the principal supervisors and principals (Thessin, 2019).

Professional Learning Communities for Principals

As a result, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are a promising structure and approach to support school administrators' development as instructional leaders (Honig & Rainey, 2014), and principal supervisors can organize principals in such communities. PLCs are grounded in and consistent with the sociocultural learning theory. When the supervisors create space for school leaders to learn or engage in a Community of Practice, they see themselves as contributing members who hold expertise in different areas of instructional leadership.

Honig and Rainey (2014) found that supporting principal learning in PLCs, the supervisors are engaging the principals in relevant work: "focusing on principals' instructional leadership as joint work, modeling, developing and using tools, creating opportunities for all principals to serve as PLC learning resources, and brokering, including the active mediation of outside resources" (Honig & Rainey, 2014, p. 39). Thessin (2019) described that the principals' contributions in partnership or group work would further increase their motivation and readiness to lead, which fosters more opportunity for instructional leadership development/ The supervisors who hold a teaching and learning stance grounded in sociocultural learning theory and providing appropriate structures and conditions can better support school leaders in their instructional leadership growth (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Thessin, 2019).

Such a structure for professional learning—Equity-centered Professional Learning Communities—existed in the district for three years (2008-2011), a structure in which principals with supervisors and external coaches working with small groups of principals decided when and

where to meet for three hours a month, what the focus of their collective inquiry would be, and how they could be and become leaders of equity. The results were characteristic of how we should rethink principal learning and development, as I did in this PAR project and study. The project evaluation yielded these results:

1. Most SFUSD elementary school leaders reported that EC-PLC structures and protocols positively impacted their school change work. Ninety percent of SFUSD elementary administrators rated the impact of the EC-PLC on their development as school leaders as having more impact than average in comparison to other experiences of district-initiated professional development.
2. Implementing the critical friends consultancy protocol facilitated the generation of concrete plans of action for addressing site challenges. The critical friends consultancy protocol emerged as a crucial piece of the leadership work accomplished through the professional learning community structure.
3. Choice in content focus of professional learning communities has proven powerful in motivating in-depth discussions around implementing school change strategies. Participants praised the EC-PLC work for allowing school leaders to self-select into groups and study topics they considered most salient; 97% of school leaders overall rated their topic as of high relevance to their work.
4. Facilitators play a critical role in clarifying structures and providing content-related resources. (Spain, 2009)

These are the same structures and possibilities, as I determined from the research, that are necessary for effective principal support, and, as supervisor, I intended to play a reimagined role in supporting school leaders to be culturally responsive leaders who are equity warriors.

Conclusion

The term equity warrior was coined in 2002 (Leverett, 2002). Leverett (2002) said that equity warriors are "people who, regardless of their role in a school or district, passionately lead and embrace the mission of high levels of achievement for all students, regardless of race, social class, ethnicity, culture, disability or language proficiency" (p. 1). Mitchell (2018), in her discussion of the critical role of equity warriors, reframes the term in indigenous terms:

> The warrior, for us, is one who sacrifices himself for the good of problems that we face. Therefore, they put their bodies between the others. His task is to take care of the elderly, the defenseless, literally forming a shield for those who cannot provide for themselves, and above all, the children, the protection of life . . . They show up whenever they are asked, or wherever there is a need, and offer whatever assistance is required upon the Earth. (p. 153)

This is the type of leadership that matters as the principal supervisors and school leaders embark on interrupting the racial inequities in our school systems as culturally responsive leaders. Kendi (2019) reminded us that there is "no neutrality in the racism struggle" (p. 9). To become an antiracist is an ongoing practice and life work. A culturally responsive leader supports antiracist school policies and practices through their actions (Kendi, 2019). CRSL emerges to be a promising approach antiracist and liberatory approach that affirms our radical hopes of indigenous and authentic cultural practices and identities of students (Khalifa et al., 2016). A CRSL leader practices critical consciousness (Gay & Kirland, 2003; McKenzie et al., 2008), engages and values the social and cultural capital of the community and its members (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017), validates indigenous student identities (Khalifa, 2010), and forms authentic relationships with students (Khalifa, 2010; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) in order to

promote inclusive school culture and environment. Additionally, they develop the teachers' capacity for culturally responsive teaching and learning as a means to improve learning and experiential outcomes of minoritized students (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Khalifa et al., 2016).

By adopting a teaching and learning stance, principal supervisors are situated to function in a dual role, as coach and supervisor, more effectively (Thessin, 2019). While there is inherent tension since the supervisors hold the evaluative authority, the goal is to engage the school leaders in the joint work and to adopt a coaching approach, a vehicle to foster collaboration (Honig, 2012). When school leaders use Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), they find this structure and collaborative space to be effective in enhancing and supporting their development of instructional leadership (Honig & Rainey, 2014; Spain, 2009). Leadership coaching can have effective results on site leaders' development and that relational trust is essential in successful coaching relationships (Wise & Hammock, 2011). Bloom et al. (2005) reminded us that trust has to be established and nurtured over time in a coaching relationship. In addition, the most crucial coaching model is grounded in the premise of affecting more significant outcomes of students. The principal supervisors' goal, adopting a transformational coaching approach, is to develop school administrators' capacity as systems thinkers. When leaders can develop an awareness and see the system as a whole, they are more inclined to take strategic actions in tackling the most complex issues, such as achievement gaps (Aguilar, 2013; Shaked & Schechter, 2019, 2020).

The expanding literature on the central office leadership has provided the educational community the necessary insight that informs the role of the principal supervisors. Such seminal work commissioned by the Wallace Foundation on existing principal supervisory systems in six

urban school districts (Corcoran et al., 2013) and the Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI) (Goldring et al., 2020; Goldring et al., 2018) yielded core components and practices that are not only relevant but informative for urban school districts. Scholars indicated that central office leadership plays a vital role in principal development, especially in the area of instructional leadership (Honig & Rainey, 2015; 2019; Thessin & Louis, 2019). As principal supervisors continue to evolve from their traditional supervisory and transactional role (Honig, 2012), they are adopting a teaching and learning orientation to assist school leaders in leading their own learning (Honig & Rainey, 2020a).

Implications

The literature review yielded important insights for the PAR project and study. As an educational leader who works as a principal supervisor, the insights afforded me a greater understanding of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices. I leveraged a coaching stance or approach to support our school leaders in enacting more CRSL practices to interrupt and dismantle the racial inequities in our school systems. In addition, understanding the history and the hierarchical nature of the central office helped me in reimagining the role of the principal supervisor to one that is more collaborative and relationship-forming. In the PAR, I explored how I could support leaders to become culturally responsive school leaders and equity warriors. Figure 1 illustrates the factors necessary to reach this goal, particularly ones gleaned from the literature review.

Figure 1. Reaching culturally responsive school leadership.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the Participatory Action Research (PAR) study, I examined the extent to which elementary school leaders enacted Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices to address the historical and persistent opportunity gap of minoritized students (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). In this exploration, I supported school leaders in building their capacities to become more effective at examining their personal and professional identities, use a network of support, and implement culturally responsive school practices in their school environments. Through a reimagined relationship with me as their supervisor, we co-developed a collegial coaching relationship that supported our co-learning and the principals' abilities to be equity warriors and culturally responsive leaders.

The PAR design was grounded on the following Theory of Action (ToA): IF school leaders are supported in increasing their capacities as culturally responsive instructional leaders through a reimagined relationship with their supervisor, THEN they create the necessary conditions to enact more CRSL practices to address the opportunity gap for minoritized students. As the lead researcher, I directly supported and supervised 16 school principals and four assistant principals in SFUSD for the duration of the PAR project and study. From this cohort of leaders, I invited four participants to engage in the PAR study. In the PreK-8 division, our district established existing structures that fostered collaboration between district supervisors and school leaders. The existing structures, which include one-on-one check-ins and monthly cohort meetings, provided the opportunity for frequent contact and communication between school leaders and me. I leveraged this support by utilizing Community Learning Exchange (CLE) as a process and a methodology to engage the principals in regular meetings. For this study, the school leaders and I explored Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) through a series

of Community of Practice meetings (CoP) to examine and reflect on specific CRSL behaviors through iterative cycles of inquiry.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project and study, which includes the methodological approach to the study, an outline of the cycles of action research, research questions, participant sampling criteria, specifics of data collection and analysis, and potential considerations for the study, including limitations, validity, and confidentiality. I used Participatory Action Research (PAR) to address the research questions (Herr & Anderson, 2014; hunter et al., 2013).

Research Design

The methodology of this project was Participatory Action Research (PAR) that incorporated activist research, improvement science (IS) methods, and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms. The research addressed the PAR questions, and I relied on the theory of action by gathering data through iterative cycles of inquiry to facilitate the research process.

Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research is a dynamic and collaborative process with an emancipatory aim of improving and empowering individuals and organizations (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). Herr and Anderson (2014) asserted that "[a]ction research is inquiry that is done by or with insiders to an organization or community, but never to or on them" (p. 3). Therefore, the design of action research fostered collaboration with persons who were closest to the problem through a reflective, iterative systematic process (Herr & Anderson, 2014). PAR is an action-oriented, advocacy mode of inquiry and includes qualitative data collection (Creswell & Guetterman, 2018). I chose Participatory Action Research because the participants had an opportunity to be co-learners and provide input on the study by reflecting and examining their

leadership practices systematically to address complex educational challenges (Herr & Anderson, 2014).

In addition, the particular type of PAR I used had an activist dimension that centered on "collective action in order to challenge the many forms of social injustice" (hunter et al., 2013, p. 7). The difference between participatory action and participatory activist research is that the research participants operate as active instigators of change. The participants' "political action is explicit, owned and deliberately aimed at making a positive difference in the lives of those suffering disadvantage or oppression and in the lives of those working in your cultural profession" (hunter et al., 2013, p. 21). Therefore, I collaborated with a team of four school leaders who served as co-practitioner researchers (CPR) and provided consistent input to our collaborative work. As a result, they increased their capacities to use Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices.

In the PAR project, we used an improvement science inquiry-based process that included a Community of Practice (CoP) structure and space for inquiry and learning. The PAR project and study occurred over three cycles of inquiry. According to Bryk et al. (2015), "[i]mprovement science is a methodology that uses disciplined inquiries to improve practice" (p. 10). Our research had a parallel track: to change how leaders understood culturally responsive leadership practices and use our understandings to reimagine their roles and the conditions to support the school leaders in their change efforts. To facilitate the PAR study, I re-imagined my role as the district supervisor. Under the improvement science approach, we used "rapid tests of change to guide the development, revision, and continued fine-tuning of new tools, processes, work roles, and relationships. The approach is explicitly designed to accelerate learning-by-doing" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 8). In addition, the CoP structure is designed to accelerate the research team's

capacity to learn from the planning and testing of change ideas generated by the participants and use data for learning and improvement (Russell et al., 2017). However, the CoP structure offers structures that are stronger than typical collaboration. Lave and Wenger (1991) conceive of identities as "long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practices. Thus identity, knowing and social membership entail one another" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Therefore, the CoP provided a space in which the community members negotiated what they would accomplish and how they interacted with one another regularly to develop new skills, refine old ones, and incorporate new ways of understanding the shared enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Militello et al. (2009) reminded us that successful leaders work collaboratively with others for improvement work, rather than in isolation. The Community Learning Exchange (CLE) process and methodology complemented the IS methods and CoP structure.

Community Learning Exchange

A Community Learning Exchange (CLE) is a dynamic process in which "community members openly examine their common challenges, collective gifts, and then freely exchange successful approaches and tools that can drive changes within themselves, their organizations (including schools), and their communities" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 3). This type of learning space was essential for the participants who became vested in operating as a team to co-construct meaning, work together, and learn from each other to find potential solutions to complex educational problems. As a part of the PAR process, I used the CLE axioms and practices to inform the improvement cycles and the social aspects of learning. At the heart of the work are five essential axioms that guided us in the PAR project and study:

1. Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes.

2. Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.
3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.
4. Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process.
5. Hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities. (Guajardo et al., 2016)

The participants and I leveraged the CLE axioms as part of our cycles of inquiry. We focused on the framework of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016). Together, as we read texts and calibrated our understandings of leadership, we generated change ideas, reflected on the effectiveness of implementation, and made necessary adjustments based on analyzing the evidence from the cycles of inquiry. The research participants and l used dynamic pedagogies for sharing and reflection. Based on these processes, I collected and analyzed multiple data sources that I analyzed and shared with the CoP members to inform the iterative inquiry.

Role of Praxis

Reflection is vital to the improvement cycles and pushes the participants to interrogate assumptions about the Focus of Practice, research questions, methods, action steps, and measures. However, reflection must lead to intentional practice or action that is connected to activist research outcomes of social justice. Freire (2000) defines *praxis* as the iterative process of reflection and generative dialogue that leads to informed actions. He asserted that if one dimension of the word "is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers" (Freire, 2000, p. 87). Our understanding of and use of praxis was critical in the PAR project and study; as we effected change, we simultaneously exercised consonant and iterative reflection and action

(Freire, 2000). During the course of the project, I designed and included activities that inspired praxis. At our CLE and team meetings, the research participants reflected on practices, readings, successes, and challenges related to enacting culturally responsive strategies. During our meetings and one-on-one check-ins, I asked participants to reflect on their CRSL practices and implementation progress and incorporate the next steps. As the lead researcher and the co-practitioner researchers' supervisor, I wanted to ensure that I designed a supportive and reflective space for us to reflect, listen, learn, and make appropriate action steps in our cycles of inquiry. As described in the last chapter, I relied on a collegial coaching model that leveled the hierarchical structure and offered a process that principals could replicate in their schools.

As a lead researcher, I practiced praxis as a model for others. I captured my thoughts on the learning and experiences of our activities through reflective memos. Capturing my reflections and reflections of the participants informed me about necessary adjustments I needed to make to ensure effective inquiry cycles, activities, and data collection. In the reflective memos, I tracked my leadership progress, which is the third research question, and provided a means in triangulating the validity of the team's learning, discoveries, and practices.

Research Questions

The overarching question guiding this research is: *How do school leaders increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders?*

The following sub-questions provided additional guidance for the PAR study:

1. To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and dispositions to be culturally responsive instructional school leaders?
2. To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and skills to enact culturally responsive instructional leadership practices?

3. How have I developed as a culturally responsive assistant superintendent?

I used the PAR questions to guide the qualitative data collection and analysis process and yield responses to the research questions, study discoveries, and recommendations.

Action Research Cycles

Based on conversations with the group of school leaders, I determined the perceived assets and challenges in operationalizing culturally responsive leadership practices that attended to racial equity. The initial conversations helped me define and solidify the Focus of Practice of the PAR, which aligned with the direction of our school district and its mission to focus on equalizing the opportunities, resources, and supports for especially marginalized students. In the proposed three improvement cycles, we leveraged the CoP space (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Militello et al., 2009) and used the evidence from each PAR cycle to make improvements in the participants' CRSL practices. The goal of each cycle was to engage the participants in improvement science processes (Bryk et al., 2015) to test out change ideas, monitor implementation, reflect, and adjust action steps based on key learning from the evidence in each cycle of inquiry. In a parallel process, I reflected on my practice as a lead researcher and a supervisor who adopted a collegial coaching approach to support the school administrators. The key learnings informed the design of activities during participant meetings and CLE sessions, one-on-one check-in coaching sessions, and other structured learning spaces.

We implemented the three PAR cycles of inquiry over the course of three school semesters. The PAR Pre-cycle began in the Fall 2021 by convening the participants every month. Activities included establishing shared goals and purpose, using CLE axioms and protocols to support our meaning-making, codifying action plans, and consolidating learning. I leveraged the existing structures such as one-on-one check-in coaching sessions and monthly cohort meetings

further to support CRSL practices and reflection of implementation and learning. The participants shared recommendations with me to support their work more effectively throughout the PAR study. In PAR Cycles One and Two (Spring 2022 and Fall 2022), the participants continued with the same activities and I collected qualitative evidence from multiple sources during the cycles of inquiry that I coded and analyzed using Saldaña (2016) methods of analyzing data. Next, I describe the context and introduce the participants.

Context

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is a large urban progressive institution. The district serves more than 59,900 students with twelve early education preschool sites, 64 elementary schools, 13 middle schools, 15 high schools, and three county schools. SFUSD is a highly diverse school districts with minoritized students making up 86% of the student population. Based on the public data, the four largest sub-group of students in SFUSD are Asian (35%), Latino (31%), White (14%), and African American (9%). Despite the rich diversity, the African American, Latino, and English Learners are performing between 40-60 percentage points below their White and Asian counterparts in both math and English language arts according to the Smarter Balance State assessment scores for grades 3-12 (cde.ca.gov).

In the 2020–21 academic year, the senior leadership team launched an antiracist initiative to mitigate these disparate achievement outcomes for our minoritized students. The initiative includes providing resources, tools, and professional development for school leaders and teachers to address the achievement gap. For example, the English Language Arts curriculum focuses and affirms the identities of students who are marginalized. The professional development of instructional practices focuses on lifting the assets to improve student engagement. Similarly, the school leaders receive resources to support them to engage staff in

sensitive conversation to shift mindsets. Most school leaders' resources, support, and readiness to engage in school reform are reinforced by a progressive educational institution. Within this district level context of support, I worked with four elementary school leaders who I invited to participate after IRB approval.

Participants, Data Collection, and Analysis

As an assistant superintendent, I support and supervise school leaders. Therefore, I engaged the co-practitioner researchers (CPRs) who were school leaders in administrative positions who agreed to be in the Community of Practice. Co-practitioner researchers is a term to describe practitioners who work closely with the lead on the research process. In this study, working collaboratively with my CPR members yielded invaluable insights on understanding and enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership since they are practitioners at their school sites. As critical partners, the CPR team was essential to the PAR study as they supported me through regular input, feedback, and reflection. This process helped to ensure the validity of the findings.

Sampling

Purposeful sampling is a method of choosing participants who are willing and available to participate in a research project (Patton, 1990). For this PAR project, I used purposeful sampling to select the co-practitioner researchers (CPR) for the study. According to Patton (1990), qualitative inquiry focuses in-depth on relatively small samples; therefore, selecting participants strategically and purposefully "illuminate[s] the questions under study" (p. 169). I identified the participants based on their interest and disposition and their demonstrated desire to solve complex educational problems; they wanted to incorporate culturally responsive practices in their work as school leaders. The participants demonstrated a common criterion: a desire to

improve students' learning for marginalized students by changing their leadership practices to be more culturally responsive.

Co-Practitioner Researchers

I recruited the co-practitioner researchers (CPR) from the cohort of school leaders whom I support and supervise within our elementary cohort division. I invited four of these school leaders to participate in the PAR study as members of the CPR team. They demonstrated a commitment to learning and the desire to implement Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. Once recruited, the CPR identified goals and objectives, clarified theories of CSRL, met as a group to share experiences and leadership dilemmas, planned actions reflecting change ideas, employed the improvement science cycles of inquiry, provided feedback on the data analysis process, and reflected on and revised their actions. The team provided feedback and recommendations about evidence that would inform the next steps of the PAR. To ensure the CPRs' confidentiality, I use pseudonyms to replace their names and school sites.

Effective school leaders are critical players in school reform efforts (Rigby & Tredway, 2015), and those who lead with an equity lens are vital to this study. The ideal CPR members demonstrate the qualities of equity warriors who understand themselves and their orientation, the needs of their school communities, and are dedicated to solving complex school issues with a social justice lens. As indicated, I selected these participants with those qualities in mind using the purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) approach.

Data Collection

In a qualitative study, the researcher focuses on the process and outcome while collecting data in collaborative spaces and natural settings where participant behaviors and events occur (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this PAR study, I used multiple methods of collecting

qualitative data. Initially, I observed school leaders as they facilitated meetings and made classroom visits. Then, we explored effective CRSL practices and analyzed how to transfer these practices to their work as school leaders. I co-observed classrooms with the school leaders. In addition, the data collection process included gathering artifacts from our meeting in which we used Community Learning Exchange protocols. I interviewed participants and recorded observation notes from the individual check-in sessions and CPR team meetings and wrote reflective memos I maintained throughout the research process.

Data Collection Instruments

Creswell and Creswell (2018) asserted that qualitative research includes these types of data collection procedures:

- Qualitative observations, where field notes capture behavior and activities of participants in unstructured or semi-structured ways
- Qualitative interviews, in which the researcher conducts individual or group interviews that may be unstructured and generally open-ended questions to capture the views and opinions of the participants
- Qualitative documents, which may include meeting minutes or reflective memos
- Audiovisual and digital materials, which include artifacts, art representations, and other technological forms of communication

For the PAR study, I incorporated these types of data collection tools and used them strategically with the CPR team and during CLE activities.

Typically, qualitative observations (see Appendix G for the observation protocol) are open-ended and researchers ask general questions about the participants' views and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the lead researcher, I captured observation notes of our monthly

meetings and other CPR activities; I collected data on the CPRs' perspectives about Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. These data reflect our interactions and experiences during our one-on-one and other community learning spaces.

For the qualitative interviews (see Appendices Z for the interview protocol), I used unstructured and open-ended questions to elicit perspectives and opinions from the participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In our one-on-one check-in meetings, I used semi-structured questions, as I needed to respond to each individual and create the conditions in which the CPR members felt safe and spoke candidly about their views and experiences. During CPR meetings, I asked open-ended questions to capture their perspectives and interpretations of observation data and utilize the collected data for analysis and open coding (Saldaña, 2016).

Documents and artifacts are two other essential data collection tools. In each PAR cycle, I collected artifacts (see Appendix D for the CLE artifact protocol) that included CPR meeting minutes and observation notes, and notes from our one-on-one check-ins and other collaborative spaces. In addition, I used reflective memos to triangulate with other qualitative data and evidence gathered for the study.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) reminded us of the importance of research integrity. Researchers are "responsible for showing how the data will not be compromised and how such information will not place the participants (or the researchers) at risk" (p. 184). Therefore, using reflective memos to triangulate with other data sources ensures validity (see Table 1).

Data Analysis

The data analysis process involves separating and dissecting the data, like peeling back the layers of an onion; I followed a five-step data analysis approach for qualitative research. (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Sources

Overarching Question: How do school leaders increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders?

Research Questions	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulated with
1. To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and dispositions to be culturally responsive instructional school leaders?	• CPR Meeting Notes & Artifacts • Interviews • School Leader Reflections	• Reflective Memos
2. To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and skills to enact culturally responsive instructional leadership practices?	• CPR Meeting Notes & Artifacts • Interviews • School Leader Reflections • Observations • Coaching Conversations	• Reflective Memos • Member checks
3. How have I developed as a culturally responsive assistant superintendent?	• Reflective Memos	• School Leader Reflections • Coaching Conversations

- Organized and prepared the data for analysis, including transcribing notes from monthly meetings, interviews, observation notes, and cataloging and sorting data into different types.
- Discerned a general sense of the information and the overall meaning;
- Used an open coding technique (Saldaña, 2016) to analyze data;
- Generated a small number of categories and themes;
- Used a qualitative narrative to represent the descriptions and themes.

Saldaña (2016) defines "a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data" (p. 4). The author noted a distinction between categories and themes as resulted in coding a word or phrase. A category is explicit, whereas a theme is often subtle and tacit. Saldaña (2016) offered a simple example: "*security* can be a code, but *denial means a false sense of security* can be a theme" (p. 16). In the iterative coding process, I determined categories and emergent themes in the PAR Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One. I triangulated these data with reflective memos and conducted member checks with CPR members throughout the process to ensure the validity of the data analysis process. Creswell and Creswell (2018) asserted that the themes "should display multiple perspectives from individuals and be supported by diverse quotations and specific evidence" (p. 194). I used the data from PAR Cycle One to substantiate the themes in PAR Cycle Two and determined findings.

Study Considerations: Limitations, Validity, and Ethics and Confidentiality

In the PAR study, our goal was to gain a deeper understanding of how we could implement Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. As the primary researcher with the CPR team, I designed the PAR project and study to make meaning and find solutions in

mitigating the opportunity gap that continues to widen for our minoritized students. As a CPR team, we held space for conferring, learning, and reflecting so that we could adjust in the PAR implementation and in the implementation of CRSL at school sites. Creating a collaborative environment and conditions to foster candid dialogue and different viewpoints was paramount as part of the process in the PAR project. Despite these methodological safeguards and assurances, there were limitations in the research study.

Limitations

In a PAR project, the challenge in data collection conducted in structured space and the participants' natural setting should occur over an extended period of time (Queirós et al., 2017). I conferred with the CPR team frequently to evaluate their needs and concerns. While the PAR is an effective method for understanding the behavior of people and their experiences (Queirós et al., 2017), their contexts were distinctive to their situation. Therefore, the findings may not be used to generalize other school leaders and their context; however, other school district and school leaders could use the processes in this study to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership through a reimagined relationship between the principal and their supervisors.

As the Co-Participant Researchers' direct supervisor, I was cognizant of the power dynamic and ensured that I took special measures to avoid any level of directing innovations or decision making. My role was a guide and collegial coach. I was cautious to avoid how "practitioner researcher places the insider/practitioner at the center of the research, but often tends to decenter other important stakeholders, such as clients and other community members" (Herr & Anderson, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, ensuring that this PAR was collaborative was a primary aim for me. Herr and Anderson describe a continuum of positions a researcher assumes, especially as a person working from a district position; I navigated as an outsider and insider.

Hale (2008) reminds us that positionality has its advantage in research; however, "there can be risks and hurtful consequences" (p. 21) when the ideal relationship of positioned objectivity is not fully achieved. Therefore, the participants gave informed consent without any sense of obligation. They could choose to terminate consent at any time during the study without any form of reprisal.

Validity

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that internal and external validity are trustworthiness criteria that researchers are obligated to consider. Below, I will describe in more detail the validity of the PAR process. This process was strengthened by utilizing the CPR team, as the members assisted me, the lead researcher, in determining if we were representing the realities of school leaders appropriately. Additionally, collecting data from school leaders ensured that the data collected was from a sample of people who were representative of the population under study. Hale (2017) offered two important points on validation:

> (a) People, who ultimately are the sources of the social science "data," tend to provide much more, and much higher quality, information when they feel they have an active stake in the research process. Often, especially when the topic is charged or sensitive, they only provide information under these conditions.
>
> (b) Collective participation of these *subjects* in data collection and its interpretation inevitably enriches what we end up learning from the research.

Internal Validity

The validity of the PAR project was the result of the qualitative processes connected to the research goals (Herr & Anderson, 2014). Therefore, the data collection and analysis processes were carefully applied in order to avoid issues and concerns. During the course of this

study, I gathered data from our CPR monthly meetings, one-on-one check-ins, observations, and interviews. As the lead researcher, I engaged in long-term observations over a period of three cycles of inquiry by keeping field notes and involving the co-participants in all phases of the research and the data collection and analysis process. Guba and Lincoln (2000) affirm that prolonged engagement at a site, persistent observation, and peer debriefings are critical means "to safeguard against loss of credibility or to continually test for it" (p. 377). In addition, I used reflective memos to document my perspectives to avoid research impartiality or biases. To further enhance the internal validity, I used member checks as a form of triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 2000; Merriam, 1998). Guba and Lincoln (2000) define the term member checks as participants who respond to data analysis of the lead researcher on a continuous basis throughout the study with the participants. They asserted that to further ensure credibility, the qualitative researcher have access to the participants and "can ask those people whether he has presented their realities appropriately" (Guba & Lincoln, 2000, p. 376).

External Validity

The PAR study involved four urban school leaders, and each one of their school's context and community is distinct from others. While the research focused on exploring the effectiveness of Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices, the individuals' dispositions, readiness, and school context mattered. Therefore, the study results may not have the transferability or applicability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to other school contexts within our district nor outside our district. However, the methods or the process in which we engaged in the project can be generalized or transferable to other projects.

Ethical and Confidentiality Considerations

The ethical considerations of bias and confidentiality considerations of data collection and storage for research are critical. To control and mitigate potential bias, I ensured that all evidence collection and data analysis processes were transparent and conducted with co-participant researcher input. I preserved the security of the data collected and the confidentiality of the participants by these processes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018):

- All forms of data collected, including CLE artifacts, meeting notes, electronic correspondence, were stored in a locked file cabinet or password-protected filing.
- Data and copies of the report were shared with the CPR group for transparency and reflection purposes and were not reproduced or shared with anyone outside of the CPR except with written consent from the group.

The participation and commitment of the research team are based on the desire and need to solve a complex educational problem. I selected the participants based on prior relationships with each and their desire in seeking solutions to improve educational issues. Each CPR participant signed a consent form before participating in the study. As the participants' direct supervisor, I was cognizant and explicit in my communication that their participation in the study was categorically voluntary. They could withdraw at any time of the process. The schools and Co-Participant Researchers were protected through the use of pseudonyms. All appropriate consent was in place prior to the commencement of the study.

In addition, all researchers in SFUSD must submit a research proposal to the district for approval of the project, and that letter is in the Appendix B. The participants signed consent forms approved by East Carolina University's Institutional Review Board (ECU IRB). The approval of IRB is in Appendix B.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the research design and methodology for the PAR that involved using improvement science, CLE, CoP structures, and reflection activities to answer the overarching research question: How do school leaders increase their capacities to become culturally responsive school leaders? In describing the data collection and analysis processes, I considered the study's potential limitations and ethical considerations. Through the iterative process of the three inquiry cycles, the CPR team tested change ideas based on improvement science theory within the culturally responsive instructional leadership domain. I collected and analyzed data to develop emerging categories and themes that led to the study findings.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH PRE-CYCLE

In this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project, I ascertained the necessary conditions for building the capacity of school leaders to enact culturally responsive instructional leadership practices. Through a collaborative process using Community Learning Exchange (CLE) and Community of Practice (CoP) structures, I facilitated a process by which school leaders could develop Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices that would eventually contribute to the learning outcomes of students who are minoritized and often stigmatized. In this chapter, I describe the PAR context and then the process I used to form the co-practitioner researcher (CPR) group, a group of elementary school administrators who met with me to develop processes for building their capacity as culturally responsive leaders. To accomplish this goal, I facilitated the group meetings and collected data during the PAR Pre-cycle. I examined the emerging categories of both content and process through data collection and analyses from meeting artifacts, conversations, and researcher memos. The data addressed the PAR research questions and Focus of Practice. Lastly, I describe how the Pre-cycle informed the next cycle of inquiry.

PAR Context

To establish the context for the project and study, I describe the context of our school district, chronicle how I selected the Co-Participant Research (CPR) members and describe the school communities and the characteristics of the school leaders. I use the term minoritized students (Khalifa, 2018) to describe students who are treated as a minority even when they are the majority in a school. They are students whose identity and culture differ from the white dominant cultural norms and forms we typically see in classrooms and schools.

District Context

San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) is a large urban progressive institution and a highly diverse school district, with 86% of the student population identified as minoritized students. The four largest sub-groups of students break down as 35% Asian, 31% Latino, 9% African American, and 14% White. Despite the rich diversity of students in our district, African American, Latino, and English Learners are among the lowest-performing subgroups. Compared to their White and Asian peers, they scored between 40-60 percentage points lower in state tests for math and English language arts according to the Smarter Balance State assessment scores for grades 3-12 (cde.ca.gov).

In the 2020-21 academic year SFUSD launched an antiracist initiative to mitigate these disparate achievement outcomes for minoritized students. As a result of that initiative, the Curriculum and Instruction team developed an English Language Arts curriculum that focuses and affirms the identities of marginalized students. The professional development offerings to the teaching staff included engagement strategies to elevate the students' assets and standard-based instructional tasks that are cognitively stimulating and demanding. Similarly, the school leaders could access resources to engage staff in sensitive conversations about race to help shift mindsets. The school leaders' readiness to engage in school reform is supported by a progressive educational institution committed to improving all students' outcomes. Within this district-level context of support, I invited four elementary school leaders to participate in the PAR.

Forming the CPR Group

During the fall of the 2020-21 school year, as the director (before I became the Assistant Superintendent with the same cohort) for sixteen PK-5 elementary schools, I invited twenty

school leaders to attend a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) session. Seven school principals and one assistant principal participated. I gained their perspectives and input to better understand the assets and challenges across the system in enacting the antiracist leadership practices, an essential element of Culturally Responsive School Leadership. Of the eight leaders, four displayed a firm conviction to interrupt inequitable systems and practices to create significant outcomes for minoritized students. I had worked closely with them as their primary supervisor and supported their continued development as educational leaders. Once I received IRB approval for the research, I invited all four to join a co-practitioner researcher (CPR) group for the PAR project and study (see Table 2). All four school leaders agreed with alacrity to be part of this journey. To maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the co-researcher participants and their school contexts, I use pseudonyms for both the names of the schools and individuals.

School Communities and School Leaders

To further contextualize the CPR team members within their communities, I provide a more descriptive background of each co-participant researcher's school context. After each school context, I describe each CPR member's professional experiences leading them to their current leadership positions.

Curry Elementary

Curry Elementary is a small school community that serves a culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students from across the city. The student population represents seven ethnic groups, including approximately 60% who qualify for the free and reduced lunch program. In addition, 42% are second language learners who are the lowest-performing subgroup in English language arts and math according to the most recent state assessment results.

Table 2

CPR Group Members

Name	School	Description
Mason Bell	Curry Elementary School	TK-5 elementary school principal for three years; African American male, grew up in the South and moved to California from the East Coast; previous roles as school counselor, teacher, and assistant principal.
Sandy Moon	Sunny Grove Elementary School	K-5 elementary school principal for five years; mixed heritage of White and Asian; grew up in the Bay Area; previous roles as paraeducator, teacher, and instructional coach.
Sidney Frost	Boise Elementary School	PreK-5 elementary school principal for five years; White Jewish female; grew up in the Midwest in a rural town; previous roles as teacher and instructional coach.
Ben Lemon	Boise Elementary School	PreK-5 elementary assistant school principal for four years; African American male; grew up in the Bay Area; previous roles as special educator teacher and teacher leader.

Mason Bell joined our cohort and school district as a new principal of Curry Elementary during the 2020–21 academic year. He previously served as an assistant principal on the East Coast and at a neighboring school district before joining our team. He is in his third year as the school principal at Curry Elementary and participated in our district's principal leadership support program. In his short tenure, he has proven to advocate for marginalized students and families. During the COVID-19 pandemic, he delivered school supplies and technological devices to the students' homes if their families could not pick them up at the school site. Mason, an African American male who grew up in the South, is grounded and humbled by his background. His late grandmother, a descendant of a slave, never learned to read. Mason was surrounded by role models who helped him overcome challenges during his early schooling experiences. Inspired by his grandfather's modeling of hard work and unwavering integrity, Mason is passionate about social justice and equity issues. As an educational leader, he believes that quality education is the vehicle to true liberation and breaking the cycle of poverty for marginalized families. Mason has been reflective in his leadership practice and often asks clarifying questions to enhance his institutional knowledge, structures, and processes across the system as he forms partnerships with his colleagues and central office partners.

Sunny Grove Elementary

Sunny Grove Elementary School, located in the western part of the city, serves approximately 430 students. The three significant subgroups are Asian, White, and Latino students. Based on the most recent state assessment results, Sunny Grove is considered a high academic performing school since both ELA and Math are between 20-30 percentage points higher than the district average of 50%. However, English Learner (EL), special education

(SPED), and low socioeconomic status (SES) students are performing at 30-40 plus percentage points lower compared to their Asian and White counterparts.

Sandy Moon is passionate about social justice and committed to interrupting educational and racial inequities in our school system. Prior to becoming an educator, she often volunteered in an after-school Bible study at church, in which she found her calling to become an educator. With thirteen years in education, she has been a teacher leader and instructional coach before becoming a school administrator five years ago. Although Sunny Grove serves more affluent families, Sandy remains explicit in her equity stance and vision on ensuring that all her students are given the opportunity and resources to succeed. With her mixed racial (White and Asian) and heritage identities, Sandy understands marginalization and privilege and embraces the importance of diversity. She especially supports the families who are marginalized as she reflects on her upbringing. When she first arrived at Sunny Grove, Sandy was aghast at the inequitable practice imposed by the parent-teacher association (PTA) requiring all families to make a minimum contribution of $1,500. “Who does that?” exclaimed Sandy. As she has become more aware of the inequities at her school, she asserted that she must interrupt these structures and practices that often perpetuate oppression. During the last couple of years, she methodically and fiercely worked toward building unity and forming partnerships with her staff and helped shift their mindset in supporting marginalized students through instructional reform. One example is her work to transform mindsets within her Instructional Leadership Team (ILT). Sandy developed the school vision with the ILT using performance and other relevant data to discern which student groups are not receiving the same learning experiences at their school. She and her ILT refined their school goals, changed concepts, and developed a professional learning plan by centering the students who were most marginalized at their school. While the equity work is

ongoing, she has shown perseverance and an unwavering commitment to her students and families who are most vulnerable and often receiving inadequate resources.

Boise Elementary

Boise Elementary is a historically underserved school located in midtown, where gentrification has been rampant in its school community over the last two decades. Nevertheless, the multi-generational families remain steadfast in maintaining their children's enrollment at this neighborhood school. As a Title 1 school, Latino and African American students are the two dominant subgroups and have been underserved. To close the opportunity gap for these students, the school district has provided additional resources. Examples include hiring academic support staff and implementing class size reduction. Among the entire student population, approximately 70% are socioeconomically disadvantaged, and 43% are English learners. With a strong focus on instruction, all major subgroups have seen a steady and substantial increase in the students' academic performance. The African American students have surpassed the district's average by over eighteen percentage points in ELA and six points in math, according to the most recent SBAC assessment results. Similarly, the Latino, English learner, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students scored twenty plus percentage points greater than their previous assessment results.

Sidney Frost, a hard-working and determined instructional coach for over ten years, has been the principal at Boise Elementary during the last four years. She believes that instructional reform has the highest leverage in effecting more significant academic achievement outcomes for students who are marginalized. Boise Elementary is a historically underserved school where over 90% of the students qualified for the free and reduced lunch program. Two years ago, Boise was one of the few schools where African American and Latino students made significant gains in

their academic achievement based on the state standardized testing results. As a Jewish, heterosexual White female, Sidney recognizes her inherent privilege and benefits from the system. Her grandparents instilled in her that education is a vehicle to overcome challenges. For example, Sidney will often recount a quote from her grandparents, stating, "Jews believe that Holocaust could have been prevented through education." While growing up in the Midwest and attending all White schools, her father would coach an all-Black basketball team. Her father's modeling of humanity and working toward the good for all people in her small community taught and inspired Sidney's drive to work in a school community like Boise and to level the playing field for the students who are minoritized. These formative years taught her that the people in her community were racist and that "even though we have a free education system in our country, it does not serve everyone the same way…." Her early experiences drive her passion as an educational leader; she is committed to social justice and equity work and has fostered a collaborative culture at her school. She has supported and prioritized school resources to build her staff's instructional capacities in culturally responsive teaching and learning practices. Two years ago, the principal was able to add an assistant principal position, which further supported the school community in many areas.

Ben Lemon has served four years as the assistant principal, two years at a neighboring school, and completed his second year at Boise. During the 2022-23 school year, he moved to be principal of a PK-5 Elementary school in a different cohort of the same school district. He was a welcome addition because he has a strong special education background and builds authentic partnerships with families. Before working in SFUSD, he was a special education teacher and teacher leader in another urban school district within a 25-mile radius. As an African American male, he is committed to decreasing the number of African Americans disproportionately

identified as special education students. Attending schools with primarily White teachers, Ben learned early on that to keep him and his siblings safe they would need to abide by the "White rules." His father instilled the importance of conforming, which "allowed him to make it past the age of 18." As an assistant principal at Boise, he hopes to shift the deficit mindset of staff members who hold a dominant cultural view, into a more reflective approach that moves away from a deleterious lens of students of color. He believes that all students can and will learn given the opportunity, resources, and tools. With a strong family network, with uncles who are pastors and doctors. As an adult, he found out that his grandfather was a teacher in a naval base, which motivated Ben to continue this lineage of educators. Reflecting on his upbringing and educational experiences, Ben is committed to a better outcome for his students entrusted in his care. The laser focus on instruction at Boise was one of the primary reasons that attracted him to apply for the assistant principalship.

School leadership is a key component of school success in every school, and effective school principals or leaders are critical in school reform (Grissom et al., 2021a; Leithwood & Louis, 2012). The commonality of these leaders is that they demonstrate the quality of equity warriors who understand themselves and their orientation, the needs of their school community, and the intersection of all the elements that go into their school reform efforts (Mitchell, 2018; Rigby & Tredway, 2015). They are not hero principals but engage their school communities in strategic ways to interrupt practices that are not fully serving children and families (Kim & Maudlin, 2022). I selected these participants using the purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990) approach. These Co-Participant Researchers were qualified and eager to explore and enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices to level the playing field for minoritized students.

PAR Pre-Cycle Process

The PAR Pre-cycle occurred in Fall 2021 and included four Co-Participant Researcher (CPR) meetings. After finalizing the CPR team of three elementary school principals and one assistant principal, I facilitated our first CPR meeting to review the PAR purpose, expectations, and commitment. The subsequent meetings focused on relationship building and learning about the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework. Additionally, over the course of the cycle, I wrote reflective memos, had conversations with CPR members during our existing meeting structures, and met with my research coach to generate and refine agendas that reflect the research questions. Due to my insider-insider positionality (hunter et al., 2013), I collected data within pre-existing collaborative structures (i.e., monthly cohort meetings, school visits, formal and informal check-ins) that were part of my duties and obligations as a principal supervisor, conveniently allowing me to perform my duties as a researcher.

Next, I detail the CPR activities, data collection, and analysis during the PAR Pre-cycle, focusing on the progression of activities that fostered team and relationship building. In addition, the emergent categories generated from professional reading, discussion, and meaning making with the team set the stage for PAR Cycle One.

CPR Meetings

The CPR team convened four times during the PAR Pre-cycle. In each meeting, we focused on building relational trust by engaging in self-reflection, personal narratives, and activities that ranged from illustrating their backgrounds and experiences to their hopes and vision in their leadership journeys. The focus of the practice and a review of the research questions were vital points of information for the CPR team members to know what they were volunteering for during the three-semester commitment. As the primary researcher and the

participants' immediate supervisor, I was keenly aware of my positionality and underscored that the PAR was entirely voluntary with no repercussions should they choose not to participate.

During our first meeting (September 29, 2021), we unpacked and calibrated what it means to be equity warriors using a quote, "Equity warriors are people who, regardless of their role in a school or district, passionately lead and embrace the mission of high levels of achievement for all students, regardless of race, social class, ethnicity, culture, disability or language proficiency" (Leverett, 2002, p. 1). Their personal narratives reflecting the quote set the tone for our PAR as we aspired to become more culturally responsive as leaders. We then developed individual mandalas, visual maps to illustrate who we are presently and who influenced us as leaders. This activity was generative as the team members reflected on their hopes, dreams, and moral imperatives as school leaders. We reviewed the focus of our PAR project, timeline, and commitment. Everyone continued to express a high interest in the project as they sought to learn more about the Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices (CRSL) (Khalifa, 2018) and their deep desires to narrow the opportunity gap for minoritized students.

We used Khalifa's (2018) book based on a study of school leadership, *Culturally Responsive School Leadership,* to anchor our second CPR meeting (October 27, 2021). Before the meeting, we read the introduction that specifically included the rationale of a different type of leadership and the need for CRSL and a deeper understanding of the concept of epistemology. We listened and responded to an audio-taped interview with Dr. Khalifa, in which he described the importance of community-based epistemology. The CPR team engaged in the Four A's Text protocol to surface the author's *assumptions,* chose parts of the text with which we *agreed* or

argue with, and followed with which concepts or practices we *aspire* to as leaders. I invited each member to share what they might explore based on new learning or what each might try to do within their respective school communities and share what they learned at the next CPR meeting.

At the third meeting (November 17, 2021), we continued to nurture our professional relationships and cultivate relational trust through personal narratives and participation in developing a leadership journey line. We discussed the first chapter of the book and focused on the difference between school-centric and community-based epistemologies, where we often observe conflict or dissonance between these two epistemologies at schools. The CPR members reflected on why there is often a mismatch from parents' and students' interpretations of behaviors and school incidents from that of teachers and administrators. By digging into these existing school contradictions, the leaders continued to expand their growing awareness of the inequities at their schools. Next, the CPR members developed leadership journey lines to contemplate the formative experiences that molded their paths toward leadership. By understanding each other's pivotal experiences that shaped their ontologies or perspectives, we became more aware of our epistemological stances. We formed closer bonds as we made connections to the challenges at their respective school communities. In each of the last two meetings, we invited members to explore an aspect or area of CRSL to set the stage for action. For the next professional reading, the team would read Chapter 2 to discern one of the four essential components of CRSL: critical self-reflection.

During the fourth CPR meeting (December 15, 2021), the team members reflected on the school structures and processes that perpetuate inequitable outcomes for minoritized students, shared how they have attempted to interrupt inequities in a safe space, and, based on the PDSA cycles of inquiry, began planning what they would initially do as trial balloons. Khalifa (2018)

asserted that "personal critical self-reflection is not enough." He argues, "that all structures and processes in schools need to be critically self-reflected as well" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 60). The team offered their reactions to this quote and discussed their questionable school structures and processes. One leader noted that her school community must reflect on staffing and consider hiring more people of color. The second indicated a need to make the special education process more explicit for the general education teachers so that they can make better decisions in serving all students. At this meeting, every co-participant researcher member wanted to explore the concept of community-based epistemologies; they provided an update on what they had learned from that experience or what barriers had precluded their attempts. Finally, the CPR members spent time reflecting on a dilemma or question with which they were grappling within the scope of being a culturally responsive school leader. Their initial responses, ideas, or questions will spur the next CRSL content.

Data Collection and Analysis

During the PAR Pre-cycle, I collected and analyzed the data pertinent to the project and study. First, I share the data I collected from the activities described in the previous section. Then, I describe the data analysis process that led to the emerging codes and categories.

Data Collection

From the four CPR meetings, I collected a primary set of evidence that included meeting agendas, text discussion notes, and artifacts from both the mandala and leadership journey line activities. In addition, reflective memos throughout the semester, which included graduate school assignments and my reflections after the CPR or individual coaching meetings, were part of the data collection process. The memos provide an additional means of measuring or triangulating

the validity of the evidence. The PAR Pre-cycle data collection process concluded with arranging all documents for preparing to code.

Data Analysis

The primary sources of evidence were the CPR meeting artifacts (including agendas, notes, reflections, and artifacts), one-on-one coaching notes, and reflective memos. The initial data analysis began with coding this one set of data. I used open coding for the initial round through a lens aligned to the PAR's Focus of Practice (i.e., how to support principals in building their capacity to enact more culturally responsive instructional leadership practices). I organized the data in a spreadsheet and highlighted and merged closely related codes. I repeated the same process with each data source. In the subsequent rounds, I sifted through the data through a deductive lens of the PAR focus. Based on frequency, distinctive or conspicuous codes emerged, which manifested as the categories reflective of the data set. The emerging categories are illustrated in Table 3 and then I describe them.

Throughout the PAR Pre-cycle, I had two distinct objectives. First, the Pre-cycle was essential to establishing the CPR team as a supportive network to tackle complex educational leadership issues related to significantly closing the opportunity gap for minoritized students. Developing authentic professional relationships and cultivating relational trust were paramount for the team to engage in new learning. The team grew more connected as they fully participated in all four CPR meetings throughout the semester and shared intimate details of their journeys toward leadership by engaging in the mandala and journey line activities. Next, we anchored our learning through the professional reading of Khalifa (2018) to deepen our knowledge and understanding of the premise of being a culturally responsive school leader and CRSL framework. The CPR meetings provided a purposeful space for the co-practitioner researcher

Table 3

Pre-PAR Cycle Data Analysis

Category	Code	CPR Meeting	%
Personal Identities: Motivation to Become School Leaders (n=27 or 22%)	Family backgrounds	18	14.7%
	Role models	9	7.3%
Awareness of Structures: Oppression and White Supremacy in School Systems (n=96 or 78%)	Awareness of the dominant value system within school structures	31	25%
	Misalignment of school-centric and community-based epistemologies.	16	13%
	Critical reflection of self and staff mindsets.	29	24%
	Developing equity stances within their contexts	20	16%

members to connect on a more profound and personal level as they developed greater trust among the team. The members engaged in the new learning of culturally responsive school leadership in a safe and risk-free environment. Principal Bell asserted, "I never even heard of or knew the meaning of epistemology until now." In addition, Principal Frost stated multiple times throughout the series of CPR meetings, "this is a safe space," as she reflected on her leadership shortcomings. In addition, the CPR meetings encouraged the Co-Participant Researchers to be more vulnerable and authentic when we discussed Culturally Responsive School Leadership issues during our one-on-one meetings at their respective schools. Principal Moon faced the dilemma of managing an ineffective teacher and addressing the growing concerns of parents. Instead of taking on this issue alone, she sought my thought partnership to explore solutions. She developed a communication plan and leveraged internal resources to support the teacher and ensure the students received supplemental intervention support when appropriate. This illustration of Principal Moon's actions was an example of a trust with her supervisor and critical reflection, a CRSL element that centers on the needs of the students who are most vulnerable and in need of additional support to be successful. These examples illustrated the growing connection of the team and their increasing shift towards culturally responsive leadership.

In sharing the data analysis, I discuss the two categories that emerged: (1) Personal identities as motivation to become school leaders and (2) awareness of structures of oppression and white supremacy in school systems.

Emerging Categories

Rigby and Tredway (2015) asserted that “school leadership is of central importance of what happens in schools. Effective school leaders are the connective tissue in school reform” (p. 329). Through the data analysis process, the emerging categories of personal identities and

equity consciousness are essential characteristics of effective school leadership and motivating factors in driving educational change to improve outcomes, especially for minoritized students. La Salle and Johnson (2019) noted that "equity leaders must have the will to disrupt the status quo. Our experience has taught us that regardless of how they get there, all equity leaders are driven by one moral imperative, their True North, which propels them to action" (La Salle & Johnson, 2019, p. 5). This quote resonates for me because the CPR members' school leadership practices are motivated by their why or moral imperative, which corresponds to their beliefs and personal identities. As these school leaders engaged in personal narratives using the mandala and leadership journey line activities which focused on personal and professional identities, they illustrated their motivation and journey toward educational leadership. They demonstrated critical consciousness throughout the Pre-cycle as they often reflected on the dominant value systems prevailing within their schools and societal structures and practices. Freire (1973) reminded us that "critical consciousness always submits that causality to analysis" (p. 44). The CPR team named the injustices and inequities that persist within our educational system throughout this Pre-cycle and began exploring solutions.

Personal Identities as Motivation to Become School Leaders

Experiential knowledge or personal identities engendered the four CPR members' motivation toward leadership as career choices. Their individual epistemologies inform the school leaders' ontologies or perspectives about leaders and their actions. Therefore, their personal identities shaped their aspirations about educational leadership. From a philosophical lens, personal identity is the concept one develops about self that progresses throughout one's life. Aspects of one's evolution may include family background, where the person lived, and even the choices that the person makes in life. Therefore, I named this category as *personal*

identities as motivation to become school leaders because, through our discussions, the CPR members recognized how our epistemic stances inform our ontologies or perspectives, and that their personal identities profoundly influenced their leadership decisions and trajectories. When asked to reflect on who they are as leaders and what influenced them, their responses led to two sub-categories with high frequencies: family background and role models.

Family Background

The CPR members' backgrounds represent a diverse range of ethnicities and experiences; however, no matter their background, their experiences in their families strongly influenced the CPR members' moral imperatives and influenced their solid commitments to being equity educational leaders. In addition, they each reported direct or indirect impacts from living in a system of White supremacy.

As a Southern Black male, Principal Bell was motivated by his late grandmother, a descendant of an enslaved person, who could not read. His early understanding of his grandmother and the oppression that she experienced shaped his leadership path. He stated, "That's a big part of my why." He understands the importance of an education as he asserted that a "good education is the vehicle that can help change things for people, like someone in a generation of the cycle of poverty." He drew wheels in his mandala (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021) to represent education as "a vehicle that can actually lead them out of (poverty)." He has firsthand experience as he reflected on his "mom who lived in New Jersey and was living in poverty."

Principal Moon grew up identifying as mixed-race Filipino and White. As a school-age student, she would joke that she was "Filipino on the weekends and White on the weekdays" in her white suburban environment. She recognized that her "family unit was separated from the

general school community. We had to listen to our teachers, but we weren't part of the community." Her early experience as a bi-racial student impacted her path toward leadership. As a principal, "now I connect with the families, the ones that I don't see because they rely on the school to take care of business," as she reflected on her experience that paralleled the families who are most marginalized at her school (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021).

Reflecting on her Jewish background, Principal Frost stated that her ancestors and family impacted her path toward leadership. Her grandmother and mom were both teachers, and Principal Frost knew being an educator was part of her journey. Her "grandparents really instilled in us that Jews believe that Holocaust can be prevented through education" as she reflected on her "why." As a White Jewish female from the Midwest, she recognizes her white privilege. She noted that "it is very easy to be around this world because people tend to listen and agree with me, and I move around with ease because of that." On several occasions during my one-on-one meetings, Principal Frost asserted that she only has intentions to work in Black and Brown school communities like Boise Elementary because she wants to ensure the students at her school develop and deem as very significant "critical thinking and understand what's happened around [them]" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021).

Being an educator is in Principal Lemon's (former assistant principal) family lineage. He beamed as he explained that his grandfather was a naval base teacher. As he recounted his upbringing as a Black youth, he shared that he and his siblings had to protect each other. He asserted that "we have rules for White folks, and that was the protection rules because we can never talk back to White folks." His "dad's goal [was] that (they) make it past 18." Mr. Lemon connected to the current context of the Black youth as he lamented that "we are always the second choice, like Colin Kaepernick, unless we got the stamp of approval from the White

folks." As he reflected on his educational history and experience as a Black student, he was determined not to have his "students go through that" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021).

The diversity of the CPR members' family backgrounds illuminated their purposes in educational leadership. The role models in their personal lives significantly impacted their leadership trajectories. These experiences prepared them to aspire to be equity leaders. In each case, CPR members came to the realization that these particular experiences in which they came face to face with racism were the ones that defined their motivations and aspirations. The members understood that their experiences were reflective of larger societal ills and that their school settings were microcosms of this dynamic.

Role Models

The role models in these leaders' lives contributed to developing their identities, which in turn laid the foundation of their leadership work. I describe how the members' role models pushed the CPR members to recognize and address inequities in their communities. In turn, the CPR members saw the qualities in their role models of people who challenged a system that often marginalized certain groups.

Besides having familial models to look up to, Principal Bell was fortunate to have many pivotal role models that inspired his leadership work. As a 5th grader, Mr. Bell reflected on his challenging behaviors in school. He appreciated the honesty from Ms. Berry, his 5th-grade teacher, who candidly told him that he was not going to make it. According to Principal Bell, "it was eye-opening to take that feedback from her. I really appreciated that from her because she was strict, and, as many Black students like himself, he had "never thought college was an option." As he entered into the leadership program at University of Washington, one of his

professors, Professor McGregor, not only introduced him to equity work but modeled the way by not "just saying but really doing the work" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021).

As for Principal Moon, her role models are her parents. Her "mother grew up in the South in the 50s during a time schools were segregated." Hearing her mom's stories, she realized, "there are always two schools. A Black school and a White school." Principal Moon reflected her mixed-race identities as something similar to her White mom's experience during the segregation era. Principal Moon's Filipino father held high expectations and consistently demonstrated selflessness, and she wanted to make him proud by engaging in charitable work. After his passing, she "volunteered in a youth group and at a school, as a para" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021).

Principal Frost experienced a challenging period at age 15 after her mom passed away. However, her soccer coach and German language teacher modeled care and did not let her fail in school and life. Even with an attitude of "I just didn't care," her "soccer coach allowed (her) to get back on the team" after a period of non-participation. She recounted that her German teacher "came to my house and dragged me to school, and I realized that she really cared." She even "gave me a job" as a babysitter (Frost, CPR meeting notes, November 17, 2021). However, the most significant role model was her father, who coached a basketball team of all Black players in a rural town with conservative values. She recalled that "we spent time with the team that he coached. Every summer the full team would spend all weekends here. Child Protective Services was called, and (White) people wouldn't allow their kids to come to our house" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021). Ms. Frost was taught a valuable lesson of the selfless act of her father and realized that "we have a free public education in this country. But it doesn't serve everyone the same way, and so that's when I really started to get committed to like what I do."

Principal Lemon asserted that "education chose me" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021). He followed the footsteps of his grandfather. When he became a teacher, he valued the support from his vice principal, who "really helped me to grow. She really helped me and sat me at the table. She really helped me be an effective teacher during my first and second year." He wanted to do the same for teachers when he became a school leader. His father was another role model who impacted his trajectory toward leadership. His father was a general contractor and "would take us out [on his jobs], and he always taught us to finish what we started" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, November 17, 2021). This experience carried over when Principal Lemon was a summer counselor, where he took kids to the state capital. When he realized he "needed a 'B' driver's license to drive a van. I knew that I was a leader, so I did it."

Sharing their family backgrounds and the role models who inspired them illustrated the leaders' motivation to challenge inequities in society and offered stories that bonded the principals to each other in the CPR group. Facing racism and experiencing hostilities and discrimination informed their desire to become leaders. Their personal stories brought them closer as a team and enabled them to discuss the oppressive structures in the school system.

Awareness of Structures: Oppression and White Supremacy in School Systems

Freire (1973) described critical consciousness as the ability to negotiate reality in order to change it. He asserted that "critical understanding leads to critical action" (p. 44). To be culturally responsive, school leaders must have high levels of consciousness or awareness of themselves and their school contexts to make necessary changes to improve the outcomes for minoritized students. Khalifa (2018) posited that critical self-reflection is "a necessary first step because it is a process through which school leaders recognize and discover how their institutions and practices have been oppressive to minoritized students" (p. 74). Recognizing the

dominant value system is an initial sub-category and includes each participant's personal experiences growing up and developing awareness of systemic structures of White supremacy and racism reflected in their school contexts. Khalifa (2018) made an essential distinction that critical self-reflection is relevant to personal and structural consciousness. He encourages school leaders to identify and examine oppressive power structures that exist in schools. This is specifically what the CPR members aimed to do as they increased their leadership capacities in a manner that interrupts the reproduction of oppressive practices in their contexts.

In analyzing and coding the data, I found that the CPR members' consciousness of equity issues in their schools formed a second category and constituted 78% of the data that I analyzed. The data indicated the CPR members' increased awareness of the dominant value system in the larger society and their school structures as one of the two more extensive codes. Another code that showed up with frequency was the way that the leaders contemplated or reflected on the school structures to achieve a greater level of equity. More specifically, they demonstrated awareness of the dominant value system within school structures and reflected on ways to transform or shift school structures to achieve more equity.

Awareness of the Dominant Value System within School Structures

An important sub-category that emerged in PAR Pre-cycle is awareness of the dominant value system within school structures, representing 25% of the data for the Pre-cycle. Naming this as an initial part of the leaders' experiences in the PAR project and study indicated the members' growing understanding and awareness of the inequitable structures and how they may affect minoritized students. Leaders were aware of a misalignment of school-centric and community-based epistemologies. Furthermore, through a process of critical self-awareness, CPR members understood that their inherited values often aligned with the dominant system.

This understanding allowed them to recognize the preconceived ideas held about families of marginalized backgrounds, which are framed within a White supremacist ideology. These preconceived ideas were held by the CPR members themselves and by their school staffs and were often mis-aligned with community beliefs and culture.

Misalignment of School-Centric and Community-Based Epistemologies

Principal Bell shared that "many teachers often make assumptions about our families that they might not have the same expectations of their children… I want to dig into the deficit mindset, especially since we are a community that needs change. I want to be more culturally responsive" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, October 27, 2021). Principal Bell was well aware that the majority of the school staff, based on their standards and assumptions, hold mindsets that perceive students and their families as lacking strengths or assets. In other words, teachers and sometimes leaders perceived the students as needing improvement to reach a standard imposed by the dominant value system. However, this deficit mindset ignores the experiences and knowledge of families who are marginalized in the community and the wider society.

Principal Moon reflected on her school's Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) asking every family for $1500 to donate to the PTA funds. "The first time I read that four years ago, it was very shocking, and it is still very shocking." Principal Moon noted that many of the privileged parents do not recognize the economic status of some of our marginalized families, and "they (privileged families) might not realize how triggering it is when it is on paper." She lamented, "Who does that? Who has $1500 to pay for that in public school?" Principal Moon expressed her condemnation of the lack of awareness of the privileges held by some staff and families, that not all constituents share (CPR meeting notes, October 27, 2021). The privileged constituents'

epistemologies are steeped in dominant values in society, which further marginalize families and students who come from different and more diverse backgrounds.

Critical Reflection of Self and Staff Mindsets

The leaders were fully aware that they needed to critically reflect about themselves and the mindsets of the staff as those mindsets (or ontologies) create an epistemic environment that does not consider the cultural knowledge and reality of the students and families. Awareness of this factor, with 24% of the Pre-cycle data, is a first step in taking action to change oppressive systems. For example, as a White female leader, Principal Frost is mindful of her inherent privilege. Right out the gate, she asserted that "We often look at things from a White perspective and White value. What we are measuring is based on our perceived value and whether those values match with the value of our students. I have been thinking a lot about that. Who is achieving or who is not achieving?" (CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021). When asked to reflect on the current reality of how community epistemology is valued, she responded, "I don't feel like I have an example of a non-top-down approach where our school truly works in collaboration with families. It feels out of reach, and (I'm) not sure how to make it happen. I think we do very little in terms of shared decision making" (CPR meeting notes, October 27, 2021).

Principal Lemon acknowledged that the deficit mindset at his school is prevalent. "In my mind, I feel when they (teachers) just don't have any belief in the students. You feel that in the voice. In their tone. You are in the CCT (Coordinated Care Team) meeting; they would say it is not my fault that they are here. They have these automatic labels—it's not my fault" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, October 27, 2021). He shared that there is no consistent and clear structure to support parents. He described a situation in which a mother reached out to the police to protect

her child because of a lack of trust in school personnel. Her child was being bullied; yet because she did not trust the school staff she completely skipped the conventional process in place. He stated, "Honestly, we took a number of steps … not sure what the process in the past is stopping her from working with us. I just keep staying open and, in my mind, not to conclude that there is not a solution" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, December 15, 2021). Through a process of critically reflecting on his school staff and procedures, Principal Lemon recognized the lack of support for marginalized families. He was able to name the deficit mindset held and practiced by school staff. He further identified the impact it has on some parents and the lack of trust they have in school structures.

The CPR team recognized the existing challenges they were facing at their respective schools and demonstrated a keen awareness of the dominant value system that produced oppressive structures for their students and families. As they thought of next steps, they aimed to employ a high level of reflection and resolved to mitigate the inequitable systems in their school community.

Developing Equity Stances Within Their Contexts

Developing an awareness of the dominant value system within ourselves and our school structures is the first crucial necessary step, accounting for 16% of the evidence in the Pre-cycle. For transformation in awareness and perspective to take hold, reflection on challenging issues is a critical process. As a result, the principals were deepening their awareness and adding to their equity stances in the areas of connecting to parents, disciplining, and staffing.

In terms of connecting to parents, the principals took equity stances to create opportunities for parents and families to develop more agency. This involved providing parents and families opportunities to share their voices and promote a more equal partnership with

school constituents, particularly with the teaching staff. Allowing teachers to see and hear the perspectives of families and parents was something the principals felt would create a more equitable structure at their schools.

Curry Elementary is a diverse community; yet parent partnership remains minimal. Principal Bell's goal is to establish structures where the families and parents can share their funds of knowledge about their children so that the teachers can better serve them. He asserted, "I want to hear how things are for them and how the educational systems are impacting them. I want to build relationships and trust with the families." He wanted to explore affinity spaces with the different families. He reflected that "we haven't been able to start them yet, but there is a request to have an AAPI (Asian American and Pacific Islander) space." Principal Bell believes that by understanding the "family better (norms, experience, trauma), we can better serve our students better and that would increase their academic outcomes" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, December 15, 2021).

Principal Moon reflected on the discipline structures and practices at her school. We established "structures and rules that require students to behave. Depending on the behavior, it might not match with the structure" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, November 17, 2021). She lamented that they don't currently have an AAPAC (African American Parent Advisory Committee), and "I always wanted to get that going." Principal Moon further expressed that she "grappled with how we get in there (instruction) so that teachers and staff prioritize the marginalized students and that would drive their work…I am not sure how to do that" (Moon, Meeting notes, December 15, 2021). Her humility in admitting to not having the answer is a testament to the trust-building during the Pre-cycle.

In terms of staffing decisions as a process to promote more equitable structure, Principal Frost reflected on her school systems and structures. Principal Frost shared that "We must reflect on staffing. Who are we hiring? Are we hiring a diverse staff? The staff should be diverse with race, gender, age within certified and classified. I am not sure how we can reflect on critical systems and structures when the staff is not diverse." She added, "only then would we have all perspectives represented." She shared a recent accomplishment to address staff conflicts. With the support of the professional learning central office team, Principal Frost "created a racial equity team that consists of teachers and a family liaison." She proudly noted that "it is an accountability system. So, when we have a conflict with someone, whether it is around race or something else, there is a very clear structure for how we can handle that conflict or dilemma and who can help with the restorative conversation" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, December 15, 2021).

Principal Lemon contemplated a recent support approach for a first-grade student. As the interim principal, while Principal Frost was out on medical leave, Mr. Lemon worked with other teacher leaders to determine a plan of action. What he realized during our CPR meeting was that the process was rushed and did not include the key constituents. He recounted the importance of slowing down and reflected on the process. He noted that "I made the decision to reconvene…instead of making arbitrary decisions that can affect other people who didn't have a voice in it." He was glad that he was able to flesh it out and realized that "it could have been spilled over and super messy" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, December 15, 2021).

Conclusion

PAR Pre-cycle created opportunities for the CPR members to connect and learn about each other's identities and their motivation as school leaders. The team unpacked Culturally Responsive School Leadership elements such as school centric and community-based

epistemologies and the need for critical self-reflection. The engagement through personal narratives and reflective activities supported the conclusion that the members' personal identities is a strong motivation for them to become school leaders. Further, the CPR space provided the Co-Participant Researchers to explore and reflect on oppressive structures at their respective school.

The convenings supported members in connecting at personal and professional levels and discerning their motivations as practicing school leaders. The leaders were able to publicly share their strengths, question their decisions and actions, and gain a stronger sense of how their beliefs and knowledge about leadership and equity could be better aligned with their ontological perspectives and actions. The CPR collaborative structure provided the opportunity for the leaders to contemplate the existing culturally responsive leadership practices as delineated by Khalifa (2018) as having the potential to interrupt oppressive school structures. The CPR space created a bond among the members and increased their level of commitment to learn and enact CRSL practices. In the next cycle, I planned to further our CRSL development and move us toward action as the members appeared to be ready.

Reflections on Leadership and Next Steps

The PAR Pre-cycle provided a meaningful space and opportunity for the CPR team to connect and build their capacity in understanding Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). As a result, we achieved the majority of the intended outcomes for this cycle. We formed authentic relationships with each other, and the members were open and reflective about their journeys as leaders and the current state of equity actions and issues at their school. In particular, recognizing that I am the primary researcher who concurrently holds positional authority with the other Co-Participant Researchers (CPR), I believe we developed collegial

relationships in our meetings that fostered future growth and action. The CPR members were not only candid but reflective on how they arrived in educational leadership. The team was committed to exploring the elements of the CRSL framework and began to apply the acquired knowledge in their daily practice as school leaders. Starting with a text gave an anchor for discussion. In this section, I reflect on the on three areas: research questions, leadership, and plans for PAR Cycle One.

Research Questions

The two emerging categories—personal identities as motivation to become school leaders and awareness of structures of oppression and white supremacy in school systems—intersected with two sub-research questions: (1) To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and dispositions to be culturally responsive instructional school leaders? and (2) To what extent does reimagining the central office supervisor's role support school leaders in enacting culturally responsive instructional leadership practices?

I did not anticipate how significant the influence of the four leaders' upbringing, family dynamics, and identities would be on their leadership trajectories. In all cases, the CPR members' family background or the role models in their lives laid the foundation of their leadership development. For example, Principal Bell's grandmother who, as a descendent of slaves, could not read, ignited his passion for becoming an educator. Recognizing the systemic racism for Black students like himself, he "never thought that college was an option for (him)" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021). Equipped with his family history, Principal Bell believed that effective education is a vehicle that can change the outcomes for people, especially those who are impacted by poverty. His hope as a school leader is to advocate for and inspire the community to thrive. In another example, Principal Frost's ancestors and her faith in Judaism

significantly influenced her passion for education and leadership development. Her grandparents instilled in her that "Jews believe that the Holocaust could have been prevented through education" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2021). The CPR members' identities are the driving force of their moral imperatives. This emerging category may inform new questions and new directions for the research in the next cycle.

During the Pre-cycle, CPR members demonstrated awareness of the issues and espoused values about culturally responsive instructional leadership practices; however, they were not clear on how to enact these practices with intentionality. During our one-on-one coaching meetings and our routine learning walks observing teaching and learning, the CPR members were keen on calling out classroom systems and practices that would have improved the learning of minoritized students but did not have clear explicit or clear strategies to address these challenges. This sighting informed next steps with the CPR members.

As the CPR members developed their understanding and knowledge of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), creating a safe learning space for the Co-Participant Researchers to engage in new learning and make meaning of the CRSL framework was essential. This safe space promoted a greater sense of relational trust and a supportive network. Aguilar (2016) asserted that cultivating trust must be the most challenging thing about building teams.

To create the conditions where we can learn, I was intentional in designing activities for our CPR convenings. Aguilar (2016) stated that "knowing about each other's histories, backgrounds, values, beliefs, hopes and dreams, skills and abilities, and fears and concerns is important" (p. 42). As a positive outcome, the CPR took risks and demonstrated humility as they embarked on their engagement. Principal Moon publicly acknowledged that she is "unsure how to (interrupt)" the dominant value system and practices of the PTA and her staff (Moon, CPR

meeting notes, December 15, 2021). Similarly, Principal Bell admitted that he had never even heard of the word "epistemology" before our engagement and participation in this research (Bell, CPR meeting notes, October 27, 2021). As a result, he modeled his humility at one of his parent meetings where he was learning and practicing Culturally Responsive School Leadership. He proposed creating structures for parents to share their "community-based epistemologies." He hoped to "really understand the parents' perspectives" and partner "with them so that we can give our best to our students" (CPR meeting notes, December 15, 2021). I will continue to create these safe spaces and to build trust in order for our CPR members to have the tools and confidence to intentionally practice Culturally Responsive School Leadership.

In addition, the Community of Practice (CoP) structure that anchored our CPR meetings proved to be a compelling space for learning and collaboration. Lave and Wenger (1991) noted that the use of CoP structure goes well beyond systems for collaboration; they conceive of identities as "long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation in communities of practices. Thus identity, knowing and social membership entail one another" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). Therefore, members in that space negotiate to determine what they will mutually accomplish and interact with one another regularly to develop new skills, refine old ones, and incorporate new ways of understanding the shared enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

The evidence from the emerging categories indicated that helping leaders discern and reflect on their motivations is an essential component for developing Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). Our leaders are motivated and driven by their identities and belief system. La Salle and Johnson (2019) reminded us that "beliefs manifest themselves in decisions and actions" and "[t]herefore, beliefs we hold about students drive institutional decisions and

policy actions or inactions that directly impact students in our charge" (p. 6). The implications for principal supervisors are that they must help leaders discern and cultivate their stances for culturally responsive leadership. In addition, central office supervisors should nurture those who are willing and demonstrate an equity disposition or the "conviction that every student is entitled to the premium schooling currently experienced by only some" (La Salle & Johnson, 2019, p. 5) by creating the optimal conditions for collaboration and establishing trust. The glue that maintains the partnership between central office supervisors and school leaders is relational trust (Aguilar, 2013; Aguilar et al., 2011; Bickman et al., 2010; Bloom et al., 2005; Thessin, 2019; Thessin, 2020; Wise & Hammock, 2011).

Reflections about Leadership

As the lead researcher and the supervisor of the CPR team, I was mindful and intentional in creating the conditions to foster relational trust and a safe learning environment for the members to explore the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework during our CPR space and our regular one-on-one coaching meetings. After inviting the members to take part in the PAR study, I leveraged the Community of Practice (CoP) structure coupled with the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms to build a sense of community ripe for learning. Due to my dual role as the researcher and supervisor who holds positional authority, I was unsure if the team would fully participate in a meaningful way. I was highly aware that my facilitation of the CPR meetings must be thoughtful. Principal Frost was delighted and commented at our first CPR meeting, “Did you all catch that? This study spans over three or more semesters. That means we are secure with our jobs.” Hearing this observation confirms that they are at least aware of my positional authority. As a supervisor, my goal was to create an experience meaningful and rich in learning, less hierarchical, and more relational. Dewey (1938)

noted that "any experience is mis-educative that has the effect of arresting or distorting the growth of further experience" (p. 25). Throughout the Pre-cycle, I was not only intentional about how these leaders receive their experiences during our CPR space, but in my other informal and formal spaces with them. The intentionality of the experiential frame is internalized in my practice. Dewey (1938) reminded us that "every experience is a moving force" (p. 38).

Further, I ensured that my research coach reviewed the content of my agendas to provide an additional set of lenses to prevent any oversight or shortcomings. I valued this process as I am generally reticent in seeking assistance. I valued the coaching support because "the coach provides the outside eyes and ears and makes you aware of where you're falling short" (Gawande, 2011, p. 16). Since I am also a coach to our school leaders, I must explicitly model this behavior of seeking support and guidance.

Documented in memos, I embraced this journey as a learning opportunity, not as an expert in this subject area (CRSL) but as an eager student who wants to know more from the site leaders leading this work on the ground level. However, I realized that learning and action are non-binary; they can happen simultaneously. Our leaders faced many challenges throughout this semester while operating a school during a pandemic. As a leader, I should have explicitly stated that part of our goals as equity leaders and Co-Participant Researchers is to learn about and attempt to enact CRSL practices. As I move forward, I will be more conscious of the fact that whatever objectives I put forth in our CPR meetings should be well aligned with the needs and desires of the CPR members' commitment in interrupting oppressive structures in their schools. The process of using member check of data is vital in surfacing the needs of the members as well as validating the data as we continue in the next cycle.

During the data collection and analysis process, I initially used "open coding," looking at every piece of data. As I progressed as a researcher, I learned to use a process described by Braun and Clarke (2006), as using both semantic and latent levels to identify categories and emerging themes. They referenced this process as the interpretive analytic coding process and asserted that the coders "examine the underlying ideas, assumptions" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) in order to interpret the content of the data. This process encouraged me to engage with the data analysis process through my own lens and select and interpret the data based on my conceptual framework.

As a neophyte in research, the open coding was a difficult process because I was unsure of what direction to take and felt as if I was searching for a diamond in a sea of pebbles. As I began to notice emerging patterns, the data would steer me a certain direction. In many cases, the patterns were predictable; in some cases, they were surprising. Saldaña (2016) asserted that all coding is a judgment call since we bring our knowledge, perspectives, personalities, and predispositions to the process. I learned to trust my experience and instinct as an educational leader. By incorporating my leadership epistemologies, I started to identify chunks or patterns which I did not see when I started the using the open coding process. I hope to further my understanding and development through practice over time.

Direction for PAR Cycle One

The PAR Pre-cycle created the necessary conditions for the CPR team to build a supportive network and assimilate the CRSL elements. We closed out the Pre-cycle by underscoring the importance of actions to interrupt oppressive systems and structures that often precluded our minoritized students from maximizing their learning opportunities, thus expanding the opportunity gap. The emerging category of awareness of structures of oppression and White

supremacy in school systems is evidence that the CPR members are eager to make attempts to interrupts these structures. During the December 15, 2021, CPR meeting, the school leaders reflected on their school context and the challenges they were grappling with within the CRSL frame. As Freire (2000) noted, praxis is an iterative process of reflection and action. Hence, praxis was an essential element in the PAR cycles because the CPR team had to continue this iterative process to evolve as culturally responsive school leaders and interrupt oppressive systems within their school structures. As the CPR members deepen their understanding of CRSL practices, I am optimistic that Par Cycle One will yield more significant opportunities for our members to enact greater CRSL moves and practices.

Conclusion

> *Equity leaders must have the will to disrupt the status quo. Our experience has taught us that regardless of how they get there, all equity leaders are driven by one moral imperative, their True North, which propels them to action*. (La Salle & Johnson, 2019, p. 5)

The quote summarizes the CPR members' commitment to transmuting the outcomes for minoritized students who are failing within our educational system, not only within our district but across the nation. I am humbled to have the opportunity to conduct the PAR study with a group of leaders who have shown to be motivated by their "True North" (La Salle & Johnson, 2016).

The chapter describes the context and the members' biographical professional and personal background. The PAR Pre-cycle process detailed the activities which created the opportunity and space for the members to connect and construct the meaning of the CRSL framework. The Pre-cycle provided the necessary relational trust among members to deepen our work in PAR Cycle One. The CoP was a critical collaborative structure for the CPR team to move further in to construct and deepen our knowledge about the CRSL framework and practices

through text-based protocols and discussions. As the CPR focused on planning and enacting culturally responsive leadership moves and attempt to interrupt oppressive structures within their schools, I prioritized gathering data as the leaders problem-solve dilemmas within the CPR network and enact CRSL practices at the school sites.

CHAPTER 5: PAR CYCLE ONE

Vulnerability is about sharing our feelings and our experiences with people who have earned the right to hear them. Being vulnerable and open is mutual and an integral part of the trust-building process. (Brown, 2012, p. 45)

During the Participatory Action Research (PAR) Pre-cycle, the Co-Participant Researchers (CPR) and I focused on forming a community and building our capacity to use the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework. By grounding our work in the text of *Culturally Responsive School Leadership* (Khalifa, 2018), we gained knowledge that contributed to improved skills and more informed dispositions. As reported in Chapter 4, two categories emerged: (1) personal identities as motivation to become school leaders, and (2) awareness of structures of oppression and white supremacy in school systems. As a result, the CPR members demonstrated vulnerability by sharing their identities and experiences that led them to school leadership. Brown (2012) asserts that being vulnerable and open to new learning, ideas, and perspectives is essential to the trust-building process. We were open to learning via the CRSL framework and from each other; as a result, the principals increased their awareness of the oppressive structures and practices prevalent in their school communities. The CPR team reflected on the oppressive structures' impact on their students, families, and the community.

While the pandemic had not completely dissolved and the lingering effect continued to disrupt site leadership and day-to-day supervision, the CPR members were consistent participants in their capacity-building throughout the PAR. In this chapter, I focus on PAR Cycle One from January to May 2022. First, I describe the process and activities that deepened the CPR team's epistemological understanding of the CRSL framework and elevated their leadership identities and development. As the lead researcher and practitioner, I facilitated the activities with the participants, including the monthly CPR meetings, individual and group interviews,

one-on-one check-ins, and observations. I analyzed the data set through a latent coding process reflecting the overarching and sub-research questions in mind. According to Braun and Clark (2006):

> A thematic analysis at the latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data. (p. 84)

Then I shared the categories emerging from the codes and the emerging themes in PAR Cycle One. Finally, I explored the implications of PAR Cycle One to inform the next steps of PAR Cycle Two.

PAR Cycle One Process

In this section, I detail the activities and data collection and analysis from PAR Cycle One (see Table 4). In this cycle, the CPR team furthered their relationship building, deepened their understanding of the CRSL framework, and participated in problem-solving processes to address challenging dilemmas. In conclusion, I discuss the evidence that emerged from the activities and the analysis processes.

PAR Activities

In PAR Cycle One, I continued to prioritize forming authentic working and collegial relationships with the CPR team members as we furthered our collaboratively developed epistemology of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework and practices anchored by Khalifa's (2018) CRSL work. We held five CPR meetings during the Spring 2022 semester. To address challenges, we used the Critical Friends Protocol (CFP) developed by SFCESS (San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools) and the Liberatory Design by

Table 4

PAR Cycle One Activities

Activities	Key Participants	Timeline	Evidence
CPR Meeting #1	CPR Group	January 26, 2022	Agenda Meeting notes Reflective memo
CPR Meeting #2	CPR Group	March 1, 2022	
CPR Meeting #3	CPR Group	March 16, 2022	
CPR Meeting #4	CPR Group	April 20, 2022	
CPR Meeting #5	CPR Group	May 18, 2022	
CPR Individual Interview	Principal Bell	March 25, 2022	Meeting notes Reflective memo
CPR Individual Interview	Assistant Principal Lemon	March 25, 2022	
CPR Individual Interview	Principal Moon	April 17, 2022	
CPR Individual Interview	Principal Frost	April 21, 2022	
CPR Group Interview	CPR Group	April 20, 2022	
Coaching/Check-in Session	Principal Bell	February-April 2022	Check-in notes Reflective memos
Coaching/Check-in Session	Principal Moon	February 2022	
Coaching/Check-in Session	Principal Frost and Assistant Principal Lemon	February-April 2022	
Observation – Equity Training	Principal Frost and Assistant Principal Lemon	February 23 2022	
Observation – Learning Walk	Principal Moon	March 17, 2022	

NEP (National Equity Project) as tools for the CPR team to practice problem-solving in a safe space. CFP proffered participants the opportunity to present their APT (authentic, passionate, transformative) dilemmas to a small group of colleagues for input, reflection, and recommendations to solve complex issues such as interrupting inequitable school structures that obstruct opportunities for marginalized students to succeed.

Similarly, Liberatory Design is a problem-solving approach that centers on equity (www.liberatorydesign.com). I proposed an ambitious process based on the emerging categories from the PAR Pre-cycle, that would focus on probing and testing fail-safe approaches to learn and interrupt the inequitable power and white supremacy structures in our schools (National Equity Project, https://www.nationalequityproject.org).

Both approaches fostered the importance of collaboration and equity. As we incorporated the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) and Community of Practice (CoP) structures within our CPR meetings, I facilitated one group interview to ascertain the CPR members' growing ontological perspectives regarding the knowledge base from the CRSL framework and experiences within the CPR collaborative learning space. During the PAR Cycle One period, I conducted individual interviews with each CPR member and one-on-one coaching sessions as part of their typical collaborative structures with me as their principal supervisor. I observed three of the four CPR members in their CRSL efforts (see Table 4). Further, I reflected on my leadership development as a practitioner and lead researcher through reflective memos.

CPR Meetings

The primary goals for our five CPR meetings held from January 2022 to May 2022 during PAR Cycle One were to nurture our professional relationships and cultivate relational trust, deepen our understanding of the CRSL framework, and create space to support each other

as we explored and examined oppressive structures within our school contexts. The CPR team was eager to participate in learning and supporting each other with the anti-racist work that we committed to practicing and implementing as part of our personal and district vision. I describe the data collection strategies and tools: personal narratives, CLE protocols, interviews, and reflective memos.

Personal Narratives. Personal narratives provided a useful pedagogy for the CPR team to elevate our learning and relationships throughout PAR Cycle One. At our January CPR meeting (CPR Meeting, January 16, 2022), we used personal narrative as a reflective practice to unpack the quote, "Only humans are praxis—the praxis which, as the reflection and action which truly transform reality, is the source of knowledge and creation" (Freire, 2000, pp. 100-101). We prioritized storytelling as part of the relationship-forming and content-building to strengthen our mental muscles for the CRSL practice or action. The stories were about how the members were enacting practices that interrupted inequitable structures. Guajardo et al. (2016) assert that engaging in storytelling is a relationship-building process that "will help facilitate and navigate meaningful engagement" (p. 70). Furthering our connections and trust were paramount within our CPR team, and storytelling became a stable process for our pedagogical space in our meetings throughout PAR Cycle One. I used a quote or provocative statement in every CPR meeting to goad reflection and connection through personal narratives.

Text-Based Protocols. The CPR team valued the protocols we used to analyze the text during the PAR Pre-cycle. As a result, we continued to employ protocols as we explored and deepened our understanding of the CRSL framework grounded in Khalifa (2018). For example, we used the Three Levels of Text Protocol (www.sfcess.org) to examine book chapters. This protocol is designed to deepen the understanding and explore the implications for participants'

work. The CPR members responded to the three levels of the text by selecting a passage that resonated for them by: (a) clarifying the literal meaning; (b) providing an interpretation or connection of past experiences; and (c) naming the implications for their work.

For example, in Chapter 3, Khalifa (2018) discusses "not only physical location, but social and historical contexts that are associated with communities" (p. 82). In other words, to be inclusive, educators must embrace and value students' language patterns, experiences, dress, interactive behaviors, relationships, and modes of learning associated with their communities. The CPR team reflected on the direct and indirect exclusionary practices and their deleterious impact on the students in their schools. In analyzing Chapter 4, the CPR team reflected on the clash between school-centric and community-based epistemologies. Such text-based protocols fostered engaging and dynamic discussions from the CPR team. By examining a piece of text that sparked relevance, hope, and inspiration in a safe space, the CPR members used the text as an impetus to speak candidly about their school contexts and express the desire to do more for their students.

Problem-Solving Protocols. The Critical Friends Group (CFG) consultancy process is widely used in educational and business organizations to address dilemmas. As a result, participants typically achieve collegial relationships, encourage reflective practices, and rethink leadership (www.sfcess.org). This protocol consists of the following general structure:

1. The presenter presents the dilemma to a small group.
2. The participants ask clarifying questions to seek a greater understanding of the situation.
3. Then they ask probing questions to encourage reflection from the presenter.

4. The participants discuss the dilemma by drawing on their own experiences and offer suggestions.
5. The presenter reflects on participant advice and articulates potential action steps to address the dilemma.

Storey and Wang (2017) assert that, in the critical friends protocol "enhanced collegiality helped them [participants] to stay on task, enhanced critical thinking, facilitated an appreciation of ways of thinking about a problem, and expedited self-reflection" (pp. 6-7). As the lead researcher, I chose to use the CFG version developed by SFCESS (www.sfcess.org) because I had previously had success with it in supporting colleagues in strengthening collegial relationships and developing viable solutions in complex problems in a trusting space. I incorporated CFG to launch our PAR Cycle One with the intent to further the relationships among the CPR team and forge a safe space to increase our capacity in problem-solving and enacting CRSL practices.

In addition, during our third CPR meeting (March 16, 2022), I introduced the Liberatory Design problem-solving model to contemplate a universal common challenge. According to the National Equity Project (n.d., www.nationalequityproject.org), Liberatory Design is an approach to address equity issues and change efforts in complex systems. This design approach is rooted in a set of mindsets and modes. There are a total of twelve mindsets that are intended to surface particular beliefs, values, and dispositions to ground and center the design practice. Full descriptions of the library design are found on the organization's website at www.liberatorydesign.org). Similar to the CFG, the purpose of the Liberatory Design strategy is to support participants in solving complex issues.

The CPR team praised and appreciated the Critical Friends Protocol (CFP) and the Liberatory Design approach as tools to leverage their problem-solving. We ultimately chose the CFG as the ideal vehicle for sharing equity dilemmas because of the familiarity and straightforward processes preferred by the majority of the CPR team.

In my reflection as the lead researcher, I found that the CPR space was critical in developing our capacity for Culturally Responsive School Leadership and deepening our trust among the group. This collaborative space reinforced our need and desire to engage in more learning to deepen our understanding and knowledge of CRSL and explore and practice solving complex problems in a safe space. These protocols provided essential data for analysis.

Individual and Group Interviews

During PAR Cycle One, I conducted a group interview and individual interviews (see Appendixes E & F) with the CPR members. During the interviews, I learned about what CRSL actions the team members were attempting to enact or what barriers might have inhibited them from reaching their desired goals. The CPR team's commitment to making attempts to enact CRSL practices or actions was established at the beginning of this cycle.

To prepare for the interviews, we examined the concept of praxis, the term coined by Freire (2000). He asserted that the word praxis has two dimensions, "reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed—even in part—the other immediately suffers" (p. 87). As culturally responsive school leaders, the CPR team agreed that we could reflect and talk excessively about what we need to do, but, without action, we will not be able to make an impact or interrupt the predictable outcomes for our marginalized students.

At each of our five CPR meetings, we relied on the following questions: What CRSL moves or action are you trying out? and What leadership activity(ies) would you like me to

observe? My intent as the lead researcher was to nudge and encourage their commitment to enacting CRSL practices in a supportive fashion while being careful not to overstep my positional authority.

Coaching/Check-In Sessions

As the lead researcher/practitioner, I am the CPR members' supervisor. The the coaching/check-in sessions are part of the existing structure between supervisors and supervisees and we focus on instructional coherence. Throughout the project and study, I have assumed the role of colleague and co-inquirer. Having this structured time, however, provides a key opportunity for consultation and data collection.

To address district guidelines on learning, the site leaders and I conducted classroom learning walks to observe how students responded to instruction, calibrated what we observed to inform leadership moves aligned with their school goals, and discussed operational and managerial needs. As part of the PAR, we explored Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices as part of the dialogue. These meetings afforded the CPR members and me, as the lead researcher, the opportunity to deepen our collegial relationships and increase our collective capacity to explore and implement the CPR's CRSL commitments.

Observations

In addition to the other PAR activities, I participated in two school events with the CPR team members: Equity Training (Boise Elementary, February 23, 2022) and Integrated English Language Development Learning Walk (Sunny Grove Elementary, March 17, 2022).

At Boise, Principal Frost and Assistant Principal Lemon engaged their staff in social justice and equity work during the last two years. The two CPR members worked with a consultant and formed an equity team inclusive of classroom teachers and support staff. In the

equity professional learning on microaggression, the leaders and their staff explored the overt and implicit harm to students and other members of the school community. Principal Frost and Assistant Principal Lemon fostered an inclusive culture in which other members of the community shared the facilitation of the meeting and planning responsibilities.

At Sunny Grove, the staff members generally were in the nascent stages of the equity work. Even with the district's antiracist initiative, most staff members genuinely believed that they were providing their students a quality and equitable educational experience, not being aware that marginalized students are receiving a different experience and outcome. However, the local performance data indicated a consistent trend that students who have been historically marginalized continued to perform below their White and Asian counterparts. Principal Moon contemplated effective ways to engage her staff to improve the learning outcomes for her English learners and other focal students. She hosted an Integrated English Language Development learning walk with district partners from the curriculum and instruction department to identify instructional strengths and areas for improvement so that the school principal could lead a necessary conversation with the staff and explore other approaches to improve student learning, with a particular focus on those who have been historically marginalized. Principal Moon hoped that the learning walk was an avenue to advance equity work.

The observations gave me insight into the leaders' school contexts and commitment to making viable attempts in their CRSL efforts. In addition to other evidence, the observations provided data for analysis.

Data Collection and Analysis

Next, I explain the process of gathering and analyzing the evidence, including the CPR meeting agenda, CLE artifacts, interview and observation notes, and reflective memos. The data sets informed my leadership moves in refining CPR meeting agendas to reflect the evolving needs of our team and connected to my growing understanding of theories and practices.

I recorded the audio portions of the activities and took notes during group and individual interviews and observations. During each CPR meeting, I captured the notes on a running document and gathered CLE artifacts as I reflected on the CPR members' thoughts and inputs during the essential engagement in personal storytelling, text discussions, and problem-solving activities. Furthermore, in our one-on-one check-ins and other professional convenings I collected key *sightings*—moments when the school leaders' values matched their actions—which indicated the participants' knowledge, motives, actions, and evidence of their evolving leadership stance (McDonald, 1996). I triangulated the reflective memos with the evidence to inform my leadership moves and intentional support for the team.

For the initial analysis, I conducted an open coding of the entire data set to observe patterns and salient details. Saldaña (2016) described this process as initial or open coding in which the researcher compares or delineates the similarities and differences of the data collected. Further, the author asserted that the initial coding is to remain open to any possible theoretical directions the data may lead. In the first pass at the data, I noticed any patterns that might be a surprise or lead me toward a new direction. After multiple passes at the data, I leveraged a practitioner lens to make meaning of the relevant emerging details. As the Pre-cycle categories of personal identities and the awareness of power or dominant structures were prevalent, I combed through the data set with these categories in mind. Braun and Clark (2006) asserted that

there are two primary ways of thematic analysis: inductive and deductive. Like Saldaña's (2016) open coding method, inductive analysis is congruent with this bottom-up approach because it is a "process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (p. 83). From my experience and growth during the Pre-cycle process, I gained a deeper insight in identifying categories or themes as I examined the data. Braun and Clark (2006) described this process as the *latent* or interpretive analytic coding process; the "latent level goes beyond the semantic content of the data, and starts to identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations—and ideologies—that are theorized as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p. 84). Based on my growing connection and knowledge about the CPR members, I incorporated the open and latent coding process as I culled out emerging categories or themes. In using protocols, interviews, and one-on-one check-ins, but primarily during Critical Friends Protocol, the CPR members demonstrated and expressed vulnerability. I noticed numerous instances (60 times, or 21%) of members expressing vulnerability explicitly. I identified this as an emerging category because the team members provided each other psychological safety as they shared their dilemmas in a supportive environment. Trust occurred as an essential element of vulnerability (frequency of 51 instances, or 18%), demonstrating their willingness to sit in discomfort as they shared their dilemmas or challenges from their school contexts. Due to the affinity between the elements of vulnerability and trust, I combined them as one category. The CPR members connected in a humanizing manner throughout our convenings (Kemmis et al., 2014) and developed a support system that cultivated their problem-solving skills and Culturally Responsive School Leadership development.

Throughout PAR Cycle One, the CPR participants deepened their understanding of the educational system. They were more reflective and grounded in their professional identities, especially in developing their skill sets as system leaders. Critical self-reflection was a transformational practice evident in different contexts throughout this cycle. I coded 136 (46%) instances for this category under the theme of cultural understanding. The CPR members' commitment to equity work was evident as they often described their focus, reflection, and dilemmas in establishing themselves as anti-racist or culturally responsive school leaders. Critical self-reflection was a catalyst for affirming their professional identities, which showed up with frequencies of 44 times. Their understanding of the inequitable educational systems and their impact (frequencies of 26 times, or 9% of the time during discussions on cultural understanding) and the clash between school-centric and community-based epistemologies (frequency of 40 times) were other subcategories of their cultural understanding. As a result, the CPR members could name or identify inequitable structures or systems of oppression that often precluded their most marginalized students from maximizing their full academic and social-emotional potential at schools. Identifying systems of oppression showed up with frequencies of 48 times.

Emerging Themes

Two themes emerged from the multiple sources of qualitative evidence vulnerable space for leadership and cultural understanding. A vulnerable space was essential in fostering trust and a space for learning. Vulnerable space is related to the category of personal identities from the Pre-cycle data. Cultural understanding is similar to the personal identities category evident in the Pre-cycle as the growing professional identities of the CPRs (Co Practitioner Researchers) emerged. In the second theme of cultural understanding, the CPR transformation toward

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) materialized in their interactions and practices. They developed a heightened level of consciousness about the cultural understanding of their constituents and the interplay and navigation within the systems. Emerging themes were generated throughout this cycle's data collection and analysis process (see Table 5).

Vulnerable Space for Leadership

A vulnerable space for leadership work helps leaders not only survive but thrive. Brown (2012) asserted that "trust is built one marble at a time" (p. 49). The CPR team initiated the trust-building process right from the start of this Participatory Action Research (PAR). Trust is a product of vulnerability that grows over time and requires work, attention, and full engagement. Trust is not a grand gesture—it is a growing collection of nuggets of interaction or marbles that accumulate over time. As a result, the emergent theme of vulnerable space has two critical attributes, a trusting space for dialogue and a network of support.

Creating the necessary conditions to enact leadership is vital -- even more necessary than knowledge about CRSL. The CPR team engaged in the PAR with a sense of excitement, commitment, and vulnerability. One indicator of demonstrated trust is that Principal Frost did not miss any CPR meetings even though she was on temporary medical leave from the latter part of November to the end of January 2022. The sense of trust built over time encouraged the members to connect, cultivate a sense of self among colleagues, and affirm their interests and ideologies as educational leaders. Brown (2012) emphasized that being vulnerable is not a weakness. In fact, "[v]ulnerability sounds like truth and feels like courage" (p. 37). The CPR team embraced discomfort and acted with courage as we cultivated what it means to be a culturally responsive school leader.

Table 5

PAR Cycle One Data Analysis

Emerging Theme	Category	Code	CPR Meeting	Individual Interview	Meeting 1:1	Memo	Total
Vulnerable Space for Leadership	*Trusting Space for Dialogue*	Vulnerability and Relational Trust	(33/35) 68	(9/2) 11	(9/6) 15	(9/8) 17	(60/51) = 111
		Willingness To Sit in Discomfort	8	0	2	4	14
	Network of Support	Finding The Right Balance and Connection	27	5	3	8	43
		Empathetic Problem-Solving Approach	8	0	2	4	14
		Active Listening	20	1	0	0	21
		Asking Probing Questions to Promote Critical Reflection	31	0	0	5	36
		Empathetic Input as Support System	34	1	0	6	41
Cultural Under-standing	*Critical Self-Reflection*		83	35	10	8	136
	Affirming Professional Identities		21	16	3	4	44
	Deeper Understanding of The Educational Systems and Their Impact	Understanding the Tension of Differing Epistemologies.	12	10	2	2	26
		Identifying Systemic Oppression	24	8	5	3	40
		Understanding the Tension of Differing Epistemologies.	25	13	7	3	48

Trusting Space for Dialogue

Enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership is not a solo act. Instead, democratic and shared leadership is one of the key theoretical constructs of social justice (Kim & Mauldin, 2022, p. 1). The CPR team grew to trust each other at a deeper level throughout the PAR project. They demonstrated courage and vulnerability in sharing their dilemmas as each member was committed to narrowing the evasive opportunity gap affecting our many vulnerable and marginalized students. The CPR members explored the barriers within their school context. They prioritized their commitment to interrupting structures, practices, and ideas that inhibit the minoritized students from maximizing their full potential. To engage in critical self-reflection is to be comfortable sitting in discomfort. These school leaders were eager to share their equity dilemmas in their school context even though it might show their shortcomings or their leadership foibles. Throughout PAR Cycle One, each member shared their current dilemma at the CPR meetings (January 26, 2022, March 1, 2022, April 20, 2022, and May 18, 2022). The Community Learning Exchange axioms (Guajardo et al., 2016) are the drivers in creating those conditions. Every convening and interaction was a learning space and opportunity, as Guajardo et al. (2016) posited that "learning and leadership are dynamic social processes." The following are examples of the CPR members demonstrating their vulnerability and courage, which created an authentic, trusting space for dialogue.

Vulnerability and Relational Trust. Throughout PAR Cycle One, the CPR members demonstrated an openness to vulnerability and exhibited a high relational trust toward each other. I coded vulnerability and trust as separate subcategories; however, they go hand in hand. These subcategories are like the chicken and egg adage because they acted as reinforcements; one could not exist without the other. Therefore, I grouped these subcategories as one.

Brown (2012) asserted that "vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity" (p. 34). Throughout the PAR, the growing willingness to be vulnerable was evident as the CPR members shared and acknowledged their mistakes and shortcomings as they engaged in the equity work. By letting their imperfections show in the public space within a trusted environment, they provided a psychological safety net for each other to learn and problem-solve complex educational issues. Bloom et al. (2005) asserted that relational trust is crucial for capacity building and sustainability. Thessin (2019) stated that trust is critical in establishing a partnership between principal colleagues and their supervisors. As I documented in reflective memos, I observed the trust and bond growing among the CPR members and experienced their vulnerability and trust demonstrated during our one-on-one convenings.

Principal Frost reflected that leadership is "lonely . . ..and leaders don't necessarily have like people that you can go to." She appreciated and valued her partnership with Assistant Principal Lemon while demonstrating vulnerability by openly lauding the support she received from the CPR members. She expressed that her school colleagues do not share or exhibit the level of trust and vulnerability that her CPR team provides. She lamented that we "definitely need trust and vulnerability, and I just think sometimes we don't have that at Boise." Being vulnerable is something she wanted to model. She further explained that she could model vulnerability for her "ILT...I could model that to my lesson study leads" (Frost, CPR meeting, March 1, 2022).

Principal Moon demonstrated vulnerability as she described her challenges working with a group of teachers who do not always share her values and educational stance. She shared her dilemma around the tracking reading groups, explaining that the grade level team was ". . .a very

union strong group of teachers, and they have always done [reading groups] and so one of the things I have grappled with myself is maybe not feeling when I left teaching I had my best year so it is like I come in wondering like who am I to say that they [teachers] should change their practice. Like I guess I don't have that confidence" (Moon, CPR meeting, March 1, 2022).

In fostering relational trust, the team was not bashful in sharing their appreciation and connections for each other. During the same CPR meeting mentioned above, Principal Frost expressed her sentiment toward her colleagues. "Moon, I want to first appreciate your vulnerability when you shared your dilemma, and then I want to appreciate the group for just being in space where people can be vulnerable to, like, talk about not being perfect and God, I hope I can get me back to being in space like that because we will never make any changes if we can't come together with people and be vulnerable and feel you know, intellectually and emotionally safe to grow and learn" (Frost, CPR meeting, March 1, 2022). In addition, Assistant Principal Lemon expressed his appreciations for the team that drew us closer. He started with,

> "This is not easy work. The struggles we face are probably always different . . .we're here in our human form, taking care of real-life issues that can bring us to tears . . .I think that in this group, we've been able to support each other in that and realize that no matter what school you land at. In this particular field [educational leadership], where no one really appreciates us on many different levels, you know that we appreciate each other, and we're here as a community. This is something that helps keep us going, so yeah, I do enjoy these meetings" (Lemon, CPR meeting, March 1, 2022).

Willingness To Sit in Discomfort. Educators and students learn best when we are challenged cognitively. The willingness to be uncomfortable is a primal place for learning. As a first attempt to practice problem-solving in a safe space, I reached out to Principal Bell and he

graciously agreed to present his APT (authentic, passionate, transformative) dilemma to the group. To ensure this would be a meaningful experience for him and the Co-Participant Researchers, I held a pre-meeting (Bell, meeting notes, January 6, 2022) with him to explore and learn more about his equity dilemma. He was kept up at night by seeing the disconnect and lack of access for many of the families who are marginalized by the school system. He asserted that the "community epistemology is not valued" and that "certain families don't feel heard and do not know how they can share their input." Our pre-meeting was productive, and I observed his commitment to improving the inclusive space for the families and students at his school. Holding the pre-meeting with Principal Bell was vital in establishing a sense of trust and support. His alacrity to be the first to share an Authentic, Passionate, and Transformative (APT) dilemma indicated his willingness to sit in discomfort, especially allowing his supervisor to initiate the probing.

During the Critical Friends Protocol (CFP) session, Principal Bell posed the following: As an African American site leader, I am wondering how we can increase the family partnership where they would have a voice and agency to support their child's school experience and learning outcomes. He then elaborated on the context behind this dilemma. He reflected that as a staff, "we didn't have a strong connection or relationship" with the families (Bell, CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022). One example he cited was that the Resource Specialist Program (RSP) teacher claimed to have a strong relationship with a family whose child has been receiving special education services for the last several years. However, the teacher did not even know the mother had reading difficulties. Principal Bell recalled that when the mother did not respond to the special education documents and communication, he conducted a home visit and learned that the mother was illiterate. He was apologetic and offered to read the IEP (Individualized

Education Program) letter and documents to the mother. He lamented and wondered how many families they (staff) had failed to serve. The team proffered probing questions for him to consider as Principal Bell reflected on his next steps in supporting his most marginalized families. Subsequently, every CPR member shared their equity dilemma during the CPR meetings in Cycle One.

Principal Moon shared her dilemma (CPR meeting, March 1, 2022) regarding her third-grade students who were not receiving the high-quality instruction they deserved. Principal Moon recounted how the third-grade teachers divided "their kids up, all the third graders up, mixing them all up into leveled groups, and then those little groups go into the classrooms. And they go through language as they call it, language group . . .the high group has book clubs, the low kids are mostly the ESL students" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). She lamented that she still had many questions about that practice, and now "fast forward four years and the practice still happens, in more or less different forums. We have a huge challenge at our site with ELA (English Language Arts) instruction anyway." Principal Moon further reflected, "how do I interject myself into this group and be curious to understand their rationale there, so I'm trying to think of bright spots with this team because that's the other thing, the team itself has been a challenge for me personality-wise" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). She demonstrated courage to sit in discomfort by admitting that she was unsure how to interrupt the inequitable instructional practices at her school.

Principal Frost shared her dilemma with her CPR team (CPR meeting, April 20, 2022) stating that one "big missing piece at [Boise] is specifically academic; working with the families . . .family engagement is an area of growth." She appeared to be conflicted about her position as the school principal and asserted that "you know, as a White woman leading a school where I

don't share a racial identity with almost all of my students and families . . .this is something that I have wanted to get better at my entire time as a principal and just don't feel like I have this family engagement figured out." She bravely shared to the group and wondered "how to engage families who are often different in cultural identities in a way that is authentic and engaging and that would seek their perspectives and help further their children's educational experience, and how do I do this in a way that ensures that their voice and experiences are part of our planning and decision-making process?" (Frost, meeting notes, April 20, 2022).

Assistant Principal Lemon expressed the conflict of finding a balance between meeting district directives and providing a buffer for his staff so "they don't quit" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, May 18, 2022). As a school leader, he valued staff empowerment and democratic leadership and pondered that the "impact of Covid is real . . .we are still seeing the consequences from it." The dilemma that Mr. Lemon shared was authentic and complex. The CPR team thanked him for raising a situation everyone could relate to in their context yet raised additional questions on how to be culturally responsive and meet the district-level demands. Assistant Principal Lemon demonstrated a genuine passion in sharing his dilemma while sitting in discomfort.

Each CPR member appreciated the meeting space, the opportunity to learn, and the conditions that created a safe space to learn, reflect, and problem-solve complex issues within their leadership. Principal Bell asserted, "each time that we do this, there's so many great ideas that come out" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022). Next, the trusting space not only encouraged the CPR members to embrace discomfort but established an affirming support network.

Network of Support

Each CPR meeting, coaching session, interview, or conversation is an opportunity to learn. The CPR team embodied the aspirations of the Community Learning Exchange (Guajardo et al., 2016). These authors asserted that a Community Learning Exchange (CLE) "provides an opportunity for diverse community members—leaders, activists, educators, youth, elders—to come together for a period of engaged, deeper learning" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 3). This learning space deepened the participants' relationships with each other as they:

> . . . establish conditions of safety and trust so that they can openly share their gifts with others so that together they can challenge themselves, their organizations, and their communities in order to better meet their individual and collective needs while supporting the development, growth, and happiness of others in equitable and just ways. (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 3)

Militello et al. (2009) underscored the importance of collaboration and that successful leaders work together for improvement work, rather than in isolation. Sinek (2019) asserted that building a trusting team is vital to sustaining in an infinite game like educational leadership. The intentionality of our agreed-upon activities during CPR meetings and other convenings created the necessary conditions for the team to foster relational trust, work across differences, and develop a kinship as we deepened our knowledge and skills around Culturally Responsive School Leadership and built the confidence to lead and problem-solve complex educational issues.

Finding the Right Balance and Connection. The CPR team members started building their camaraderie at the outset of this PAR. The growth of the CPR team mirrored Brown's (2012) assertion about the development of trust and teaming, "It's a marble collection," rather

than a one-time occurrence. During PAR Cycle One, we grew our relational trust by navigating between both the lifeworld and system world (Habermas, 1984) through authentic engagement and the development of our professional identities in a supportive environment. Awati (2013) asserted that these two systems are interconnected.

> . . . Our day-to-day lives are played out in two distinct spheres: the social arena which comprises our interactions with family and society at large, and the professional and administrative sphere in which we work and/or interact with institutional authority. Habermas referred to the former as the *lifeworld* and the latter as *system* (para. 6).

In order to find balance, the planned CPR activities and the interactions created the conditions for us to be human first—the social arena—so that we can engage in the system work. Prior to the start of PAR Cycle One, the CPR team met for dinner, celebrating our one-year mark (May 18, 2022). Principal Bell and Principal Frost ordered wine to accompany various Thai dishes. They quickly learned that Assistant Principal Lemon and I do not drink alcohol. The team teased Principal Bell about being single, as Principal Moon and Frost were determined to play matchmakers. We had wonderful time getting to know each other's personal lives and navigating the lifeworld at a deeper level, which brought the team even closer and formed our unspoken bond. During our journey, Principal Frost dealt with personal challenges, and she felt comfortable enough to share them with the team. During one CPR meeting (March 1, 2022), she discussed her challenges and stated, "It was the first time in thirteen months that I feel like I'm working with a full capacity—mind and body. And it feels really good. I'm like, oh yeah, there; you can get s--- done when you feel okay" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). As a team, we often make space to check in on each other and make authentic connections before the start of each CPR meeting.

Empathetic Problem-Solving Approach. Empathy means "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner" (www.merriam-webster.com) Educational leadership is highly complex, and the work is often isolated and lonely at the school. Throughout PAR Cycle One, the CPR team demonstrated empathy for each other's unique school context as they shared their dilemmas, challenges, or primary concerns.

As mentioned previously (CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022), Principal Bell shared his dilemma regarding improving access and accountability for families, especially those historically marginalized. Principal Bell expressed his hopes and dreams and noted, "What I rather have seen is that the relationship [with families] was really authentic and that person [staff] really knew that family and really connected to them" (Bell, meeting notes, 1.26.2022). This sharing is an example of Principal Bell and every member showing vulnerability. There were many incidences in which the CPR team demonstrated empathy and provided support through active listening, probing questions, and input as a form of encouragement.

As we engaged in Critical Friends Protocol (CFP), the CPR team developed a set of norms and routines that strengthened their problem-solving acumen. Over time, I observed that they were steeped in exercising a higher level of active listening, probing to encourage critical reflection, and proffering their expertise and experience to aid in empathetic problem-solving.

Active Listening. Active listening is an essential form of communication and involves "going beyond simply hearing the words that another person speaks but seeking to understand the meaning and intent behind them. It requires being an active participant in the communication

process" (Cunic, 2022). The CPR members asked clarifying questions to seek to understand the dilemma or problem of practice at hand.

For example, to better understand Principal Bell's dilemma around parent access, Principal Frost inquired, "What's the family's race that is not feeling included?" Principal Bell responded, "She is Mexican" (Frost and Bell, meeting notes, January 26, 2022). Principal Moon chimed in and asked if the two students were "in special education?" (Moon, meeting notes, January 26, 2022). This type of questioning for clarification demonstrates that the CPR members listen thoughtfully and attentively.

During Principal Moon's sharing of her dilemma about student tracking, Principal Frost wondered if "these groupings are for the entire year. . . and how do students get moved to receiving different support?" (Frost, meeting notes, March 1, 2022). "How long have they [third-grade teachers] been together as a group?" (Bell, meeting notes, March 1, 2022). "What your teachers are calling the low group, are they ever exposed to grade level content in reading?" (Frost, meeting notes, March 1, 2022). "How did they refer to the scholars?" (Bell, meeting notes, March 1, 2022) Principal Moon responded, "Well, they call them as general language group" (Moon, meeting notes, March 1, 2022).

By asking clarifying questions, the CPR team demonstrated active listening in the CFP space and other engagement activities, such as personal narratives and text-based discussions. The team continued building trust through authentic engagement in learning and building their CRSL knowledge.

Asking Probing Questions to Promote Critical Reflection. Based on the CFP developed by SFCESS (San Francisco Coalition of Essential Small Schools), "Probing questions are open questions for the benefit of the presenter and, based in positive suppositions, uncover

passions and beliefs, and deepen and challenge current thinking. Presenters do not have to answer every PQ" (www.sfcess.org). Similar to the CLE axioms, conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes (Guajardo et al., 2016). The CPR team leveraged probing questions to promote critical reflection for each other to rise to a higher level of CRSL leadership. The following example is a norm during our critical friends activity, not an anomaly.

Principal Moon felt embarrassed to share a dilemma (a reading structure that inhibits student progress) that has existed since she was appointed to the school. She asserted that, "I have been here for four years and still sitting and trying to figure out how" to address this issue (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Principal Bell replied that he does not ". . . think it's embarrassing. I think it's a problem a lot of us are dealing with," reassuring her and the team that this is a safe space (Bell, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). While Principal Frost prodded, "What do you think is holding you back from just saying, these are the best practices . . . this is what research shows?" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Principal Moon candidly responded, "It's hard for me, like I feel threatened when I'm having to debate with this person and it's been three years of debating this. This is the first year it's been amicable and kind and happy" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Principal Frost nudged further by posing, "What might you have done as the students' reading teacher?" Principal Frost encouraged Principal Moon by stating, "I can feel it in your heart that you're like ready to take what's not going to be an easy step" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Former Assistant Principal Lemon chimed in and wondered, "What resources might you tap into centrally and what have you done previously [to address similar situations]? You know, we need all the help we can get" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). After hearing from the team, Principal Moon appreciated the prodding and offerings for her to consider. The idea of

making rigorous instruction for students a non-negotiable issue resonated most after she reflected on Principal Frost's veiled suggestion on the importance of not having permanent or non-progressive reading groups. Principal Moon responded, "The principal expectations, it was kind of like, well duh," as she reflected that revising her principal expectations would be an ideal leadership move or next step (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). The CPR team internalized asking probing questions as a vehicle to support and promote critical reflection and become receptive to taking feedback and input on problem-solving.

Empathetic Input as Support System. As an essential component of the Critical Friends Protocol (CFP), the participants give input or suggestions to explore solutions. "Members of the group sometimes suggest actions the presenter might consider taking. Most often, however, they work to define the issues more thoroughly and objectively" (www.sfcess.org). Shipe (2019) proffers that members sharing their diverse experience and knowledge inspire and stimulate curiosity and imagination. She defines this phenomenon as Productive Ambiguity: "the ability to transform tensions that disrupt our current understandings into opportunities for personal growth." When the CPR participants placed themselves in a dilemma, they were reflecting on how they might solve the problem. Shipe (2019) suggests that this act of reflection and solution offering is an opportunity for personal growth. This engagement is a win for everyone and inspires collaboration and support.

Dewey (1938) asserted that "everything depends upon the quality of the experience which is had" (p. 27). The CPR group worked diligently to form authentic relationships over time, and giving meaningful feedback and advice is the byproduct of relational trust. For instance, the group rendered suggestions and advice to Principal Bell during the January CPR meeting as he grappled with fostering a more inclusive space for his families. Principal Moon

asserted that "it takes trust. . .and finding an entry point through the less challenging staff," as she suggested that the staff might not be ready to hear the parents' perspectives. Former Assistant Principal Lemon built on the idea and stated that "maybe even [start] like a small group setting where one person isn't really singled out, but you're discussing it as a way to improve the school as a whole, but you're getting feedback from a small group, where you can take it from that group to the broader context of the school" (Moon, Lemon, CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022).

During the March CPR meeting, the team shared honest and meaningful feedback to support Principal Moon as she contemplated how to interrupt the third-grade reading groups that continued to marginalize the most vulnerable students. Principal Frost offered her opinions on addressing the third-grade bully teacher as she reflected on addressing bullies at her school. She asserted that “the bullies at Boise, we have a professional relationship, and I need as a leader to do like in your case; they’re obviously tracking, it’s obviously an equity issue. And I take a stance it’s going to make a person not like me at all, but at the end of the day I don’t interact with that person outside of work, and it doesn’t matter if they like me or don’t like me for what I know is like the stance that I have to take” (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Principal Bell goaded Principal Moon that the “key is to start” having courageous conversations and “put these things out in the open” (Bell, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Assistant Principal Lemon asserted that “when it comes to change . . .use data and sharing with them the data where it [performance] may drop off in the third grade compared to the other grades” (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022). Principal Frost was emphatic in her next suggestion. She began, “I don’t know if I’m a little bit top down. In this sense, I have some basic instructional principal expectations for the readers’ block, the writer’s block, and the math block. I have in my

principal's expectations that those components be in place in all the classrooms. And it's known they're non-negotiable across the site. So I have a similar situation, not quite as hard as yours" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022).

Principal Moon was appreciative of the input, encouragement, and the fact that she was not "alone in this, and it's a good reminder that . . .there're problems like this everywhere else. So, I guess that in some ways that's comforting. The idea that resonates is the principal expectations" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 1, 2022).

The CPR members provided each other empathetic input to support each other to address challenging equity issues at their schools, thus creating a vulnerable space to further their CRSL leadership. In the next section, I discuss the second emerging theme: CPR group's developing cultural understanding at the system level.

Cultural Understanding

Epistemology is the study of knowledge or how knowledge is formed. The light bulb went off for me and the CPR team when we explored our personal and professional identities and how we formed our knowledge—and particularly our knowledge about cultural understanding—through our experiences. Khalifa (2018) delineated why epistemology is important, especially in the context of the school systems and especially as we live and work in diverse contexts:

> One person's (or group's) truth is often not truth for others. Individuals and groups have different histories, experiences, and perceptions, and therefore differ greatly in how they come to know and understand reality; and because of deep epistemological differences between communities, it is difficult to generalize concepts of beauty, appropriateness, importance, or even goodness. (p. 11)

The tension for students and families who are historically marginalized is that their indigenous epistemologies often differ from the educators within the school community. When educators operate within a system driven by White or dominant cultural norms, our Black and Brown students and families often experience exclusion and even harm during their experience at school. The CPR members were grounded in their identities and culture and recognized that the school system is designed to serve specific groups of students aligned with the dominant culture. If we do not recognize the oppressive structures within the school system that prohibit minoritized students from maximizing their potential, we as school leaders and central office supervisors can contribute to the minoritization or the perpetuation of the status quo. Khalifa (2018) defines minoritization as oppression, a form of oppression that is historical and "it is reproductive and requires little effort to reproduce" (p. 18). During the PAR, the CPR members have cultivated their critical self-reflection and deepened the epistemologies of their professional identity, systems within their schools, and the equity challenges as a vehicle to interrupt oppression in their school contexts.

Critical Self-Reflection

Khalifa (2018) reminded us that three specific skills as leaders regularly renew their commitment to being critically self-reflective:

1. A leader must have the ability to identify and understand the oppressive contexts that students and their communities face.
2. A leader possesses a willingness and humility to identify and vocalize their own personal background and privilege, which allows them to see how they are directly involved or complicit in oppressive contexts.

3. A leader must exhibit the courage to push colleagues and staff to critically self-reflect upon their personal and professional roles in oppression and anti-oppressive works, and to eventually develop responsive school structures (p. 61).

These examples of the critical self-reflection sightings happened during our convenings. Assistant Principal Lemon lamented that he needed to make time for meetings and provide feedback for his teaching staff. He asserted that he needed to prioritize going into classrooms and be "able to do observations and give feedback to teachers . . .in their areas of growth." He stated that "once we're able to hear and to give and to get feedback, it does leave us with time to reflect on how we should move forward after those particular meetings when it comes to not necessarily making like monumental changes, but making those slight adjustments" (Lemon, interview, March 25, 2022). Assistant Principal Lemon was reflective of the changes he needed to make to better support his teachers and the shifts and reflective thinking he envisioned his teachers to make in their teaching practice.

In another instance, Principal Bell reflected on his understanding of the school-centric and community-based epistemologies that are often the tension point in supporting student learning. He shared that "the first time I learned about the word epistemology and this kind of realizing and wanting to understand our families and have the partnership is essential in educating scholars . . .being such a diverse school where we have families that come from other countries and things are totally different the educational experience they have received." He later asserted that through starting with the families as an avenue to understand their experiences, he hoped that this work would translate to his staff. Principal Bell fell that "if the staff can learn more about families, they too would be able to change their understanding of families and

support the scholars better" (Bell, interview, March 25, 2022). Principal Bell was reflective in establishing the right conditions and structures for his staff to promote critical self-reflection.

Principal Moon reflected on her courageous conversation with one of her more challenging teachers. She began by stating that her relationship with this teacher was "very challenging to me personally, and also being her supervisor is really challenging for me. To be able to share what I think is progress . . .did I stumble and how awful that I did and shared that feedback to her. I said to myself, okay Sandy, so maybe now you have a way to start asking some questions and maybe it won't be so combative for you" (Moon, interview, April 17, 2022). Principal Moon found the proper entry point to have a difficult conversation with this teacher and recognized the importance that this teacher must realize another perspective so that she could shift her mindset and practice.

Further, Principal Frost exercised critical self-reflection to support her development as a culturally responsive school leader. When asked how she shows up in her culturally responsive work, she asserted that "as my best self every day, but as an administrator, you have to learn to let things roll off of you, you have to learn never to assume anything and always probe, to try to best understand where people are coming from. One thing I have done is letting go, I guess, of perfectionism . . .I've been trying to set up and do a lot of informal listening sessions, more so with my support staff or staff of color" (Frost, interview, April 21, 2022). She recognized that to support a more inclusive school community, she needs to get input and support from the staff that does not always have a voice. She "noticed the more (she) do that, the more people will likely open up, especially if I just listened, without any responses. I'm just there to listen and to hear their perspectives." In addition, she emphasized the need to support her teachers, especially the new teachers who were not meeting the needs of the Black and Brown students. She wanted

the teachers to have the exact high expectations she held and asserted that "95% of the time, seeing the kids carry the cognitive load. I see student notebooks that show that the students are likely able to do the work they are learning about in class." Moreover, "they are always reflective in the data, and that was a great teaching, and the data proves it" (Frost, interview, April 21, 2022). These examples of critical self-reflection illustrated that these CPR members are reflective in their behavior and actions, in their support for their staff to shift, and in exploring structures to change outcomes for their most marginalized students.

The CPR members demonstrated a higher level of self-reflection and evidence of motivating their staff to be reflective as well. As they continued to exhibit the behaviors of culturally responsive leaders, they were more grounded in their professional identities.

Critical Self-Reflection for Affirming Professional Identities

Becoming an educational leader is a monumental accomplishment. Becoming a culturally responsive school leader requires another level of critical self-reflection and the ability to help others critically self-reflect (Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa (2018) asserted that school leaders "needed to have an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving poor children of color" (p. 60). Throughout Cycle One, the CPR participants exemplified critical self-reflection as they built their capacity in Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices, in turn solidifying their professional identities.

During a personal narrative session in PAR Cycle One (CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022), Principal Moon reflected on an equity challenge at her school where a teacher advocated for an African American third-grade student to be tested for special education services. Both the reading specialist and the school psychologist advocated against the evaluation process. They both referenced the reading assessment results indicating that the student was reading at grade

level and that the school must provide opportunities for her to succeed and catch up. Principal Moon expressed "being conflicted" because she wanted to do right by the student yet maintain a positive relationship with the teacher, who was adamant about testing (Moon, CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022). Ms. Moon was honest and vulnerable in her candid reflection on the tension between centering on students and maintaining professional relationships with staff. Through her reflection and the support she received from her CPR team, she was firm on centering on the student by strengthening robust classroom instruction and providing students intervention support before honoring assessments. Her goal was not to disproportionally place students, especially minoritized ones, into special education without exhausting every effort. Her equity stance affirmed her professional identity as a culturally responsive school leader.

Assistant Principal Lemon shared his commitment to interrupting inequitable practices when he recounted a difficult conversation with a first-grade teacher who wanted to move an African American student to kindergarten because he was behind in his reading development. Mr. Lemon candidly informed the teacher, who was African American, that her demeanor around the kids was not welcoming, and that the student, who was behind, could "sense you don't want him to be there" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022). While Assistant Principal Lemon's voice was calm, his body language and the way he shook his head indicated that the courageous conversation was not an easy undertaking, especially counseling someone of affinity. Mr. Lemon is a collaborator and a self-proclaimed team player and previously shared that he would go along with what the team wants. His courage to give candid feedback to another African American educator demonstrated his reflective practice as a culturally responsive school leader. The candor and vulnerability displayed in Assistant Principal Lemon's sharing and

reflection were compelling and moved the CPR team toward a stronger bond. Mr. Lemon demonstrated confidence in his CRSL stance.

During our group interview session (CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022), Principal Frost candidly lamented that she engaged in making inaccurate assumptions about her White affinity and People Of Color (POC) groups as she pondered on her insight from engaging in the CPR learning space and her leadership. She stated, "I've made assumptions about race. I think I am getting better at it, but I think I've definitely made assumptions that White staff came from privileged families and Black staff, you know, I made assumptions about what sort of hurdles" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022). Principal Frost reflected on the privilege of being a White female leader and demonstrated a vulnerability in acknowledging her constant work on critical self-reflection. She asserted, "I need to create space to listen more and lift up others to lead." Principal Frost affirmed her identity as a CRSL practitioner and stated, "being a culturally responsive leader is ongoing work" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, May 18, 2022).

Principal Bell reflected on what he was working on to increase his CRSL practices at our April CPR meeting. "The work we really want to do is to help people really understand" the hardship and challenges that families bring into our school. He reflected on his desire to change the narrative for parents and the mindset of teachers. "With the way I grew up, I think it impacts me on compliance, like this is what is said, this is how you supposed to do it and just comply with it . . .you don't rebut a lot . . . I'm trying to get myself out of that situation." As he pondered what he learned about himself, he asserted, "I'm going to step in and advocate what is right and to say something that just doesn't work and invite others to rethink and be in partnership, so it works better for people" and for doing right by our students (Bell, CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022).

Throughout the PAR Cycle One process, the CPR members were not only developing trust within the team, but they were affirming their professional identities as culturally responsive school leaders who engaged in thoughtful partnership in a safe space that would fortify their confidence, knowledge, and skill set in order to practice leadership publicly. In the next section, I discuss their growing understanding of educational systems and their impact on minoritized students.

Deeper Understanding of the Educational Systems and Their Impact

Habermas (1984) referred to the professional sphere as the system. Awati (2013) asserted that the "system refers to common patterns of strategic action that serve the interests of institutions and organizations" (para. 8). When there is dissonance between the lifeworld (the everyday social interactions) and the system, the "system grows at the expense of the lifeworld," or in Habermas' words, "colonises the lifeworld" (Await, 2013, para. 9). At SFUSD, the CPR team is fortunate to work under a district that developed policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion to better serve the most marginalized student population. Our CPR members demonstrated a firm conviction in being culturally responsive school leaders. Their motivation and the system at the district and site level align; as a result, the team members were situated to leverage their understanding of the system to impact durable change for the students.

Weiss (1995) affirmed that the institution has a more significant influence and effect on school leaders in their shared decision-making and illustrated that for any durable change to take hold would require intuition and system alignment. Principal Bell reflected on the need to conduct an equity audit at his school. He asserted that, "There's a heavy retention mindset at our site, and this is one of those oppressive practices that we are not aware of . . . an equity audit would obviously let us kind of go back and see how we've done things like about the retention,

so that we can interrupt oppressive practices" (Bell, CPR meeting, March 16, 2022). Principal Frost shared that "Establishing an equity vision and common vocabulary is like a huge missing link, not only at Boise, but across [district] because we're all speaking different languages, right now. What I might feel like is an oppressive trend, someone else in my school might not, and so we really need to have it very explicit" (Frost, CPR meeting, March 16, 2022). The CPR members demonstrated a keen awareness and deeper understanding of the educational systems and their deleterious impact if they are unchecked.

Understanding the Tension of Differing Epistemologies

School-centric epistemologies often clash with community-based epistemologies. Khalifa (2018) asserted that "for educators, understandings of good or aggressive behaviors, disengagement, disrespect, grit, and even achievement are subjective and how parents, students, or community members might understand them can differ vastly" (p. 11). Equipped with this growing knowledge, the CPR members reflected on shifting their practice to be more culturally responsive.

Principal Moon interrupted a classroom assignment practice that sorted students based on their perceived behaviors rather than what assets and gifts they bring to the school and how the teachers should best meet their needs. She recounted a bright spot where she and the school social worker helped assign second-grade students to the next school year's roster. Historically, the teachers at Sunny Grove would distribute English learners and students with IEPs evenly. However, the staff may not always consider "the need of the students." With the assistance of the school social worker, Principal Moon "methodically and objectively (thought] about which student would benefit and match with the teachers' personalities and instructional style." Principal Moon beamed and recalled that "the second-grade team liked it, and they only made

one suggestion of a switch. She shared that sometimes "I just need to interrupt and not be concerned of what the staff think" and "what our students need versus what the teachers want" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, May 18, 2022).

Principal Frost recognized that in her school community, there was an increase of "Arabic-speaking families specifically from Yemen, and we must hire a family liaison that speaks the language." Principal Frost recounted that using the "telephone to do translations to listen to those families is not the best way" to build positive relationships. We want to "make sure that their voices are uplifted but that the kids can see someone at our school that looks like their mom" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, May 18, 2022). The hiring of an Arabic-speaking family liaison, a former parent at Boise Elementary, materialized for the 2022-23 academic school year.

Principal Bell was eager to share his new learning of the word—epistemologies—with the families at his school, "I don't want to duplicate systems of oppression . . .when I learned about the word epistemologies, I shared it with our School Site Council and our parent-teacher club." He recalled that he wanted to know "What was their experiences and what they have gone through and how that really shows up with the scholars here at our school." His hopes and dreams were "to help people really understand" so that the staff can provide better service for their students (Bell, CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022). In reflecting on how to bring the school and families closer, Assistant Principal Lemon was hopeful to further his critical self-reflection but "help staff be able to reflect more what I've learned . . .giving them feedback around reflections, you know, sometimes like taking personally and not really viewed as something that might benefit students." He reimagined that the staff needed to spend more time to get to know the community so that "teachers spend four to six days per year in the community." He hoped to find ways for the teachers to be "released for the day to go into the actual community . . .that

we're actually making efforts to invite families in by going to where they are." Mr. Lemon reflected that school staff must find a way to understand and "learn from parents to teach the students better and that families and students trust us" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, March 16, 2022).

The CPR team developed a deeper understanding of the differing and competing epistemologies that exist in their school communities. Their growing understanding of the school-centric and community-based epistemologies gave them a more profound awareness of identifying and naming the oppressive structures within their schools.

Identifying Systemic Oppression

Khalifa (2018) asserted that "more effort is needed to disrupt oppressive systems found in schools" (p. 18). Throughout PAR Cycle One, the CPR members increased their awareness to sharply identify and name the oppressive structures and practices within their school contexts. By emphasizing oppressive structures in schools, school leaders can interrupt and shift processes to support and benefit students who are historically marginalized in schools.

Principal Moon reflected on a student success team (SST) meeting where the classroom teacher pushed for psychological assessments for the student. She recalled the "disproportionality of African Americans in special education. That's where my mind went to immediately, and I had to hold back but asked, does the student need that?" Principal Moon recounted in her mind, "what if I said any student of color is not allowed to be assessed for special education? How would we change our practice, how would we automatically then change what we're doing in our classroom to make sure that we're supporting the student" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022)?

Principal Frost lamented her school's Student Success Team (SST) meeting process and that it does not serve our most vulnerable students well. She recounted that "there's a flaw in our SST process when you have the SST and you name the strength of the student, and then you name whatever you're worried about. But then we never go back to those strengths. You put together a plan to serve this student based on all those strengths you just named, to make us feel good like we talked about the kid, but then we don't connect the dots." She later asserted that we must change "this process that obviously doesn't serve our kids" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, January 26, 2022). During another discussion, Principal Frost expressed that we must reimagine our parent-teacher conferences. "Traditionally, the teachers are talking at the family and telling the family what their child needs, I would say, definitely, our teachers are speaking at the parents, and I think some of that is White supremacy culture, but not just manifesting in White staff; it's like White supremacy culture can manifest in anyone, across race right now" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 16, 2022). Principal Moon chimed in and stated that we need "a dedicated space for meeting with families . . .because families don't come into the schools" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, March 16, 2022). Further, "why do we wait until report cards come out to schedule a meeting with the family. Why is that the system that we use for our first formal family meeting" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 16, 2022)? Principal Bell asserted, "I agree that we need to change the way how parent-family conferences are run. We must recognize that different scholars have different situations. Sometimes it can be grandparent, uncle, or foster care who are raising them or bringing them up" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, March 16, 2022). Assistant Principal Lemon stated that "we must sometimes go to them," referring that many of the marginalized families don't have access or means to get to school" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, March 16, 2022). The team felt eager to inquire about the total number of parents who

participated in the last parent-teacher conferences. Principal Frost exclaimed, "we can look at data and start to structure what our conferences could look like, to work in collaboration with the families. I guess I would ask you [lead researcher] to take this conversation with the district leadership and rethink our family conference structure" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, March 3.16.2022).

Principal Bell recalled his ongoing engagement with the families in his school community. He asserted that we must "make sure that we are having a welcoming environment for families. Teachers need to understand our parents, so they have better insight to support their children . . .like how they immigrated here, how their first years of schools were and how it was like to be in the country." Principal Bell lamented that school "is like a factory model . . .we try to make parents and their kids comply with it . . .I want our staff to hear their stories so they can begin reflecting on their own" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022). "I really like the idea of sharing stories and getting to know people beyond just what you see physically because I think a lot of assumptions can be made" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, April 20, 2022). Principal Bell continued to note that parent engagement is a priority at his school.

Assistant Principal Lemon shared that he was struggling with the district mandate that "we had to complete the Individualized Learning Plans (ILP) during the last four weeks of school." The initiative was to partner with families and develop ILPs to mitigate the disproportionality of African American students from being over-referred to special education. However, Mr. Lemon reflected that the initiative was "well intended, but they [district leaders who make these decisions] are out of touch, and they can't just drop this on us last minute." He said that our district is making decisions "without consulting with the people doing the work . . .even with good intentions, they are pushing us out and not realizing it." Assistant Principal

Lemon recognized that oppressive structures are omnipresent and "they are not exclusive at the school level . . .the folks making policies don't get it" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, May 18, 2022). Principal Frost agreed and asserted that "not only they don't talk to the people who are closest to the problem . . .this is bullshit work that is pretending to be equity" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, May 18, 2022). As a group, we tacitly agreed that pushing out district mandates to the schools without consulting or getting input from site staff members was an oppressive practice, whether intentional or unintentional.

As part of the district leadership team, I gained an insider perspective about how district initiatives can negatively impact school communities, even if the district has positive intentions. Our CPR members demonstrated an acuity in naming oppressive systems, structures, and practices at the site and district levels. The collective understanding and increased ability to discern systemic challenges gave the team confidence and readiness to make changes within our sphere of influence.

Implications for Research Questions

While the anchor text, *Culturally Responsive School Leadership* (Khalifa, 2018), was an essential component in developing the CPR members' knowledge and dispositions of their leadership transformation, the conditions that supported relationships and conversations in the CPR meetings were the catalysts. The personal narrative structure encouraged the CPR members to reflect on their understanding of CRSL practices and connect them to their school contexts. The Community Learning Exchange (CLE) structures and the select activities promoted a trusting environment for the members to learn and engage in authentic dialogues around the complex leadership work.

In each convening as a learning space, the CPR members fortified their bond by demonstrating their vulnerability, support, and encouragement for each other. One such activity that contributed to the cohesion was engaging in the Critical Friends Protocol, where they problem-solved real school dilemmas, pushed each other's thinking by asking probing questions, and offered empathetic and supportive advice. In parallel, problem-solving in a safe and nurturing environment enhanced their skills in preparing them to enact CRSL practices confidently and intentionally in public.

Throughout PAR Cycle One, being in community elevated the vulnerable space where the team members were willing to share their dilemmas and cheer each other on through an empathetic approach. As a group, we deepened our understanding of systems at the district and site level and the tension when epistemologies clash or differ from those who occupy the school space. The positive consequence enhanced our awareness and knowledge to name systemic oppression and oppressive structures within our educational system.

Leadership Actions and Action Steps for Cycle Two

In reflecting on my leadership, I became more adroit in creating humanizing spaces within the Community of Practice (CoP) and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) structures, fostering relational trust by equalizing power dynamics, and strengthening my researcher/practitioner approach to inform my leadership.

Communities of Practice (CoP) and Community Learning Exchanges (CLE)

The CoP structure goes beyond its purpose for collaboration. CoP is a space for participants to tackle relevant and challenging issues while building authentic relationships over time (Lave & Wenger, 1991). At this juncture, the CPR members had convened over two semesters where we attempted to build our capacity and transform our leadership to become

more culturally responsive to improve student outcomes. I observed that relational trust is developed over time and cannot be forced. Creating humanizing conditions is vital for this transformation for individuals to deepen their relational trust and learn with minimal barriers. Guajardo et al. (2016) asserted that "CLE is neither a project nor an isolated event—it is a way of life" (p. 23). This quote did not resonate with me until I reflected on the conditions in creating the learning space for the CPR participants. The axioms permeated and infused how I approach creating the conditions for convening:

1. Learning and leadership are a dynamic social processes.
2. Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.
3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.
4. Crossing boundaries enriches the development and educational process.
5. Hope and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities. (Guajardo et al., 2016)

At every meeting, I became more intentional in creating the structures and activities that encouraged socialization and conversations among participants. Further, leveraging the ideal pursuit sustained our focus and did not allow urgent matters to distract or derail our goals. For example, outside of the PAR, I incorporated the CoP structure within my monthly meetings for our school leaders to foster relationship building and engage in learning based on their interests or Focus of Practice. When we create the conditions for participants to learn and dialogue, they are more situated to solve complex programs within their school contexts.

Relational Trust

Throughout PAR Cycle One, I reflected on my positional authority. According to Suarez (2018), there are two types of power—supremacist and liberatory. One is the ability to control and dominate people and things, whereas the latter type of power is to create balance but requires a high level of consciousness and intention. In order to enact liberatory power, Suarez (2018) asserts that:

> "It requires a commitment to living mindfully, constantly increasing one's level of awareness in an interaction that positions one as powerless, one is able to perceive it, keep calm, and assert mutuality. Liberatory power helps one refrain from asserting power over others, or to do so carefully" (p. 24).

As the CPR members' direct supervisor, I found myself acutely aware of my position; even my job title as the assistant superintendent suggests authority. With this realization, I intentionally built trust with the CPR members by demonstrating vulnerability, calling out my foibles and shortcomings, and apologizing when I made a mistake. Demonstrating humanity became my commitment to act mindfully so that I do not abuse my authority intentionally or unintentionally.

Work circumstances challenged me to practice this same level of consciousness in enacting liberatory power outside of the CPR team when working with low-performing leaders and their perceived unwillingness to change. Instead of jumping to conclusions, I asked questions to seek clarity and understand the context comprehensively. Being a supervisor for site leaders, I am aware of my responsibility to make difficult personnel decisions when appropriate. However, I practiced critical self-reflection, which afforded me to pause and reflect before making swift decisions. Even within the last semester, I am more aware of the power dynamic

and practice liberatory power when interacting with the CPR members and other site leaders under my supervision.

Leadership Work Adopting a Researcher/Practitioner Frame

As a developing researcher, I value incorporating CLE activities as a methodology for gathering data. However, the new learning was that I developed a heightened awareness to code real-time information to inform my leadership moves or actions. For example, while conducting member checks, the CPR team emphatically articulated their appreciation of and predilection for having the space for problem-solving and learning from each other. Their expressed desire was substantiated by their verbal and non-verbal cues in participating in the Critical Friends Protocol when they shared their school-related dilemmas. While coding is still a complex and somewhat nebulous process, I found myself looking or listening for keywords, phrases, or actions to inform my leadership action in designing the CPR meetings. I developed a greater sensitivity in listening for sightings—words, demeanors, actions, and other indicators—and categorizing them to make meaning, thus informing my immediate or long-term leadership actions. I practiced these skills in other contexts outside of the PAR.

Implications for PAR Cycle Two

During PAR Cycle One, the CPR members demonstrated different stages in implementing Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices. The CoP and CLE structures within our CPR meetings provided the team with a brave space to build a support network essential to their leadership development. Their growing epistemologies on CRSL were evident in their enhanced ability to name or identify oppressive structures within their school contexts.

While the CPR members enacted some CRSL practices throughout PAR Cycle One, the brave space we had in our meetings was vital for them to practice in private; these kinds of brave spaces for leaders are pivotal for sustaining change. Therefore, I was eager to leverage the CPR meetings to hold additional Critical Friends Protocol convenings to fortify or enhance their confidence, skills, and readiness to enact a greater level of CRSL practices in public. I continued leveraging our one-on-one coaching meetings and scheduling observations when appropriate to support their efforts.

Conclusion

The PAR Cycle One provided the CPR team an opportunity to deepen our knowledge and to apply the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework within their school contexts. The CPR meetings served as an important venue for our CPR members to unpack complex issues and dilemmas in a safe and supportive environment. As a result, the team forged an even closer bond and relationship that are vital to supporting their skill development and readiness in enacting a greater level of CRSL actions or practices in public. Although the context of each school site might afford or prohibit the leader from enacting CRSL actions, the CPR school leaders continued to demonstrate an unwavering commitment to learning and enacting CRSL practices to promote more significant outcomes, especially for minoritized students.

In PAR Cycle Two, we furthered the work established in Cycle One. The emerging themes of vulnerable space and cultural understanding informed the Cycle Two activities. As demonstrated in the data analysis, the trusting or brave space for the participants to learn had become an anchor for being culturally responsive leaders. As the team deepened its cultural understanding, primarily by exhibiting its ability to name oppressive structures and practices, it further recognized how essential it is to find durable solutions to improve student outcomes. I

continued to coach and engage in thought partnership in our one-on-one coaching meetings and observe the members' actions at their sites to further their CRSL efforts.

CHAPTER 6: PAR CYCLE TWO AND FINDINGS

The widening opportunity gap for our Black and Brown students is a product of systemic oppression in our larger society. However, the findings of this particular PAR project and study underscores how critical principals are in interrupting systemic inequities in their schools by fortifying themselves in a supportive network and seeking to become culturally responsive school leaders (Khalifa, 2018). The four CPR members and I entered the PAR project and study with the intention and agreement to increase our knowledge and enhance our leadership skills so that we could more fully interrupt the school level systemic inequities in their schools and communities.

At the start of the 2022-23 academic year, the CPR team of principals was prepared to deepen our knowledge, skills, and dispositions to continue our collective quest to be and become leaders of equity. Mr. Lemon, one of the CPR members, had a new assignment as the principal at Jackson Elementary School, an urban school serving a diverse student population with the same challenges that many principals faced. The primary student subgroups consisted of White, Brown, Asian, and African American descent. Approximately 25% of the students were from "socioeconomically disadvantaged" backgrounds. According to the most recent local assessment testing results, of the 150 students (3-5 grades), 75% of them met or exceeded the standard. In math, approximately 90% of the students met or exceeded the standard. Jackson Elementary is considered one of the higher-performing schools in the district; however, Black and Brown students performed between 25-30 percentage points lower than their White and Asian counterparts. Students with disabilities and from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds showed an even more significant opportunity gap, scoring between 45-60 percentage points

lower. Principal Lemon, with the fellow CPR members, was firmly committed to elevating equity and inclusion for the minoritized students who continued to be underserved.

In this chapter, I describe the activities and data collection process for PAR Cycle Two that occurred in Fall 2022. In analyzing the collected data, two themes emerged in this cycle: humanizing learning space and Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. Finally, I analyze the evidence to present the study findings.

PAR Cycle Two: Activities and Data Analysis

During all PAR Cycle Two convenings, we deepened our knowledge, skills, and dispositions as culturally responsive leaders. As the CPR team formed trusting relationships, the power of the team primed us to exhibit vulnerability and take more significant risks in our leadership roles. In the PAR Cycle two activities, we had a critical space to reflect, learn, and lean on each other for support. Because we had become more aware of systemic inequities, we had an opportunity to be more intentional and explicit about equity actions.

PAR Cycle Two Activities

The second PAR Cycle activities paralleled the format and structures of the prior cycle. Our discussions and learnings provided the CPR members with the knowledge and skills to take deliberate leadership actions; in other words, they enacted their espoused values more intentionally (Arygris & Schön, 1974). We had three CPR meetings that were a vital learning space for everyone. In the regular one-on-one check-in meetings, I acted as a coach and engaged in thought partnership with the CPR members as they contemplated and took actions to address oppressive structures and practices at their respective schools. In addition, I observed two school events and conducted individual interviews. Further, I used the same data collection and analysis processes described in Chapter 5. In this cycle, I focused on leveraging our CoP and CLE

structures and processes to gather data and create a safe learning space where we solve school-related problems and equity issues (see Table 6 for list of activities for this PAR cycle).

CPR Meetings

The CPR team had formed genuine connections with each other and declared a solid commitment to serving our most vulnerable students. During the previous cycle, they identified and made attempts to interrupt problematic and oppressive practices and structures in their schools. With unwavering support for each other, the CPR members exhibited vulnerability in their learning, which informed the design of the meeting structures and processes. However, the evolving needs of the team prompted some modifications. During our first meeting, I planned to review our journey in this PAR project, conduct a member check, and engage the members' critical reflection by completing a poem that described their leadership evolution. However, the members spontaneously began by using the critical friend group protocol (CFG) and renewed to their CRSL foci for this cycle.

When Principal Frost shared her CRSL focus for this semester, she reflected on her challenge in supporting two POC staff members who were skeptical about school change efforts. The CPR members launched into an unscheduled critical friend protocol. The members asked clarifying questions to understand Principal Frost's situation better, probing questions to prompt reflection, and offered potential solutions based on their prior experience or expertise. At that moment, I thought that the team reached a pinnacle of learning and collaboration, which fostered a high degree of trust and respect. Principal Moon asserted that our CFG "happened naturally, and we organically were able to speak about what's coming up for us; pretty cool" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). Principal Frost agreed and stated, "having a small group of people that share your role that you can meet with on an ongoing basis and problem solve and

Table 6

PAR Cycle Two Activities and Evidence

Activities	Key Participants	Timeline	Evidence
CPR Meeting #1	CPR Group	September 1, 2022	Agenda Meeting notes Reflective memo
CPR Meeting #2	CPR Group	September 28, 2022	
CPR Meeting #3	CPR Group	November 3, 2022	
Individual Interview	Principal Bell	November 3, 2022	
Individual Interview	Principal Moon	November 1, 2022	
Individual Interview	Principal Frost	November 3, 2022	
Individual Interview	Principal Lemon	December 7, 2022	
Coaching/Check-in Session	Principal Bell	September-December 2022	Meeting notes Reflective memo
Coaching/Check-in Session	Principal Moon	September-November 2022	
Coaching/Check-in Session	Principal Frost	September-December 2022	
Observation – Lesson Study Collaboration	Principal Frost	August 9, 2022	Reflective Memo
Observation - Learning Walk with District Partners	Principal Frost	September 19, 2022	

sharing your struggles with is really important" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). The CPR valued the meeting space to problem-solve complex school challenges. We agreed that our next two CPR meetings would be structured only with personal narrative and critical friend's protocol activities, allotting the bulk of our time to solving school-related dilemmas or challenges.

CPR Individual Interviews

During PAR Cycle Two, I facilitated individual interviews (see Appendix E) with the CPR members, which were largely collegial conversations about their work. To maintain the integrity of the process, I asked the same questions as in the previous cycle. However, the goal was to engage in dialogue rather than use a script. Our connections and relationships were grounded in relational trust, and I relied on skills we learned from our CFG, asking clarifying and probing questions to spur reflection about their leadership visions and actions.

Coaching/Check-In Sessions

I consistently held coaching/check-in meetings with three of the CPR members at two to three-week intervals from September to December of 2022. While the instructional focus was a top priority as we calibrated classroom observations on students' responses to instruction, the CPR members and I engaged in thought partnerships in systems thinking (Senge, 1990). He reminds us, "systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots" (Senge, 1990, p. 68). For instance, school leaders often reacted to the impact or symptom of the issue but not the root cause. Not only is it paramount to gather vital information on the root cause, but we must interrogate the interrelationships, processes, structures, and practices that might have led to an outcome. Therefore, we must look at the whole and their relationships to

interrupt predictable patterns to impact durable change. Based on my observations, the CPR members developed a more critical lens, and improved their ability to interrogate problematic systems and structures.

As Principal Lemon established himself in a new school community, I conducted the frequent check-ins virtually or via phone. While we valued observing students, which informs the necessary leadership actions, we were especially concerned with Culturally Responsive School Leadership. As a new principal, he needed the frequent dialogue support so that he could navigate his new position.

Observations

During PAR Cycle Two, I participated in two learning opportunities in schools that involved CPR members: Lesson Study Pilot Initiative and Learning Walk with District Partners (Boise Elementary, August 9 and September 19, 2022). Principal Frost had been intentional in her Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) actions. Lesson study had been a common focus and practice at her school for almost a decade as it yielded positive academic results for their Black and Brown students. Prior to the pandemic, Boise was one of the few schools recognized for the academic achievements of African American and Latino students. Principal Frost's intention of the Lesson Study Pilot initiative was to share this best practice with a few other schools and "show that with the right conditions, our students [of color] can succeed and thrive in their academics" (Frost, interview notes, November 3, 2022). The goal of the learning walk with our district partners was to refine their observation process and systematize their practice of giving feedback to each other for continuous improvement. These in-person observations gave me the opportunity to see leaders in action.

Data Analysis

The data set included evidence from the CPR meeting agendas, CLE artifacts, interviews, observation notes, and reflective memos. I used the same collection and data analysis processes for PAR Cycle Two as in Cycle One. I examined the data through an open coding process (Saldaña, 2016) to notice patterns and salient details before applying the thematic analysis approach. With the two emergent themes (Vulnerable Space for Leadership and Cultural Understanding) from PAR Cycle One in mind, I incorporated the latent coding process (Braun & Clark, 2006) as I applied my epistemic knowledge in identifying the themes in this cycle.

Throughout PAR Cycle Two, the Co-Participant Researchers (CPRs) strengthened their professional relationships via engaging in Community of Practice (CoP) and Community Learning Exchange (CLE) structures and activities. They challenged, nudged, and cheered each other on as they contemplated school-related challenges or dilemmas. The importance of a support network increased by 26 instances in the data during our CPR meetings, which represented 40% of the theme of humanizing learning spaces. A support network is a necessary pre-condition to deeper learning. When CPR members' knowledge increased, the CPR members affirmed their professional and social justice identity and disposition (17%). As their leadership evolved, the leaders' ability to critically self-reflect surfaced 89 times or 17% of the time during discussions on CRSL practices as well as support others to reflect (7%). Further, participants developing soft leadership skills (17%) and systems thinking (15%) were evident in this cycle of inquiry (see Table 7).

PAR Cycle Two Themes

Thus, the open and latent coding process repeatedly led me to these themes in PAR Cycle Two: Humanizing learning spaces and culturally responsive school practices. When we co-create

Table 7

PAR Cycle Two Data Analysis

Themes	Category	Code	Total Frequency	%
Humanizing Learning Spaces (n=210 or 40% of the total data for PAR Cycle Two)	Support Network (n=143 or 27%)	Value to CPR Members	59	11%
		Vulnerability	45	9%
		Relational Trust	39	7%
	Partnership (n=67 or 13%)	Supervisor-Principal	34	6.5%
		Expanding Support to Teachers	33	6.5%
Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices (316 or 60% of the data for PAR Cycle Two)	Affirming Professional Identity (n=91 or 17%)		91	17%
	Critical Reflection (n=125 or 24%)	Self	89	17%
		Others	37	7%
	Knowledge Building (n=100 or 19%)	Soft Skills	53	10%
		Systems Thinking	47	9%

learning spaces in which we can be vulnerable and take risks, school leaders are more likely to learn and develop new knowledge, significantly transforming their leadership and taking deliberate actions that are culturally responsive. The culturally responsive school leadership practices were the byproduct of humanizing engagement and learning. These themes encompassed the categories in the Pre-cycle (personal identities as motivation to become school leaders and awareness of structures of oppression and white supremacy in school systems) and the emerging categories of PAR Cycle One (vulnerable space for leadership and cultural understanding). The data in PAR Cycle Two show that the humanizing learning space fortified the CPR members' knowledge, skills, and dispositions to lead effectively and publicly. We experienced deeper learning as a result of focusing on humanizing our learning conditions.

Humanizing Learning Spaces

Freire (2000) reminded us that, as human beings, our brains are not empty receptacles where knowledge and skills could be deposited. Deep learning or cognition can only be generated through co-creating and co-inventing through dialogue and humanizing interactions. Freire (2000) asserted, "trusting the people is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change" (p. 60). Thus, humanizing learning spaces for human beings is a critical factor in our work; often overlooked, the process of humanizing learning for principals, teachers, and students is iterative as relational trust is a foundational abstract resource for school improvement which we must recurrently nurture and sustain (Grubb, 2009). During the previous cycles of inquiry, we observed that achieving a condition of humanizing professional learning requires that we know each other's identities, dreams, and motivations as school leaders so that we can form and nurture relational trust by demonstrating vulnerability and courage as we prioritize connections (France, 2021). As result, we build our knowledge and capacity in enacting Culturally Responsive School

Leadership. Freire (2000) asserted that "[k]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the word, and with each other" (p. 72). The theme, humanizing learning spaces, summed up the journey on which the CPR team had embarked throughout the PAR project. Learning and leading is an iterative and interactive process grounded in authentic humanizing relationships, including demonstrating vulnerability and trust. The evidence about the importance of a support network and its essential components prepared the CPR members for their learning enterprise.

Support Network

During PAR Cycle Two, we continued leveraging the Community Learning Exchange CLE and CoP structures and activities to elevate the CPR members' growing knowledge about Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. Over time, the bond and sense of connection deepened their partnership, thus forming a robust support network among the CPR members. Successful and effective leaders work in community and collaboration to improve their goals and objectives (Militello et al., 2009). Thessin (2019) asserted that school leaders working in partnership increases and anchors their readiness and motivation to lead. Ample evidence validated the development of a support network in this inquiry cycle, especially during our CPR meetings (n=43 or 27% of the data for PAR Cycle Two). In the previous cycle, the category network of support had emerged. In PAR Cycle Two, we observed the sustained evolution of this network and their appreciation for each other. First of all, the principals valued the CPR group as an avenue for their personal and professional growth (11% of the evidence for PAR Cycle Two) and then demonstrated vulnerability (9%) as they built relational trust (7%).

Value to the CPR Members

During the first CPR meeting, the members engaged in personal narratives reflecting on their leadership development and journey of the research project. The members consistently reflected on how valuable they found the meetings and their relationships with others. During the first meeting, although I had an agenda, members organically initiated an impromptu critical friend's protocol in which they pondered the idea of being *equity warriors*. The sense of comfort and increased level of trust to speak freely and openly illustrated the kindship and sense of community they have built. Principal Moon shared her appreciation of the support network:

> Oh, wow! Our conversations feel good walking away, or even just our informal Sidney [Principal Frost] sharing stuff, and Mason [Principal Bell] and I asking probing questions and having this informal critical friend [protocol] that just happened to us. It's just us talking; it is so fun to see this happen organically. I definitely am hearing a lot of empathy in our talk. I appreciate this team so much (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022).

Principal Frost chimed in and shared her reflection on her connection to the CPR team:

> I'm curious if I can just say something that I have about throughout the year. Processes like what we participated in, I've bult a relationship with the people in this space so that I could be more reflective, and I think that relationship building does allow me personally to demonstrate more vulnerability and be more reflective. (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022)

Principal Bell reflected on the support he has received from this team:

> Obviously, I found it to be very supportive in a lot of ways. A lot of times I sat back in the listening and reflecting. This process and the team have been pushing my thinking to

> be a better leader. I am thinking a lot more about the inequities that are everywhere in our schools, and it's up to us to do the hard work. (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022)

Principal Lemon compared his experience with the team, like going to church:

> I have to say that it's kind of like being in an African church. We keep it on. Well, I think about [ideas shared in our space] when I wake up. Because of you, I have strategies or actions to consider from our conversations. I got so much from you that I have my phone nearby. So, I wake up and the ideas started popping up. I just write it down. I got so much support and ideas from you, and it is constantly flowing from my brain. (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2022)

The testimonies from the CPR members were a strong indicator of the support network they had formed during the last three semesters. As I reflected in my memos, the non-verbal cues were an even stronger indicator that this group bonded and supported each other through a collective enterprise, embarking on being more culturally responsive to their students and school community. They laughed at each other's jokes. They showed the same visceral concerns when their colleagues shared a challenging dilemma or situation. They comforted each other through empathetic eye contact and gestures when work became challenging. They cheered for each other when they shared a bright spot around their leadership action. Next, I discuss these subcategories that are indicators of the value that participants found in our meetings and dialogue: vulnerability, relational trust, and partnerships.

Vulnerability. Brown (2012) defines "vulnerability as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure" (p. 34). However, she asserted that vulnerability is never a weakness, but a source of truth and courage. The CPR members demonstrated raw emotions when they continued to take

risks and opened themselves up as they shared their school-related dilemmas in the Critical Friend's Group (CFG) during our CPR learning space.

Principal Moon presented her dilemma, citing her challenge in working with a 2nd-grade teacher who had a deficit mindset with a history of referring Black students for special education testing. She described that the particular teacher struggled to work with an African American male student who had no prior schooling experience. The teacher blamed the principal rather than exploring ways to support that student. Principal Moon demonstrated vulnerability when she recalled, "when I hear her unload, you're not doing enough, and not enough is happening. I don't know how to help her. I wanted to turn her perspective a little and see that there was a lot of support in place." She turned to her colleagues and expressed, "I want to get advice or consultancy on the leadership of this situation of what to do as a leader. I want to make sure that we are not perpetuating what has happened in the past" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2022). Asking for support and advice about difficult or intractable issues is a clear sign of trust in the group to keep confidences. As well, the support space becomes a place for sharing our fears and hopes.

Principal Bell shared his continued commitment to his school community and lamented that the most vulnerable families still do not have access to the school. He stated:

> We have some educators that do a really good job building relationships and connecting with families. We are such a diverse school community. We want our educators to really start to truly seek to understand our families. So, my thinking and what I'm trying to figure out is that we're ready to be a school that is inclusive. We started to work with the families, but now it comes back to our educators. So how do I really do this work? I'm

> calling this out, how can I work with teachers so they can better support students. (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2022)

Principal Bell exhibited passion and vulnerability as he sought support from his team.

Principal Lemon sought thought partnership from the CPR team as he explores ways to build a more inclusive climate for his staff. He shared that his new staff at Jackson Elementary exhibit *PTSD* from the previous administration, at least from their perspective:

> This is completely the opposite of Boise, where everyone was collaborative and wanted to be part of the planning. At this place, I'll put something together and ask for their input. It is frustrating that they won't put any deeper thought into it. I'm trying to find ways to encourage them to be a part of decision making, and I'm frustrated when it comes to planning things for the kids, and they are not willing to do anything. (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022)

Mr. Lemon was candid about his challenge working in a school that did not value shared leadership. He displayed vulnerability as he illustrated his frustration with his current staff as he sought support and advice from more experienced colleagues about how to proceed.

Principal Frost displayed her vulnerability as she reflected on her leadership development. During the Mandala reflection activity, she described her continued leadership development and how it can sometimes be confusing for her. Her statement illustrated her vulnerability and the support she received from the team. Principal Frost showed her illustrations and shared:

> Here, [I'm] confused. What I was trying to show here is that I could come in [our learning space], whatever situation I was in, whatever dilemma I had. I can say I needed

> help, and the team was here to support me. You know you lift me back up. (Frost, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022)

The category of vulnerability exhibited in the evidence throughout all three cycles of inquiry as they shared their worries, confusion, missteps, and possible action steps. The members had shared everything from their most intimate accounts of their family backgrounds and the people who motivated them to pursue educational leadership to their shortcomings as leaders, laying the groundwork for demonstrating vulnerability and trust in a professional setting and fortifying relational trust.

Relational Trust. As noted in Chapter 5, trust and vulnerability go hand in hand. Brown (2012) asserted that trust is required for one to be vulnerable in sharing their feelings and experiences with others: "We need to feel trust to be vulnerable, and we need to be vulnerable in order to trust" (p. 47). Relational trust continued to be an essential category in the second cycle for the CPR team. The codes in relational trust constituted 7% of the total evidence from PAR Cycle Two, and the lower percentage in this cycle of inquiry is an indicator that relational trust was fully integrated into their support community. The CPR participants gave and received candid feedback and input as they engaged in thought partnership. Examples from our first CPR meeting in the fall showed that the team reached a higher level of trust in each other. The members reflected and shared the most intimate and arduous moments of their leadership. Based on their relational trust they took risks and sought support.

Principal Frost described her leadership plan after receiving an equity audit report conducted by the National Center for Urban School Transformation, a district partner and consultant. She recounted that she was perplexed when two POC staff members "don't think it's going to work, and they think that they need a new school site assignment" (Frost, CPR meeting

notes, September 1, 2022). The angst on Principal Frost's face was apparent. Instead, the rest of the CPR members initiated an impromptu critical friends protocol to provide support, demonstrating relational trust. Frost asserted that "as a White woman in the skin that I'm in, I don't even know how to go about opening up this conversation" with these staff members. Principal Bell asked clarifying questions, "So what prompted them to say that they needed a new site? What information was shared with them? This is striking. They probably wouldn't be able to [move]," reassuring Principal Frost that the two staff members' decision wasn't about her leadership (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). The team prodded, which prompted deeper reflection. Principal Frost stated,

> The audit people are basically like, you all can't move forward as a professional community because if they're stuck, they're holding the whole group back. And it's true. I know the rest of my school really wants to focus on healing-centered engagement and healing-centered professional development. And they want to grow and learn together. And then we have two staff members that just, ugh. I'm just really speaking freely right now. I feel like we're perpetuating white supremacy culture and perfectionism—right and wrong and good and bad. That's what they [POC staff call out all the time, and I'm like, but this is exactly what you are doing. (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022)

While we did not devise a viable solution, the palpable relational trust encouraged Principal Frost to speak freely and reflect on her engagement with the two staff members. She later decided she would make space to listen more from the two staff members with dissonant views. The relationships formed enhanced our working partnership.

Partnerships. Honig (2012) asserted that adopting a teaching and learning approach places the supervisors in the most advantageous position to support school leaders in their

capacity building. Throughout one-on-one check-in meetings with CPR members, I focused on creating learning space. As I became more adept in creating conditions to maximize learning in our CPR meetings, I leveraged the same approach in our one-on-one meetings as a partnership and learning space. We conducted learning walks in classrooms to discuss how the principal might impact the rest of the staff to create durable and positive change to improve student outcomes. As second factor in building partnerships was to expand the support beyond the relationship I established with the principal.

Supervisor-Principal Partnership. The supervisor relationship is by definition hierarchical, and I was consistently focused on making our relationship a learning partnership to support the principal growth and development. During PAR Cycle Two, when I met with CPR members at their schools, we engaged in learning walks by visiting classrooms and discussing their problems of practice, a contrast to the traditional supervision that often devoted its time to monitoring compliance with various central office directives rather than learning together (Honig & Rainey, 2015).

During a learning walk with Principal Bell, we observed three classrooms focusing on how students responded to instruction. We noticed a pattern of unclear learning objectives in the classrooms. Principal Bell considered sharing his feedback with the teachers and the leadership team to promote systemic change. He stated that he "appreciate{s} this process [classroom visits and thought partnership] and collaboration where it pushes me to explore ways to work with our school-based team" (meeting notes, September 27, 2022).

In a different one-on-one meeting with Principal Frost, she requested that we skip the learning walk since she needed to inform her staff. Instead, we engaged in a thoughtful conversation on how she could support her new assistant principal in building his instructional

leadership. She later told me, “I appreciate your flexibility, and I appreciate the fact that you get me. I’m reminded of your actions in how I should interact with our staff” (meeting notes, September 21, 2022).

An authentic partnership is a form of leadership practice that requires flexibility and adaptability. When I arrived for my meeting with Principal Moon, I scratched our regular check-in routines because she appeared upset. As we sat down in her office, her burst of emotions was obvious, and she informed me of her negative interaction with a 2nd-grade teacher who felt she was being "dumbed on, has no support, and began blaming" the principal. Principal Moon recalled that the teacher was "at her wit's end" because the student of concern, African American 2nd grader had no prior schooling experience, bit three other students that morning. Principal Moon and I decided to visit the classroom deliberately to show support for the teacher. When we returned to the office, we began brainstorming the existing and potential resources for the student and teacher. Principal Moon appeared relieved after we created a solid plan to support the students and teacher. She stated, "I appreciate the support. Us going into the teacher's classroom really helped her feel supported" (meeting notes, September 27, 2022).

The deepening level of partnership I formed with the CPR participants was evident throughout PAR Cycle Two. The support network, the partnership, as well as the practices we used in group meetings prompted the school leaders to promote the same ideal conditions for their school teams.

Expanding Support to Teachers. The vulnerability and trust demonstrated by the CPR members were indispensable elements in fostering collaboration and relationships (Wise & Hammack, 2011). Employing the CoP and CLE structures and activities created conditions that were conducive for the participants in developing their CRSL knowledge and practices. As a

result, the CPR team recognized the value of expanding their support network through relationship building. These examples of leaders' strategic actions expanded their ability to foster support for and form relationships with teachers and teams in their contexts.

Principal Frost reflected on her leadership approach at our CPR meeting and asserted, "we need to be working together to have open dialogues, to have room for growth, to support each other and change" (Frost, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). She specifically named her strategies by modeling.

> I believe in leading by example. And so, if I want my staff to be really reflective, and I have to model that, what better way to do that than to launch the school year in front of everybody and being reflective alongside my teacher colleagues, and also show that the way I engage as a leader is through problem solving and reflectiveness, together with teachers and not like a top-down supervisor" (Frost, individual interview notes, November 3, 2022).

At the beginning of the school year, Principal Moon was strategic in creating conditions for equity work. She recounted that the normal Professional Development (PD) was a safe maneuver because the staff often "wanted their schedule. That checklist is where my mind always goes at the beginning of the year. So, I decided this year to do something different for the PD. I reached out to the culture climate team" and invited them to share ideas for connecting and going deeper into their culture and equity work. Throughout the PD days, she used multiple rounds of dyads, a structure where one participant speaks, and the other listens attentively without interruption. Part of her goal in using a dyad structure was to promote reflection. Principal Moon recalled that the staff "did a reflection of reading some quotes about a safe space with staff, and then they discussed race among each other. They were heavier quotes to read"

(Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). These examples illustrated that the CPR members recognized the value of creating conditions to foster relationships with their staff and expanded their support networks to engage in the equity challenges through enacting CRSL practices.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Practices

Khalifa (2018) posited that Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) includes the following leadership behaviors: "(a) being critically self-reflective; (b) developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula; (c) promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts; and (d) engaging students' Indigenous (or local neighborhood) community contexts" (p. 13). Our PAR project and study was grounded on Khalifa's work. The CPR team engaged in a book study to understand this leadership model, and the knowledge we gained from the reading and the common language we developed provided a coherence among us that supported out efforts. Coherent effort in reform work is hard to come by, but these leaders and I had some ideas about how to nurture and build that coherence across a small network and perhaps transfer that to the larger principal network that I supervised (Cobb et. al., 2018; Elmore, 2004; Forman et al., 2018; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Stosich et al., 2017). The team members valued this promising leadership approach as we envisioned enacting CRSL practices to effect more significant learning and experiential outcomes for our minoritized students. It was evident that the CPR team made valiant efforts to build their capacity and make attempts to enact CRSL practices. Throughout PAR Cycle Two, the Co-Participant Researchers demonstrated their developing CRSL knowledge and skills. As their leadership identity and disposition were anchored, the CPR members' CRSL practices strengthened. I discuss the following categories:

affirming professional identity (17% of the evidence for PAR Cycle Two), engaging in critical reflection of self and others (24%), and building knowledge and skills (10%).

Affirming Professional Identity

Leverett (2002) described school leaders who advance equity work "to improve their knowledge, skills, and dispositions; engage in risk-taking; and model these values, beliefs and behaviors for others to emulate in the quest for higher levels of learning for all groups of children and youth" (p. 1). The CPR members affirmed their professional identity throughout the entire project and study. The school leaders were committed to building their CRSL leadership muscle through gaining new knowledge and practicing new skills; they were driven by their motivation to ensure minoritized students succeeded in their schools. As we learned that their diverse family backgrounds and experiences catalyzed their journey toward school leadership, our experiential affinity with marginalized students and families affirmed their professional identities as those who advanced equity and social justice.

Affirming professional identity continued as a significant category in the second cycle. I observed examples of the personal and the professional identities blending in all our convenings and learning spaces. As school leaders shared their stories, they became explicit about their beliefs and stance on their *why* and motivation in leadership. At the beginning of the school year, Principal Frost launched and hosted a collaborative school event that involved a few other schools and their staff focusing on instruction. She described her rationale for that initiative and the importance of mindset. She emphatically declared:

> the ability for our [students of color]to be academically successful, and the only way I know how to do that is to show people that this is possible. So, we can shift that mindset from they can't to we can. Because of x, y, or z, or whatever excuse we're saying why

> they can't, they actually can if we set up the correct environment and the correct structures to support their learning. (Frost, interview, November 3, 2022)

Because Principal Bell grasped the concept of epistemology and realized that the school-based and community epistemologies often clashed and created unnecessary tensions between families and school staff, he was determined to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment for his students and families, a declaration since the advent of the PAR. Principal Bell asserted that "we need to understand our families better. We need to understand because it helps us to understand our scholars better. When we don't get scholars and their families, we have failed them. It is our job as educators to meet them where they are, to educate them" (Bell, interview, November 3, 2022).

Principal Moon consistently demonstrated her equity stance. During a school visit, she elevated our conversation by requesting that we discuss a concern about an African American second grader who did not have any formal schooling. She expressed that the teacher was engaging that student negatively due to his behaviors. This account resonated with me because her premise was about helping this student. She demonstrated the quality of an advocate and an equity warrior. As we brainstormed about support for the student, she already had 80% of the actions that I would have taken. Such actions included coordinating the resource teachers and school social worker to provide in-class support and intervention, scheduling a Student Success Team (SST) meeting, providing the teacher additional planning time to differentiate instruction, and reaching out to an outside organization, Seneca, to seek additional resources (meeting notes, September 27, 2022). Her actions were consistent with her words. In our earlier meetings, she described her role as a school leader as a job of service to our students and families. She knew she had to be completely visible in different places wearing different hats: changing out of the

safety vest, lunch duty, or the office. In all cases, she wanted to be present and hear from students, parents, and staff (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). Principal Moon is grounded in her equity work and stance.

Principal Lemon shared his leadership reflection during one of the CPR meetings. "I'm for building relationships and shared leadership. My vision is to build [staff's]capacity to support student achievement. This is why we are doing this work," referencing our CRSL. Principal Bell used the analogy of a football team to describe his current state at his new school. He described himself as the quarterback of the team who could not act alone but needed linemen. and receivers—a full team so that students could thrive (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022).

The CPR team was committed to advancing equity for their students and reflecting on how they approach their leadership and solving school-related challenges. Their critical reflection was a crucial adjunct to their actions.

Critical Reflection

Khalifa et al. (2016) emphasized that critical reflection is foundational and precedes any actions in leadership. These scholars stated that the leaders' ability to "critically self-reflect about their biases and their practice is integral to both transformative and social justice leadership" (p. 1,285). The CPR members demonstrated a heightened level of critical self-reflection of self and others during PAR Cycle Two, as this category constitutes 24% of instances from the evidence. The school leaders were reflective in their approaches to solving complex problems methodically and reflectively.

Principal Bell highlighted his concerns about the exclusive practices at his school and demonstrated his reflective approach to addressing them. He wanted to examine and change the

procedures and practices to welcome students and families (Bell, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022). Principal Bell held a Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) meeting as one of the many listening tours to capture the families' experiences as a catalyst to shift his staff's mindset (Bell, Interview notes, November 3, 2022).

Principal Moon demonstrated her reflective practice when she recognized that her only African American teacher exhibited discomfort as they engaged in discussions that required talking about their identities and experiences at their school. Principal Moon recalled that the teacher's uneasiness was unmistakable as she participated in the large group conversation. "Her voice got crackly. I could tell I wanted to get her out of that discomfort at that moment." Principal Moon pivoted and moved all the teachers into small groups, recognizing the potential harm that her facilitation could have created. She reflected, "What else could I have done? That's part of my own work around reflecting on how I can facilitate better and lead the adult work" (Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 1, 2022).

Principal Moon reflected on her approach to structuring the activities during a Lesson Study Initiative event. The staff from three other schools participated. She considered the need to prioritize building relationships with members from other schools whenever we come together as a community for the first time. She shared that:

> We reflected on how we could have done it better next time. We didn’t do a good enough job building community across the schools that day, so I think I actually would have done it better if I could do it over again. Instead of just launching with the students, launching with some community building across sites so that the adults in the room got to know each other more, and then engage in the work of watching a lesson and reflecting and talking. So that was a missed opportunity. (Frost, Interview notes, November 3, 2022)

Ms. Moon demonstrated critical reflection as she considered adjusting her facilitation and practices to bring others along the equity journey.

Principal Lemon pondered how to support a team that exhibited trauma and harm. He wanted to increase their participation and promote shared leadership. He was trying to find ways to encourage them to be a part of making decisions. He recounted that one of his teachers would get nervous around him and would start stuttering and nearly falling over. Principal Lemon's reflective practice prompted him to share this dilemma during the critical friend group and try to understand how to approach the teacher differently (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022).

As school leaders exhibited critical reflection throughout the PAR process, they increased their level of reflective practice, exemplified by their development of Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. In addition, however, the CPR members supported their staff to become more critically reflective in their educator roles.

Promoting Critical Reflection of Others

Khalifa (2018) reminds us that critical self-reflection is not enough. He argued that "all structures and processes in schools need to be critically self-reflective as well" and that school leaders "push their staff to do so as well" (p. 60). As previously mentioned, Principal Frost was committed to bringing her staff and district colleagues to reflect critically on how minoritized students could succeed and how to provide necessary resources and conditions to ensure that success. She declared her ultimate hope and dream was a mindset shift for all adults. She wanted to launch Lesson Study Initiative across school staff, not just in a few classrooms or schools. She was committed to troubleshooting and problem-solving together so that the students at school could thrive academically (Frost, interview notes, November 3, 2022). Determined with her

vision, Principal Frost consistently called out a need to bring others along as a vital pathway to achieving more significant positive student outcomes.

Principal Moon created conditions for her staff at the beginning of the school year to cultivate their critical thinking and reflection by structuring appropriate activities that engendered dialogue and improved the school culture. One such activity was her guiding the school staff to reimagine and re-establish engagement norms as an on-ramp to realize the equity work. Her goal for this school year was to generate norms by working with the teacher leaders. She thought they could find value in a learning community by increasing buy-in and not just announcing the use of SFUSD braver norms. She used an activity from TLEE (a leadership support program), and she reported that people were engaged when they were partnered up with each other in dyads to unpack the braver norms (Moon, interview, November 1, 2022). Teachers, like principals, need experiences and should have dialogue so that they can fully participate and co-construct their ideas and learning. Ms. Moon recalled that during the first few days of professional development, the teachers were eager and ready to have challenging conversations. "One of the ILT (instructional leadership team) members approached me and proposed that we could do a Privilege Walk," an activity that illuminates those who hold advantages and disadvantages based on their identities (Moon, interview November 1, 2022). Principal Moon was eager to create a student-centered narrative by encouraging staff to reflect and partner in their shared vision. The momentum she created at the beginning of the year was the catalyst of her focus on creating space for authentic dialogue.

These examples illustrated how the CPR members internalized critical reflection practices. At the same time, they were building their knowledge and skill muscles in multiple ways.

Building Knowledge and Skills

Driscoll (1994), Hammond (2015), and Resnick et al. (2015) advocate for a deeper understanding that learning is a social activity in which the learners must co-construct meaning. Hammond (2015), based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of intersubjectivity, reinforced that dialogue is an effective way to learn and process information. She attributed student talk as an effective means to "ignite" the brain's attention and "chew" on or process new input or content, which are essential components of the information processing learning model. Student collaboration, grounded in constructivist theory, supports internalization and facile content retrieval. The same learning theory applies to adults (Drago-Severson, 2012; Knowles, 1984). During PAR Cycle Two, the CPR team continued problem-solving via the Critical Friend Group (CFG) process. This activity proved vital to enhancing our skills in leading and enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices. l. Two subcategories, soft skills (10%) and system thinking (10%), frequently surfaced as part of the building our knowledge and skill capacities

Soft Skills

Lemos and Brunstein (2023) described that soft skills are fundamental for increased productivity, teamwork, leadership, and professional growth. Most importantly, critical skills "help to manage difficulties in a more positive way" (p. 144). The CPR members honed and developed their soft skills through their participation in the CFG as they critically reflected and problem-solved challenging school-related issues throughout the PAR process. During Cycle One, the soft skills were evident when they employed an empathetic problem-solving approach that illustrated these skills: active listening, asking probing questions to promote critical

reflection, and providing input to support their peers. In PAR Cycle Two, they applied the same skills in their problem-solving and other leadership space they occupied.

In one example of demonstrating these skills, Principal Moon presented her dilemma about working with a teacher with a deficit mindset toward an African American student. Principal Bell asked clarifying questions: "What kind of relationship does the teacher have with other students? Does the teacher have issues with other scholars similar to this student in the past?" Principal Lemon asked, "Do you think this teacher has biases?" Ms. Moon responded, "I guess I do. I've seen other incidents. However, her actions are almost veiled." Principal Moon later expressed her fear of confronting that teacher. "I can't connect with her attitude, and it makes me defensive." The conversation continued, and the team learned that Principal Moon had incorporated a robust support plan for the student and teacher. Principal Bell validated Ms. Moon for her thoughtful leadership while nudging her to have a candid conversation with the teacher about their shared and espoused school values (Bell, Moon, CPR meeting notes, September 28, 2022). Over time, the team became more adept and internalized their application of these skills. A strong indicator was when the team launched into a critical friends protocol without any facilitation at the September 2022 CPR meeting.

Further, I observed similar behaviors when they engaged their staff during our check-in meetings. Culturally responsive school leaders must act in ways that foster relational trust, partnership, and positive interactions, which would help manage challenges more positively and collaboratively. Soft skills are the daily interpersonal processes to promote internal collaboration, but principals need to keep track of the larger systems at the meso and macro levels so they can interpret and buffer outside demands or interference.

Systems Thinking

Senge (1990) posits that "systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots" (p. 68). Khalifa (2018) claims that all structures and processes in schools need to be challenged and critically self-reflective because schools reproduce oppressive structures unless they are challenged. Throughout PAR Cycle Two, the CPR members increased their Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices by discerning oppressive structures through the lens of systems thinking. They understood that to interrupt inequities in schools, they must reflect on the existing and create new structures and practices that would improve the outcomes and maximize students' full potential and positive experiences in school. As the CPR members became more adept at identifying oppressive structures during PAR Cycles One and Two, they exhibited greater reflective practices to improve systems at their schools, thus creating ideal conditions for staff and students.

Throughout last cycle of inquiry, the CPR members identified the need to build their leadership teams and implement the appropriate conditions as a pathway to improve their students' learning and experiential outcomes. For example, one of Principal Bell's goals was to improve the function of his Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) as a pathway to enhance the student learning outcomes at his school. He recounted that the ILT did not have a clear focus and meetings were not consistent. As well, he said the professional developments were disjointed, echoing a key factor for effective leadership: facilitating schoolwide professional learning (Grissom et al., 2021a). He was steadfast about improving ILT structure so there was rigor in every class (meeting notes, September 27, 2022). In his observations, he had noted the need for rigor, and, as a supervisor of teaching for the entire building, he saw the need to improve the

ways he observed and used his knowledge to promote professional learning (Tredway & Militello, 2023). In alignment with the district's focus, he introduced the core rubric document that emphasized four performance areas: culture of learning, essential content, academic ownership, and demonstration learning. Principal Bell unpacked the core rubric with his ILT as a means to build teacher knowledge capacity. He reflected that action was the catalyst; that "we are doing more peer observations or learning walks because the ILT were the ones who led this practice. We are focusing on our Els [English learners] and SPED [special education] students and looking for bright spots. We used the rubric by focusing on one area, so we can be more focused" (meeting notes, November 30, 2022). Principal Bell was reflective that he needed buy-in by delineating a clear focus and structure for the team to improve their instruction.

Like Principal Bell's systemic focus, Principal Moon centered on cultivating ILT efficacy. She wanted to formalize the ILT structure to meet more frequently and engage in some "norming around the purpose and outcome because we don't have a clear plan previously. It is important we outline the ILT expectations, so everyone is clear" (meeting notes, September 7, 2022). The following month, the ILT engaged in shared learning of the core rubric. "I am resisting the urge to dive in before the ILT can engage the learning with the core rubric. In TLEE principal support program—we took a while to norm the rubric" (meeting notes, October 11, 2022). Principal Moon understood the need to refine the ILT structure to increase the team's capacity, and she understood that her role in the systems thinking was to first engage the people closest to the work, so they had a deeper understanding (Guajardo et al., 2016).

Principal Lemon valued shared leadership, and his current school site was in the nascent stages of rebuilding. In his first year as a new principal at Jackson, he observed mistrust between the previous administration and the staff. He declared,

> My leadership approach is to continue to invite shared leadership, to build time for each site leader to shine and reflect on their why. However, I share my struggle as a new leader with my staff. If we have a functioning ILT, these things could have been done in a more collaborative way. I'm letting them know that nothing is going to be perfect in the process. But the process will be refined as we go on, and I hope to bring them along as a team. (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022)

Principal Lemon recognized that building his team and the conditions would take patience and time. He was committed to creating the conditions to realize his vision.

In addition to launching the Lesson Study initiative at the beginning of the school year, Principal Frost invited and collaborated with the district's Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) team to conduct a collaborative learning walk to refine the school's feedback protocol. She was curious about how the district department of Curriculum and Instruction used the structure for observations. She thought she could learn from them and then work with teachers to improve learning walks (Frost interview, November 3, 2022). Principal Frost was strategic in her actions by leveraging the district partners' knowledge and structure to create a better system to improve their instructional practices at the school.

The themes of humanizing learning spaces and Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices fully emerged in PAR Cycle Two supported by evidence from the Pre-cycle and PAR Cycle One. The CPR members deepened their relationships through humanizing engagement. In our time together during this cycle, the CPR team affirmed their professional identities. It furthered their Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) practices through critical reflection and building their CRSL knowledge. Next, I use the evidence from three cycles of inquiry to identify the findings.

Findings

As culturally responsive school leaders and practitioners who aim for critical consciousness that Freire (1970) terms *conscientização,* principals needed a trusting and humanizing leadership space to engage with each other so they can create those spaces in their schools. Our learning space offered a launching pad for them to form authentic relationships, voice vulnerabilities, build knowledge and skills, become critically self-reflective, and develop the courage to expand supporting processes to teachers, families, and outside partnerships for the benefit of students in their school communities. They gained the confidence and capacity to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) behaviors (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2010). The data demonstrate that a trusting and humanizing leadership development space for dialogue and problem-solving is paramount because this process cultivates, nurtures, and fosters a support network for the participants (Forman et al., 2018). The CPR group offered a supporting environment for members; as a result, we fostered authentic engagement and deeper learning that promoted critical thinking, affirmed professional identities, and deepened our awareness and understanding of oppressive educational systems at the micro, meso, and macro levels. The humanizing leadership development space begets the conditions that encourage the CPR members to critically self-reflect and prime them to take actions to improve the outcomes of minoritized students. Based on the emerging themes of PAR Cycle One, and the PAR Cycle Two themes, I present two findings that are supported across three cycles of inquiry:

1. A humanizing leadership development space is a precondition for Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CSRL).

2. A supportive structure promotes praxis and systems thinking that precede effective leadership action.

Evidence from PAR Cycles One and Two indicated the importance of a trusting leadership development space in which leaders could be vulnerable, examine their professional identities, and form partnerships with each other that they later transferred to teacher partnerships, a structure that fortified the school leaders' knowledge and skills to move from the state of increased awareness to enacting CRSL behaviors (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2010). Secondly, the leaders felt the network of support was the dominant factor in their critical self-reflection or praxis and ability to develop systems thinking. The data from across two cycles of inquiry (see Figure 2) demonstrates that the humanizing leadership space (33% of the evidence), which they began to develop in the Pre-cycle, was a necessary pre-condition for their culturally responsive leadership—critical self-reflection in order to act on their analysis of systemic inequities (67% of the data).

In the Pre-cycle data, we established a support network, and the initial data confirmed that establishing a group structure and processes were critical to our interactions. For example, in the Pre-cycle, the CPR members demonstrated the resolution to learn and exhibited vulnerability; as they developed relational trust (7% of the evidence) and were more vulnerable (9%), they examined their professional identity (12%) and built partnerships with their co-principals and their supervisor (5%). The mandalas and journey lines, two key identity activities, contributed to building relationships in the Pre-cycle. At the conclusion of the study, Principal Bell said, "During the last couple of years, we all dealt with different and difficult things, and this space has been very supportive because of the relationships we have formed" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022).

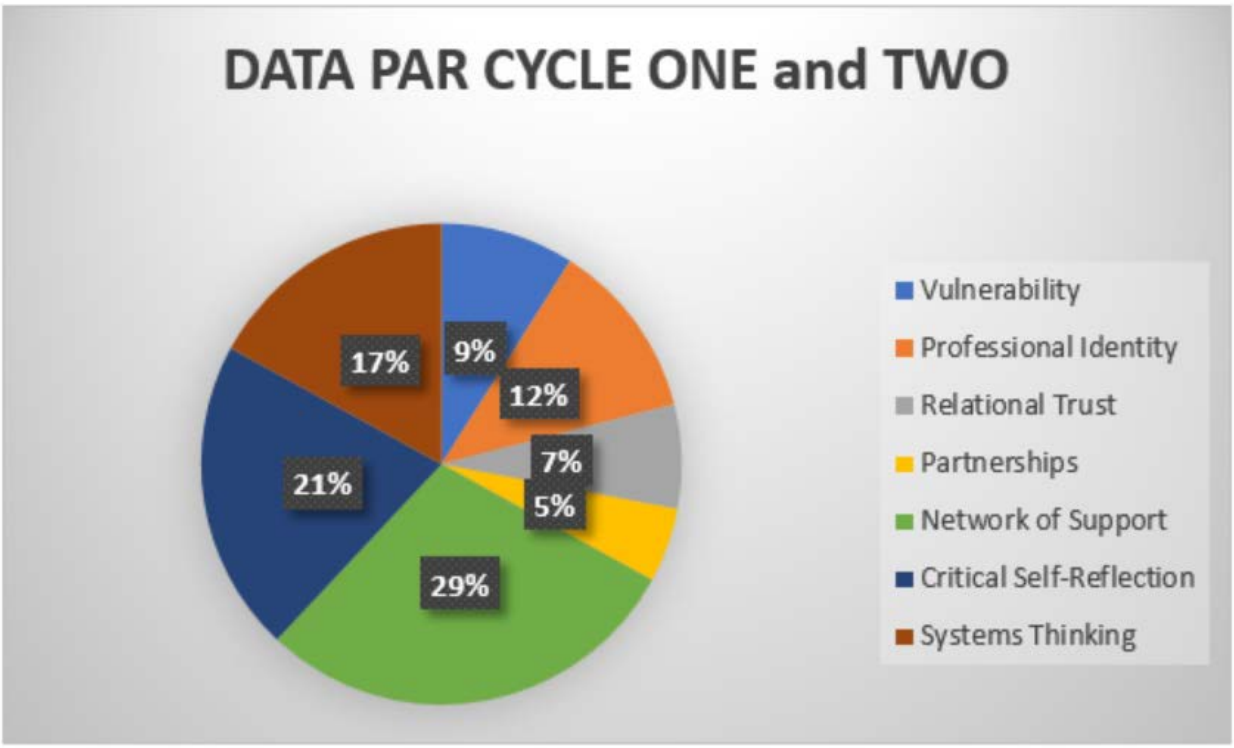

Figure 2. Aggregate data from PAR Cycles One and Two support the PAR findings.

As the CPR members exhibited increased vulnerability and fortified relational trust they co-generated a network of support (29% of the evidence) that promoted praxis or critical reflection (21%), both necessary for actions that demonstrated systems thinking (17%) with an eye to how the micro fit into systemic structures. As CPR members reflected critically, they enhanced their knowledge, confidence, and courage to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership behaviors at their schools. These outcomes formed the basis for my findings (see Figure 3).

In considering the findings and explaining their connection, I draw on two seminal works: Guajardo et al. (2016) and the Community Learning Exchange axioms and Freire's (2000) theories of praxis and *concientazação* or critical consciousness. The Community Learning Exchange (CLE) philosophy and processes offered a structure for school leaders to come together for a period of engaged learning during the PAR project and study (Guajardo et al., 2016). Relying on the CLE axioms, we co-created the conditions that promoted learning and dialogue. Similarly, praxis requires community members to engage in dialogue that promotes deep reflection and action to achieve liberation (Freire, 2000; National Equity Project, n.d.). As a result, each person developed a stronger critical consciousness about the systemic inequities in their school and was able to articulate the root causes of issues, rather than act on the symptoms. As we aimed to improve the outcomes of minoritized students in an oppressive school system, we first established a working relationship, invested time and energy in personal and professional relationships, and co-created a leadership learning space for us that we might eventually replicate for others. These constructs reflected the need for the CPR team to engage in deep learning and reflection in a safe space before they could act differently when school-based issues required their intervention or decision-making. As a result, we effectively carried out thoughtful and

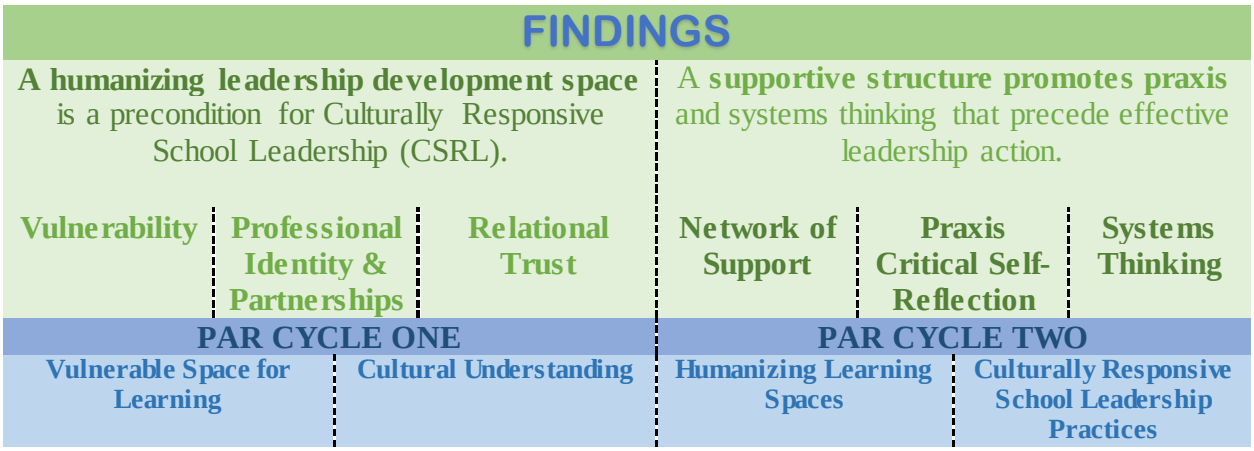

Figure 3. The PAR findings as a result of two cycles of inquiry.

strategic CRSL actions in public. I first discuss the finding humanizing leadership development as a precondition for change and structures that promote praxis.

Humanizing Leadership Development

Freire (2000) posited that humanizing pedagogy is an effective instrument to establish dialogue, an essential strategy to make meaning and promote learning. Dialogue is indispensable for problem-solving. Learning and leading require dynamic social processes (Guajardo et al., 2016). School administrators typically operate as the solo actor in the school environment, and many factors—district demands and operational tasks—are at play that support social reproduction instead of authentic change (Tyack & Cuban, 1998). My initial PAR goals were to build the CPR members' capacity and knowledge to enact CRSL behaviors. However, without the preconditions of trust and vulnerability coupled with a deeper understanding of self to create supportive professional partnerships, that vision was not conceivable.

The CLE axioms proved to be a vital structure and construct for the CPR administrators in their learning and undertaking of enacting CRSL practices. I incorporated the axioms to undergird the activities; the axioms are designed to promote humanizing learning spaces. As a group we translated a theory *of* action to a theory *in* action by engaging in these ways:

- Learning and leadership as a dynamic social process to investigate our understandings of culturally responsive leadership.
- Critical conversations and equitable pedagogical processes supported our learning.
- We were clear that, as the people closest to the issues, we were best situated to discover answers to local concerns.
- We crossed boundaries between supervisor and principals to be colleagues and co-develop an educational process that was meaningful.

- We grounded our hopes and change efforts on the assets and dreams of our school communities.

By grounding ourselves at each meeting in these principles or axioms, we began to live them as a support group because we participated in humanizing our leader learning environment. Baxter, (2011) in discussing Habermas' communication theory of society, contends that separating the life world (the personal and social) from the systems world (organizational space) causes issues. Instead, we need to humanize environments so that the organizational actors—in education, the teachers and leaders—do not experience their professional identities as separate and estranged from who they are as people. In discussing the process of Participatory Action Research, Kemmis et al. (2014) stated: "We believe that one of the most important things that happens in critical Participatory Action Research is simply that participants get together and talk about their work and lives" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 33). The CPR group used the CLE axioms as a platform through which to learn demonstrated vulnerability. Through dialogue about their identities and life stories, they co-constructed a larger understanding of their professional identities as culturally responsive leaders of equity and developed bonds of relational trust.

Vulnerability as a Catalyst for Learning

Brown (2012) asserts that "vulnerability is not weakness, and the uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure we face every day are not optional. Our only choice is a question of engagement" (p. 7). The CPR members embraced their vulnerability when they shared their most intimate experiences and family backgrounds that motivated them to become educational leaders during the Pre-cycle. That shared experience from the group catalyzed their commitment to learning the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework. Humanizing the leadership development space included promoting vulnerability as a catalyst for learning and

nurturing relational trust. While present initially in the Pre-cycle, these elements were clearly evident in PAR Cycles One and Two.

The PAR structures supported us to engender perceived or unconscious responsibility to each other and, gradually, the participants realized that the co-learning would be useful to their roles in their schools. The CPR members consistently showed up to the meetings because they reported that the engaging activities created a vulnerable space for them to learn as equals, be free from the hierarchy of positionality, and be safe enough to share their doubts and concerns. Principal Bell shared his thoughts about my relationship with the team and his perception of the team. "You are always authentic. You modeled vulnerability by sharing a lot about yourself. That's good modeling. We all did the mandala the first time, and you just shared things that was intimate right off the bat. We began sharing things and learned about each other the things we probably wouldn't have. This group is special" (Bell, interview, November 3, 2022). Through being open, we examined our professional identities.

Professional Identity and Partnership

Using Khalifa's (2018) book as an anchor, we engaged in new learning about being and becoming culturally responsive school leaders. In our CPR meetings throughout the PAR project, the participants and I developed our CRSL epistemological knowledge through interactions and activities (France, 2021). Our bonds grew over time, as we thought more deeply about what it meant to be culturally responsive and how we could inform our ontology or perspectives.

Throughout PAR, the CPR members suspended their urgent matters, engaged in deep learning, and explored positive solutions to their school-related challenges and dilemmas. Guajardo et al. (2016) posit, "Transforming one's mind and consciousness from distress and hopelessness to hope and possibilities is, by definition, the most radical transformation we

witness during the CLE experience" (p. 27). They experienced authentic professional partnerships with each other and with me as the supervisor.

Relational Trust

We know that relational trust is essential in successful and collaborative relationships and as a pre-requisite for school improvement (Bryk et al., 2010; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Wise & Hammack, 2011). Relational trust is foundational to any attempt at change. According to a Grubb (2009) study of school resources and the outcomes in terms of school improvement; without the abstract resource of relational trust, a resource co-created by the organizational actors, other actions or resources do not produce desired results.

Developing relational trust among principals and myself encouraged risk-taking, which contributed to increased vulnerability, maximizing the learning space during our CPR and other PAR-related meetings. Relational trust, which began in the Pre-cycle and continued through PAR Cycles One and Two, related to the necessary trusting space for dialogue and an established support network. Brown (2012) refers to this as brave space, a place where leaders can garner the courage, will, and skill to act differently. During each CPR meeting, we reviewed the five CLE axioms as a reminder, affirming that the meeting was a learning space, and that each member was equal regardless of our positionality within the organization. The CLE axioms served as touchstones, guiding our values and norms and creating a humanized space where participants felt valued.

The necessary pre-conditions for humanizing the leadership development space were fostering vulnerability and nurturing relational trust. Brown (2018) reminded us that trust is built over time; by enacting the CLE axioms, we enhanced and accelerated our trust on the CPR Team. Principal Frost encapsulated the embodiment of trust by asserting, "You are like family,"

referring to the CPR team as she reflected what the group meant to her (Frost, CPR meeting, November 3, 2022).

A Network of Support: Promoting Critical Reflection and Systems Thinking

Because of the supportive structures of the CPR meetings, CLE processes, and readings that supported new learning, the CPR team fortified their knowledge, skills, and confidence to enact CRSL behaviors. As a result of engaging in praxis or critical self-reflection before engaging in actions, they developed critical consciousness that informed their systems thinking lenses. Lave and Wenger (1991) considered the meaning of a support structure as "long-term, living relations between persons and their place and participation communities of practices" (p. 53). Freire (2000) described how a supportive group charged to effect change "is made neither by the leaders for the people, nor by the people for the leaders, but by both acting together in unshakable solidarity" (p. 129).

Network of Support

Humanizing leadership development space so that leaders became more vulnerable and established and nurtured trust was a first step in creating a network of support that they began to view as indispensable to their effective leadership thinking and actions. The supportive network as a generative space of reflection became an active part of the principals' lives as they used the space to be totally candid with each other about their daily struggles, engage in problem-solving through critical friends groups, decide on actions, and then reflect on the results of their leadership actions. Principal Lemon asserted his appreciation for the CPR colleagues: "I'm able to share my struggle as a new leader with my staff" because "you [team] always model humility and support me in my development as a leader" (Lemon, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022). Equipped with this layer of solidarity and support for each other, the CPR members

increased their epistemological understanding of the CRSL framework, which prepared them for praxis: deep reflection in order to undertake action for social justice.

Critical Reflection

As a result of the supportive structure, the leaders engaged in what Freire (2000) meant by praxis: deep critical reflection to enact informed social justice actions. This is not simply reflection, but a critical examination of the conditions that often are the root cause of issues. To interrupt oppression, the oppressed and oppressors must engage in praxis to achieve liberation and transform reality. Similarly, to transform reality, such as narrowing the opportunity gap that exists for our students of color, the CPR members leveraged the supportive structures to engage in critical reflection and situate their leadership practices in CRSL knowledge, skills, and dispositions before taking actions in public.

For instance, Principal Frost reflected on the importance of collaborating with district partners by inviting the Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) team to conduct a learning walk. She aimed to improve the feedback structures at their school. She asserted, "I think it was a great learning opportunity because it is not every day that you get all the heads of C&I to look at your practices and provide feedback. I look at it as an honor. I need to be strategic to support our school" (Frost, interview, November 3, 2022). In another example, Principal Bell pondered on his leadership style to promote collaboration with his staff. He asserted that how we exercise power or control when working with the staff is essential. He declared, "We do not want to replicate the dominant culture within our school. I do not ever want to be seen as one in a position to control others. We must exercise shared leadership" (Bell, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022). These examples illustrated the reflective practices that were not readily

apparent at the beginning of the PAR project. The support structures encouraged and sustained the CPR members' reflective practices and development.

Critical reflection requires critical consciousness (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al. (2016) asserted that a leader "needed to have an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving poor children of color" (p. 1,280). Khalifa (2018) declared that school leaders "must also critically examine the role of our school programs departments, hiring practices, enrichment courses, and other school structures. Because schools automatically reproduce oppressive structures unless challenged" (p. 60). The CPR team engaged in critical reflective practices, enhanced by the group structures, as they contemplated their schools' oppressive structures and applied systems thinking during our CPR meetings.

Systems Thinking

Through critical reflection, the CPR members' understanding of the culture in educational organizations and their deleterious impact increased from a state of awareness to the ability to identify oppressive school structures and move from thinking about individual instances of equity in their schools to understanding systems of oppression. "Systems thinking is a discipline for seeing wholes. It is a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things, for seeing patterns of change rather than static snapshots" (Senge, 1990, p. 68).

As a result, their critical reflection on oppressive systems helped them reconsider their position and their actions with social justice lenses. The CPR members reflected on the school-level systems, structures, and practices that supported our disadvantaged minoritized students. During the PAR Pre-cycle, the team developed a strong awareness of the oppressive and White supremacy structures within school systems. The increased awareness and knowledge fortified the CPR administrator's CRSL practices in PAR Cycle Two. Yet, as indicated in the PAR Cycle

Two evidence, the importance of relational or soft skills are necessary as leaders approach changes that address inequities. Leaders' demonstrated ability to leverage system thinking to improve school systems was essential to improve student outcomes. System thinking as a code constituted 17% in frequency from evidence, indicating the CPR members' growing systemic knowledge and skill. As a result, three out of the four administrators focused on improving their schools' ILT or leadership team functions. Principal Bell identified a need for a clear teaching and learning focus.

In contrast, Principal Moon sought to formalize the ILT structure as they leveraged the systems to improve the school culture and student learning. As for Principal Lemon, he focused on elevating shared leadership and building out the ILT as a critical first-year goal. Finally, Principal Frost partnered with and resourced the district partners to improve their school feedback structures (CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022). The CPR members' developing systems thinking reflected their attempts to improve and interrupt their schools' oppressive systems and structures. Principal Lemon summarized the need for cohesion and synergy between school sites and the central office. He emphatically stated, "I see 555 [District] as one. Central office teams must work with schools as a team in order for us to be successful," illustrating the importance of school systems at the meso and micro levels (Bell, CPR meeting notes, November 3, 2022).

Enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership behaviors as a form of action is on-going. As indicated, the school leaders were strategic in creating equitable and productive systems, structures, and practices to improve the outcomes of their students.

As much as I was hoping for our CPR members to begin enacting Culturally Responsive School Leadership behaviors, the findings clearly illustrated that the pre-condition of a

humanizing leadership development space is indispensable in forming a network of support that embraces vulnerability and relational trust. Acting in solving complex problems requires a supportive structure, critical reflection, and systems thinking, buttressed by the network of support consisting of community members closest to the issues and best situated to discover answers and solutions (Guajardo et al., 2016).

Conclusion

In PAR Cycle Two, the themes of humanizing learning space and Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices constituted the findings of the study. In addition, the CPR members demonstrated their Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices by affirming their professional identities, engaging in critical reflection, building their leadership knowledge, and enacting culturally responsive leadership in their contexts.

The cumulative data yielded two key findings:

1. A humanizing leadership development space is a precondition for Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CSRL).
2. A supportive structure promotes praxis and systems thinking that precede effective leadership action.

A network of support is essential in promoting critical reflection and understanding of the deleterious effects of oppressive systems, structures, and practices at different organizational levels. These preconditions of vulnerability and relational trust afford the school leaders the necessary space to cultivate their Culturally Responsive School Leadership reflection and actions with greater readiness, confidence, and skill sets.

As the lead researcher of this study, I was cognizant of the importance of creating a humanizing space in all convenings because culturally responsive leadership is attending to the

humanity of those we work with and serve. Pursuing social justice within our educational system requires a collective endeavor and educational leaders to foster and expand our support network. In the final chapter, I present summaries of the PAR cycles and discuss the claims and implications resulting from the process and reflect on my leadership learning.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Understanding requires not just a moment of perception, but a continuous awareness, a continuous state of inquiry without conclusion. (Lee, 1975, p. 19)

Like many minoritized youths who feel excluded, I felt a sense of pride and affirmation about my identity when I saw Bruce Lee as an Asian martial artist and a representation of my people on the big screen. Most people know of Bruce Lee as a Kung Fu artist, but not a philosopher. Since I first studied to become a school administrator, my vision and philosophy was to be adaptive, malleable, and in constant motion of learning and inquiry as Lee often espoused in his martial arts. Lee described his martial art form—Jeet Kune Do—as how one must adapt because, like water, one must become fluid and shift in real-life moments and contexts. He reflected and learned from others and, as a result, his discoveries and learning influenced his craft. He was a practitioner and researcher. Similarly, educational leadership is complex and requires adaptability, reflection, and pursuit of acquiring knowledge and developing situational awareness via dialogue and interactions with others. To this day, I follow this approach in life and in leadership. When I embarked on the PAR project, an extensive inquiry process in pursuit of improving the outcomes of our students who are most marginalized by our societal and school systems, the four school administrators I selected as participants exemplified the first stanza of this poem by Marge Piercy:

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

As the poem communicates, as administrators, we want to be of use to our schools and to each other in finding a way forward to be and continue to become equity warriors. Similar to Bruce Lee, these school administrators were open to reflect on their craft critically and learn from each other in the spaces provided through this study. They were ready to jump into the water of being and becoming culturally responsive leaders and the fluid environment we co-created was a source of sustenance for their growth.

During the PAR project and study, I was honored to partner with four equity-minded, co-practitioner researchers (CPRs) through this inquiry expedition. With the dual roles as activist co-practitioner researchers and elementary school site administrators in an urban school district, the CPR members demonstrated an unwavering commitment, resilience, and fortitude to show up as change agents. They exhibited vulnerability and humility as learners to actualize continuous improvement in their schools (Yurkofsky et al., 2020). As equity warriors, they demonstrated adaptability and perseverance to be like seals who "swim with sure strokes." During the three cycles of inquiry, we deepened our collegial relationships, built new knowledge, and cultivated our leadership dispositions and skills.

The purpose of the PAR study was to examine the extent to which school leaders identify and enact culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) practices with the support of their supervisor. We focused on building our capacity to enact CRSL behaviors; anchored by the work of Khalifa (2018), we were committing to improving the life and learning outcomes for the students who are most marginalized by the educational system. According to the most recent 2021-22 California Smarter Balanced Assessment results in English Language Arts and Mathematics, the African American and Hispanic/Latino students in SFUSD scored approximately fifty percentage points lower than their White and Asian counterparts

(www.sfusd.edu). These performance results do not reflect the students' abilities but rather the impacts from systemic and oppressive structures and practices within the walls of our schools that inhibited students from maximizing their full potential. We defined the issue as an opportunity gap for Black and Brown students (Boykin, 2021). Ladson-Billings (2006) named these repetitive conditions the educational debt—the accumulation of historical, socio-economic, political, and moral factors that tragically and systematically influence possibilities for certain students of color. The CPR team defined the theory of action as both a school reform effort and a moral obligation: If school leaders are supported in increasing their knowledge, skills, and dispositions as culturally responsive school leaders through a reimagined relationship with the supervisor, then they can enact culturally responsive leadership practices at their school sites.

Throughout the three cycles of inquiry, the CPR members participated in monthly CPR meetings, one-on-one check ins at their respective schools, individual and whole group interviews, and observations. I collected data from the meetings, interviews, observations, and reflective memos. Enacting our espoused values of CRSL required the principals to be fluid like water and identify and change conditions internally and externally. As a principal supervisor, I changed my orientation from hierarchical to collegial to build the capacity of the principals (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, 2021). As a researcher using iterative qualitative evidence to make decisions, I found that the PAR experience informed and sharpened my practitioner lens. In this chapter, I make two claims from the study and substantiate the findings from the extant literature. Then, I discuss the implications and my leadership development learning.

Discussion

The findings from the PAR cycles of inquiry show that a humanizing leadership development space is a necessary precondition for school leaders to practice culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). School leaders in a supportive structure that promotes critical reflection and systems thinking can effectively engage in praxis (Freire, 1970)—a generative space that precedes effective leadership actions focused on equity and social justice. Educational leaders do not acquire new knowledge and skills alone; they need and benefit from a supportive and trusting environment of peers who share values and are committed to individual and collective growth as leaders. In such a space, they feel safe to talk about their misgivings, missteps, misfortunes, and worries so that they can enact their espoused values (Argyris & Schön, 1974). In this case, as a district supervisor, I reimagined my role, adopted a collegial coaching stance, and created conducive conditions for school leaders to be vulnerable, take risks, and form a support network. Through fortifying their collegial relationships, they examined their dispositions, knowledge, and skills so that they felt supported and confident to act and lead in the public sphere.

In their book on renewing schools from the inside out, Glickman and Mette (2020) offer guidance to leaders in supporting educative communities by systematically changing the ways they operate. By understanding the principals' adult development needs and operating from their self-defined moral authority, a conscientious supervisor can support principals to identify and act on inequities. The authors stress that, with the right supports, school leaders can promote democratic governance and community-based research similar to the participatory action and activist research I used in this project. As a result, principals can mobilize their schools and communities to act from the inside out, using street data (Safir & Dugan, 2021) to make better

real-time decisions about what to do. Similar to the direction that Grubb and Tredway (2010) offered leaders and teachers, leaders can work collaboratively in their local contexts to address issues of equity. As well, they can have the impact in schools that Grissom et al. (2021a) identified as essential to changing school outcomes; they can be instructional leaders who engage in instructionally focused interactions with teachers, build a productive climate that is equity-driven, facilitate professional learning for staff based on useful school level data, and manage resources strategically to accomplish durable academic and social-emotional outcomes. Principals matter, and they can have stronger effects if they interrogate themselves and operate with equity and CRSL practices in mind as a moral compass for their leadership actions.

Through the PAR process, I observed that the co-practitioner researchers (CPRs) adopted a stronger equity orientation and exhibited equity warrior stances (Leverett, 2002; Mitchell, 2018). Leverett (2002) describes that equity warriors "are willing to grow and learn to become more effective in advancing the equity agenda in their school, district, or community. Any effort to achieve equitable outcomes for all learners requires the presence of these mighty warriors for social justice" (p. 1). Mitchell (2018) provides a view of the ancient traditions of being an equity warrior by adhering to a "specific code of conduct that involved respect, honor, protection, and service" (p. 153). The CPR members were modern equity warriors devoted to justice and honoring the culture and assets of their school communities. As a result of the findings and my learning in the process, I make two claims that contribute to our understanding of leadership development and efficacy. First, in order to foster relational trust within an organization, synchronizing the life world with the systems world is paramount (Awati, 2013; Baxter, 2011; Habermas, 1984). Secondly, effective adult learning is best supported by structures that *hold* adults and a collegial coaching orientation that honors them as they grow and develop (Drago-

Severson, 2012; Glickman, 2002). Organizational actors should not have to separate their life or personal worlds from the system world.. However, they inhabit a space in which the systems world has colonized the life world with technical processes – and, in their case, intentions toward equity, but actions that have another result. Thus, they had to decolonize the ways they have had unwittingly taken on the systems world and shift their ontological perspectives to enact more meaningful change. Through a personal as well as an epistemological journey, we gradually understood what it meant for them as principals and myself as the supervisor to use our personal strengths and value to humanize the schools. To show up authentically, they needed to align their personal values with their actions as professionals, and the organization or system needs to honor how adults learn best. If this equilibrium is disturbed, trust is diminished and eroded. Therefore, as a supervisor who adopted a collegial coaching stance, I co-created a culturally responsive structure with the four participating principals that supported leaders in developing themselves so they could address systems thinking and effectivelly address inequities in their schools.

Synchronizing the Life World with the System World

Awati (2013) describes the Habermas (1984) framing of the lifeworld as the everyday world that includes family life, culture, and social interactions. In contrast, the system refers to patterns, structures, and practices that serve the interests of organizations. However, both the lifeworld and system world are subject to social reproduction forces that profess to reform again and again but do not change either the social or the organization process (Cuban, 1990). A cautionary tale for change in a school district is that instead of authentic change, the organizational actors, with the best of intentions, reinforce inequitable social or organizational structures that do not support transformative leadership practices (Baxter, 2011; Shields, 2017).

In fact, Habermas (1973) understood these phenomena; in discussing crises that arise in

systems, he concluded that systems often tend to operate in familiar ways instead of attempting novel problem-solving. Likewise in a lifeworld, members of a social system can "assert themselves in a hypercomplex environment through altering . . . goal values . . . to maintain themselves at a new level of control" (Habermas, 1973, p. 3)—replicating a social structure that is hierarchical at best and oppressive at worst. For example, in our situation, while the district espouses an anti-racist mission statement, the institution does not always appear to promote a balance between the lifeworld and the system for those who serve in leadership roles; the system decided how leaders should approach anti-racism without actually asking school site leaders for input. In addition, the system places high administrative demands for school administrators. Besides the management responsibilities of staffing, budget, and discipline that require site administrators to make tough decisions for their school priorities, the principals are called upon to be leaders of equity and instructional leaders, but the leaders may not have the necessary foundation in useful practices to carry out district goals or mandates. Finally, every district, including ours, is highly influenced by the scientific management model that dates to the early 1900s, and performance efficiency coupled with a bureaucratic and hierarchical organizational structure dominate how district supervisors relate to school site administrators (Honig & Rainey, 2015; Steffes, 2008; Taneja et al., 2011). Thus, decolonizing the life world and using re-informed narratives of self to humanize the systems world is no small task.

As a result, many leaders find themselves in a perpetual hamster wheel—maintaining the organizational operations rather than focusing on the essential matters that would impact student outcomes. If the lifeworld and system are not better synchronized, "the lifeworld is thus devalued and becomes less and less important in the daily lives of people" (Awati, 2013, para. 10). Indeed, the very problems that a system (i.e., school district) is trying to solve are met with technical

solutions that do not consider "the practical domain of the lifeworld [or] the processes of meaning-making among individuals and communities in everyday life" (Fleming, 2002, p. 3). Coming into the PAR project, my goal was to reimagine the supervisory role to support our leaders in building their individual and collective capacities to enact CRSL behaviors in service of improving students' equitable academic and social outcomes. However, we did not and should not dive into external action without creating the conditions for school leaders that are conducive to learning and connecting. Thus, creating a humanizing leadership development space was essential. To accomplish authentic change at school sites, we needed to have opportunities for dialogue and reflection in our CPR group, and I needed to reimagine my role so that we could collectively interrupt social reproduction and create equitable conditions for leadership learning that they could transfer to teachers, students, and families.

Humanizing Structures

As noted in the findings, a humanizing leadership development space is critical in fostering relational trust so that the co-practitioner researchers (CPR) could be vulnerable in their capacity building. In the process, their values and identities as equity warriors strengthened over time. In facilitating a space anchored by intentional structures, we operationalized the Community Learning Exchange (CLE) axioms at every convening as an intentional means of balancing the lifeworld with the school and district systems. We held one CLE axiom in high regard: Conversation and dialogue are critical for relationships and pedagogy. With the aim of capacity building using the CRSL framework, we embraced our identity stories and our professional stories as vital components of synchronizing the two worlds. As Guajardo et al. (2016) noted, the self, organization, and community are intertwined. Therefore, CPR members found storytelling a key to navigating between their personal and public spheres. Guajardo et al.

(2016) asserted that telling stories helps make meaning of our personal experience, and "they describe the agency that is manifest through the work. The stories illustrate that this work has to be lived, because by living it the work becomes more full and more sustainable" (Guajardo et al., 2016, p. 43). Through storytelling, CPR members cultivated vulnerability; in our small group, they shared their foibles and shortcomings as school leaders. As a result, they took risks and changed their interactions and actions as leaders at their site.

Another CLE axiom I highlighted in this study, which further promoted a humanizing of the existing structures is the axiom of "learning and leadership are dynamic social processes". By demonstrating to my CPR team that I was willing to be vulnerable and take risks along with them in our time together, I promoted an egalitarianism that Bolman and Deal (2010) identify as a necessary element in humanizing leadership structures. I suspended my position as supervisor and facilitated my time with the team in a way that blurred the lines of supervisor and subordinate. As Khilji (2019) describes, humanistic leadership "is not position-centered . . . it is social, shared, and relational, in which both leaders and followers participate" (para 4). Reiterating the significance of reflection as an essential component of humanistic leadership, Khilji (2019) further asserts that leaders must reflect on their human experiences in order to move themselves and their team onto a "higher level of awareness" and create the conditions necessary for people to act and problem solve (para. 10). Humanizing leadership structures further entails that leaders' work with others that encourages "learning from mistakes" and promotes the use of dialogue to problem-solve. These methods develop a more empathetic and compassionate approach to leadership evident in the work with my CPR team (Khilji, 2019). The space created with the CPR team illustrates the synchronizing of the life world and the system world within our district.

Relational Trust

Relational trust is a necessary precondition for enacting social justice leadership and an abstract resource for school improvement—a resource that cannot be bought but one which organizational actors can co-create and nurture. In a study on school resources, Grubb (2009) contended that the abstract resource of relational trust is vital to the outcomes for school improvement. Without this resource, other strategic actions or resources may be futile and do not produce desired results. Trust is formed slowly and is the byproduct of accumulative, vulnerable, and courageous interactions and connections (Brown, 2012). During the PAR project and study, I was keenly aware of the unbalanced power dynamics. As the lead researcher and the CPR's supervisor, I needed to authorize different conditions for our interactions by establishing conditions to promote collegial interactions among CPR members. I needed to be critically conscious of my role in authorizing change and then stepping away from that role and becoming a co-participant. By leveraged storytelling, we humanized our typical system or professional world. By synchronizing these spheres of being and action, the CPR balanced their personal and public spheres. The CPR members simultaneously learned about CRSL practices and developed confidence in their roles as equity leaders as they co-constructed new knowledge and had a forum for their worries, challenges, misgivings, and mistakes. As a result, they fortified their knowledge, skills, and dispositions to act in the public sphere or system world with more confidence and intentionality.

Establishing the preconditions of humanizing structures and relational trust in small principal support groups, is vital to equity leadership. CPR members experienced novel ways of sharing their identities and their leadership challenges. While these processes do not ensure that leaders—either in their life world or systems world—will change, their actions and informed

analysis provided indicators that they were different as people and as principals.

Systems Thinking

As Bruce Lee reminds us the importance of adaptive leadership, being fluid or "be like water" is essential in shifting the systems and structures in which how we interrupt the inequities prevalent in our schools. Kendi (2019) asserts that interrupting systematic racisms can be achieved "if we focus on power instead of people, if we focus on changing policy instead of groups of people. It's possible if we overcome our cynicism about the permanence of racism" (p. 11). Throughout the PAR study, the four CPR members developed their epistemologic understanding of the deleterious effect of the school level policies, systems, structures, and practice that deny student access to learning and achieving a humanizing educational experience. To think systemically is to interrogate the existing racist policies within our schools, districts, and at the national levels. Kendi (2019) defines racism as the "marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities" (p. 18). He further posits that a racist policies are measures that sustain and produce racial inequity between racial groups. With this understanding in mind, our CPR members cultivated their systems thinking as a charge and a means to interrupt inequities at their schools with the support of one another.

As the lead researcher, in order to move my CPR members to a place where they could shift their thinking around power structures and systems, I focused on fortifying their disposition, skills, and knowledge to become transformative and adaptive leaders. Several factors influenced leaders' growth and development as adult learners and supported them to co-construct knowledge as well as develop new skill sets to enact their beliefs as equity warriors, in their transition to being and becoming transformative leaders (Shields, 2010). Shields (2017) describes four factors with which transformative leaders need to content and develop strategies

for addressing: volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). In establishing a Community of Practice in which leaders felt safe, we co-created a brave space for reflection and action (Quadros-Meis, 2021) and supported school leaders whose daily realities often included all of these characteristics. As a result of the structure we co-created, they co-constructed knowledge and skills in a safe space and supported each other to inform their systems thinking and decision-making as culturally responsive school leaders.

Community of Practice

During the initial stages of the PAR study, I considered different approaches to supporting adult learning and growth, especially with a group of school leaders with diverse backgrounds. Within our organization, the common practice for adult learning is that school leaders receive information from a professional development session, largely through the banking method of pedagogy of depositing through using power points (Freire, 1970), and are expected to enact at their schools whatever they supposedly learned. However, adults, and for that matter, students, do not necessarily learn effectively using that method. We used the tenets of the Community of Practice (CoP) throughout the PAR project because that structure supported a more useful theory of how adults learn: constructive-developmental (Drago-Severson, 2009; 2012). Learners co-construct knowledge and, in the case of constructing knowledge about CRSL, reframe their epistemological schemata about how to learn and what is most effective in using CRSL as a foundation for action. As noted in the literature review section, CoP is similar to an equity-centered professional learning (EC-PLC) structure. Spain's (2009) project evaluation results of the EC-PLC structure for SFUSD principals in 2008-2010 influenced the design principles I used to engage the CPR members in their learning and development as culturally responsive leaders.

Given this perspective, Drago-Severson (2012) says that a constructivist learning environment includes a space for dialogue in which adults feel *held* or protected and can be responsive to changing needs and ways of knowing. "Holding environments offer developmentally appropriate supports and challenges to adults who make sense of their experiences in different ways" (Drago-Severson, 2009, p. 57). During our CPR meetings, we adopted structures in which we made meaning through reflective practice and engaged in problem-solving through providing diverse perspectives on a given issue, using a critical friends consultancy protocol for addressing issues. When adults felt a sense of being held in a place, they became self-authoring and transformative knowers (Drago-Severson, 2012). As a result, they learned to "scaffold decision-making through dialogue" because they made time for "discussion of complexities and generation of personal goals" (p. 41).

Lave and Wenger (1991) described such holding environments as places that engender identity conception and foster "long-term, living relationships between persons and their place and participation in communities of practice" (p. 53), thus affirming the CPR members' personal and professional identities and offering a place to merge their lifeworld with their systems world. The CoP structure provided CPR members with the space to interact with one another regularly to develop new knowledge and skills, recycle old ones, and reimagine new ways of knowing and understanding their collective enterprise (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Militello et al. (2009) validated that successful school leaders work collaboratively and collectively with others to effect change—the very essence of our processes in the PAR project and study.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership: Epistemic and Ontological Stances

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) is critical in adult learning and development within an organizational system and in leveraging systems thinking to interrupt

inequities in educational settings. Using the CRSL framework, we developed new knowledge and shifted our epistemic stance as well as our perspectives or ontological stances. Two essential tenets of CRSL and the PAR study were building relationships and identifying the assets of participant cultural identities, which provided a foundation for all subsequent conversations as an abstract resource of relational trust we could draw on. During three cycles of inquiry, the CPR members built their CRSL knowledge, shifted their perspectives, and enacted practices or behaviors to effect greater outcomes for minoritized students. During this enterprise, our initial goal was to build our knowledge to enact CRSL practices within a seemingly intractable system world. As the CPR members fostered authentic relationships and affirmed their personal and professional identities which contributed to their leadership development, they deepened their epistemological understanding about the educational system and cultivated their systems thinking. In navigating the public sphere of the PAR project, we leveraged the Community of Practice (CoP) as an essential CRSL structure that provided me the opportunity to use collegial coaching support to further their leadership development.

Reimagined Role for a District Supervisor: Collegial Coaching

Collegial coaching, in which I considered the CPR members' identities and assets, was a crucial factor that supported their deepening understanding of the system and their transfer from espoused to enacted values. As the principal supervisor of participants with diverse cultural backgrounds, life and work experiences, and varying levels of skills and knowledge, I needed to assess their levels of readiness to take on the work and inspire their passion for leading the equity work (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970; Knowles, 1980). As well, I needed to coach in a way that Glickman (2002) terms non-directive by using constructivist listening, paraphrasing, and using mediational questioning so that the principal could make a self-authored decision for

improvement. While collegial coaching connotes peer coaching and I remained a supervisor, I needed to be a professional colleague who fully supported principals; in essence, I modeled a form of distributed leadership in which we each used our strongest assets to inform the CPR discussions and enact CRSL in their schools (Spillane, 2013; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). As Drago-Severson (2009) contends, the coach or facilitator of the learning space must "recognize, honor, and confirm who the person is, without pushing urgently for change," and when the learners are ready, offer challenges that "permit the person to grow toward a new way of knowing" (p. 58). I was cognizant of this shift in my reimagining the supervisor role as I developed activities in which we used personal narratives and Critical Friends' Group (CFG) to promote critical self-reflection and cross-pollination of acquiring knowledge through dialogue (Militello et al., 2019). As I approached this change, I was somewhat shocked to learn how long this type of coaching has been advocated and how little we have used it. Collegial coaching can change school cultures and "is a part of a constructivist supervisory model that includes strategies for engaging in reflective conversations that both support and challenge collegial thinking [and use] dialogue skills such as pausing, paraphrasing, and probing" (Delany et al. 1998, p. 4).

Hargrove (2008) asserted that the primary purpose of leadership coaching is to increase the individual's or group's capacity to obtain targeted results and maximize their organizational development. Attending to the needs and assets that the members come with was essential in CRSL practices. The coaching occurred during the CPR meetings, one-on-one check-in meetings, and other learning space in the form of establishing the conditions for dialogue, reflection, and action. We engaged in inquiries, asked each other questions, and listened to one another—the soft skills needed to enact CRSL behaviors. My use of a collegial coaching stance

infused with CRSL, in a thoughtful, intentional, and strategic fashion furthered the CPR members' systems thinking.

Multiple studies recommend a change in the district supervisor role (Goldring et al., 2020; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014; Honig & Rainey, 2020a; Thessin & Louis, 2019). When central office supervisors come to the work with a teaching rather than directive or managerial orientation, and intentionally create other conditions to foster principal success, they are more likely to fully support principals at schools sites (Honig 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). Thessin and Louis (2019) report that middle-tier managers, as I am, need to have better ratios of supervisor principal and district funding to maintain ratios to support job-embedded coaching. Goldring et al. (2020) recommend training the "supervisor to develop their capacity to support principals" (p. xvi). Based on the experiences in this particular small study, I would posit that the ratios are not the sole issue, and that supervisors need professional learning in using a constructivist or collegial coaching approach. In addition, if we would design principal support networks based on the Community Learning Exchange principles and support district supervisors to use them, principal support networks could be self-sustaining support spaces for school leader growth and learning and decision-making, but they have to be places where principals feel held and honored.

Cultivating Systems Thinking

Kendi (2019) reminds us that "racisim is a powerful collection of racist policies that lead to racial inequity and are substantiated by racist ideas. Antiracism is a powerful collection of antiracist policies that lead to racial equity and are substantiated by antiracist ideas" (p. 20). To be culturally responsive is to develop our systems thinking in ways that would shift our practices and engender policies and structures that are of antiracist. Our CPR members were committed in

refining their systems thinking to achieve our collective goals, promoting greater outcomes for our minoritized students.

Cultivating systems thinking was central to the CPRs' growing epistemology of CRSL leadership development. Once principals clearly see the system and its historical, political, socio-economic, and moral structures as bankrupt and owing a debt to the many students and families they have not served (Ladson-Billings, 2006), then they cannot *unsee* the inequitable system in their midst—ones that they might be unwittingly upholding despite their best intentions (Habermas, 1973). For me, that illuminating moment occurred when the CPR members grasped the concept of epistemology described by Khalifa (2018). Khalifa (2018) contends:

> community based epistemologies and perceptions have often been historically different from (and marginalized by) school-based, or school-centric epistemologies. This has posed a long-running, complex problem for schools, and an even bigger problem for students, families, and communities. This is true because school-based epistemologies and interpretations have been normalized in schools, and educators have exclusive power to define how students and families are characterized and treated in schools. (p. 40)

Based on this newly acquired knowledge, the CPR members began to interrogate their school systems and structures that intentionally or unintentionally marginalized minoritized students. The co-practitioner researchers applied that same CRSL thinking—learned and discussed in the CoP space and during coaching—to their approaches in supporting students and families. During our Critical Friends Group (CFG), the CPR members discussed and contemplated the different structures that advantaged or disadvantaged the students who are most marginalized in their school communities. As indicated in the findings, three CPR administrators focused on improving their Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) structures as a vehicle to improve student

learning outcomes, whereas one member collaborated with district partners in refining their school feedback structure or practices, a strategy to improve instruction and student learning.

Their growing understanding of systemic structures, practices, and policies and their impact on students shifted their approach in problem-solving. By employing systems thinking, school leaders can filter out the less essential elements of the school's challenges and identify the most important issues they need to address (Benoliel et al., 2019). Leaders could apply the CRSL approach by seeing the entire landscape of complex organizations and articulating a systems thinking approach to mitigate problematic practices (Shaked & Schechter, 2020). Weiss (1995) contends that school reform is difficult because the institution of schooling, with its deep undercurrent of structures, policies, norms, and rules, often trumps any interests, ideology, and information that might be useful for changing schools. By engaging the school leaders in our monthly CPR meetings in the CoP structure and examining the heretofore unnoticed systems at play in their schools, the school leaders transferred their moral imperative to actions. Through our coaching conversations, the CPR leaders reframed daily micro level occurrences and actions to systemic, thus making the structural components explicit as they challenged inequities (Rigby & Tredway, 2015). Through changing systems, merging the lifeworld more consciously with the systems world, reimagining the role of the supervisor, and most importantly, providing space for school leaders to co-construct *the why, the how, and then the what* of Culturally Responsive School Leadership and Sinek's (2011) golden circle, we can shift school cultures and how principals experience and enact their work as equity warrior school leaders.

In conclusion, school leaders do not acquire new knowledge or enact CRSL behaviors readily; the principal supervisor must create the conditions that synchronize the lifeworld with the system world so that we can interrupt the hierarchies that exist in institutions. When central

office leaders promote horizontal and collegial relationships in a learning space, relational trust as an abstract resource increases. When organizational actors, school leaders, and principal supervisors engage in the system informed by the CRSL lens, they are more likely to utilize collaborative structures to promote deep learning. In addition, all organizational actors benefit and can use collegial coaching within the organization and leverage systems thinking from a non-dominant perspective. Organizational actors should not have to act differently in their personal and public spheres. In enacting our values as equity warriors, we must feel supported and not alienated when we do our work in the system world.

Implications

The PAR study focused on increasing the co-practitioner researcher capacity to be culturally responsive instructional school leaders. The findings informed us that enacting CRSL practices and behaviors requires a set of pre-conditions for humanizing leadership development space and a supportive structure that promotes critical reflection and systems thinking to inform the school leaders' actions. In this section, I detail the practice, policy, and research implications of the study findings.

Implications for Practice

For school administrators to lead school reform efforts to improve the outcomes of students marginalized by the educational system, they must recognize that new conditions for professional learning and development are central. We learned that creating a humanizing leadership space for the CPR members with the support of like-minded school leaders further informed what professional development opportunities could and should look like. We discovered that a supportive structure was crucial in promoting reflection and acting proactively through a systems thinking lens to form authentic relationships (Senge, 1990).

In SFUSD, our current professional development structures for school administrators occur through the monthly engagement of the instructional coherence initiative (citywide meetings). I appreciate the targeted focus. However, the facilitators of this learning space usually operate from a banking education model (Freire, 1970). The participants receive information without deep and sustained critical reflection to make meaning and take strategic action. To create space to make meaning, we need to leverage the monthly cohort meetings for our networks to unpack what they learned from the larger convening, further our anti-racist efforts by engaging in text study, and reduce the time we spend on managerial matters. However, the cohort meeting space often competes with other demands. Making time for sustained in-depth professional development has always been challenging for our school leaders. Based on the findings from the PAR study, creating small teams in which principals choose the relevant topics that align with the school district's vision would be viable in supporting leadership development. The same experience for school leader professional learning pervades districts across the country, and this study could clarify how to engage leaders more effectively in learning and leading.

The PAR study findings confirm that relationships matter. When a small group of leaders regularly convened to tackle similar equity challenges within their school context, the school leaders co-constructed relational trust that is vital to success. In addition, a coach or skilled facilitator is vital in leading the leadership development work so that there is an intentional charge or goal for the group connected to equity outcomes for students. Sustainability is essential; the team remained together for an extended period, forming a support network that was available beyond the meetings. When school leaders have a safe space to address themselves as leaders and discuss their challenges and shortcomings, they are best situated to discover answers

to local concerns (Guajardo et al., 2016). Therefore, the implication for practice is to rethink the role of the principal supervisors. Supervisors must understand their role in creating learning spaces, such as adopting the CoP structure to engage school administrators in humanizing approaches where they can co-construct relational trust and develop a support network to tackle complex systemic issues.

Implications for Policy

Education policies require greater emphasis on promoting leadership development for the site and central office administrators. The study implications inform the need to reimagine what leadership development looks like and what resources are necessary to support continuous learning at all levels.

Macro Level

Educational policies at the national level should provide resources and measures to support institutions and districts in developing central office supervisors to improve site administrators' efficacy. Often, central office leadership development is limited. Universities and other institutions focus on school administrators' initial and novice development, but that could expand to developing principal supervisors' knowledge of what needs to be in place to support school leaders. Federal funding should be earmarked for local school districts to offer research-based professional development opportunities or incentives for continuous improvement purposes.

Meso Level

At the meso level, it is vital to the success and efficacy of school leadership to allocate continuous improvement resources for site administrators. Because school leaders should focus on essential matters such as improving instruction and facilitating change efforts (Grissom et al.,

2021a), the local school districts need to examine the ways they interrupt school leaders' ability to stay on track. A recent example occurred when principals were required to spend hours on COVID contact tracing even though that was not a skill they possessed nor a responsibility they should have had. Districts need to systematize the principals' operational and reporting functions, such as staffing, budget management, and material procurements so that principals can be equity and instructional leaders.

At the district level, the principal supervisors' role should be reimagined or refined to engage in collegial coaching and holding CoP or EC-PLC learning spaces for school administrators. Goldring et al. (2018) asserted that it is vital for supervisors to build authentic and trusting relationships to sustain collegial partnerships; therefore, the district should avoid frequent, arbitrary reorganization. District decision-makers should rethink repurposing efforts and limit training that does not serve the purpose of developing school principals. Instead, principal supervisors should have the resources to strengthen their role to lead effectively. In our recent efforts to support leaders in developing their capacity at our PITCH professional development, we leveraged the CoP spaces to fortify the small groups of participants' working relationship and create the brave space (Brown, 2012; Quadros-Meis, 2021) that would allow them to be vulnerable and develop the necessary relational trust that supports their epistemic development. As a district supervisior, I created the CoP structures for our school leaders within our cohort meetings. Leveraging this CoP space must also be expanded at scale for not only site leaders but also department partners to collaborate. In this new imagined professional learning space, district and site leaders will be able to develop new ways of knowing and collective perspectives to work in alignment to create greater outcomes for our minoritized students.

Micro Level

District professional development offerings for school administrators are well-intentioned. However, most opportunities are not personalized and do not factor in meaning-making content with the support of a coach or peers. In order to enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership behaviors at the micro level (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018), site administrators should engage in holding environments such as CoP structures and should participate in joint work such as conducting classroom observations and discussing their Focus of Practice. These practices could engender dialogue and critical reflection, which is an essential and new way of operating professional development. Mirroring the humanistic leadership approach (Khilji, 2019), which I facilitated with the CPR team, site leaders could enact dialogue to decenter their positional authority. When school leaders become adept in authentic dialogue with other constituents, leaders and supervisors, they replicate the same structures for their staff as a pathway to authentic school reform and accountability.

Implications for Research

The methodological design of the participatory action research (PAR) incorporated the CLE axioms and Community of Practice (CoP) structure. The PAR design attempted to analyze the work of four elementary school principals and the principal supervisor in examining how site administrators increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders. In comparison, there was extensive research on Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), but limited research on the Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) framework.

The PAR was a dynamic and collaborative process because the cycles of inquiry were conducted by and with the school leaders who were insiders to the organization (Herr & Anderson, 2014). This data-gathering and analysis approach differs significantly from traditional

data-collection methods such as surveys and questionnaires. As a data collection method, the CLE protocols yielded insight into how the four school leaders developed their CRSL knowledge, dispositions, and skills. The CLE data collection method can be used in future formal and informal studies.

The methodological design of the PAR included the CoP in which co-practitioner researchers interrogated and reflected on their practices through cycles of inquiry, deepened their CRSL knowledge, and enacted culturally responsive leadership behaviors. The research has implications for school administrators, legislators, and district leaders as it unequivocally identified deliberate behaviors and actions necessary to make meaningful improvements. Central office administrators or principal supervisors should participate in PAR cycles utilizing the communities of practice and Community Learning Exchanges as a basis of their engagement and become researchers of their work.

Limitations

Having four Co-Participant Researchers (CPR) is a small sample size and affects the outcomes; therefore, to reduce the limitations the results may need to be more representative. Further, a lead researcher, who is the school leaders' direct supervisor, may inhibit the CPR members from fully engaging, preventing them from taking more significant risks, being vulnerable in their learning, and cultivating their authentic accountability. More research is needed to study the ideal conditions for increasing school leaders' capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders. However, Hale (2008) states that the standard of validity for activist research is the usefulness to participants, and the participants in this study found the iterative evidence, based on meeting dialogue and school site observations, useful to their shifts to be culturally responsive leaders.

Leadership Development

The inflection point or the advent of my leadership development dates back to early in my life. As I reflect on my formative years, I realize that my educational experience as a second language learner and an immigrant student was at best substandard. I became a teacher to re-educate myself and ensure that students like me would have a better opportunity to succeed. I became a literacy coach because I wanted to expand the impact on more students by supporting the continuous improvement of other teachers. I became a school principal because I wanted to ensure we had a collective of teachers and support staff who provided the students with the highest quality of teaching and learning so that the students we serve would be given the opportunity and provided the equitable resources for them to thrive and become productive members in our community or society. For the same reason, I became an assistant superintendent in an urban school district to elevate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions of a cadre of equity school leaders. Their efforts can lift others so that all our students are given a legitimate chance to succeed in school and life. My motivation has always been about students and interrupting the predictable outcomes, especially students whom oppressive systemic and structural societal and educational systems have minoritized.

As I reflect on this leadership journey for the last two and a half years, I see that my growth lies in creating humanizing spaces as a model to be human first, fostering relational trust by equalizing power dynamics, listening as a form of research to make informed decisions, and leveraging my voice as a tool and agency to advocate for those who are inhibited from advocating for themselves.

Humanizing Spaces

Relationships matter—and matter in ways we cannot overstate. Early in my coaching

practice, I had the wrong mindset about leadership and how to engage people in a humanizing way. My former attitude was, "If I could do it, so can you." This experience as a neophyte literacy coach humbled me because adult learning was vastly different from engaging students who were young and impressionable. Adults needed relationship forming and trust building. Even as a school principal, I worked hard to create space for teachers to connect and learn. Guajardo et al. (2016) asserted that "CLE is neither a project nor an isolated event—it is a way of life" (p. 23). This quote did not resonate with me until I reflected on the conditions in creating the learning space for the CPR participants. The axioms permeated and infused how I create the conditions for convening:

1. Learning and leadership are dynamic social processes.
2. Conversations are critical and central pedagogical processes.
3. The people closest to the issues are best situated to discover answers to local concerns.
4. Crossing boundaries enriches development and the educational processes.
5. Hopes and change are built on assets and dreams of locals and their communities. (Guajardo et al., 2016)

Grasping the intended meaning of the five axioms liberated my approach to intentionally engaging others in a humanizing way. I held every space, whether brief or extensive, as an opportunity to learn and be human with the participants. I incorporated storytelling as a routine and a strategy to goad reflection and learn from others—their ideas, hearts, and intentions. This practice extended to how I now hold all meetings and professional development opportunities. Of course, not every meeting would require participants to share their life stories. Nevertheless, by sharing a little bit about themselves, their thinking, and thoughts, the stories shed light on who

they are and provide me an entry point to engage them as human beings first and forge the relationship forming required for equity work.

Modeling Relational Trust as an Equalizing Force

As I noted in the discussion section, relational trust is an abstract resource we cannot buy or demand. Through humanizing interactions, this resource is co-constructed with other leaders slowly and methodically. My continued growth is to be more aware of this fact and the power dynamics inherent in every interaction. Throughout the PAR, I reflected on my positional authority. Suarez (2018) frames power as supremacist or liberatory; we can either try to control and dominate people and things or live mindfully, constantly increasing our levels of awareness in an interaction so that we see the power dynamics and assert mutuality. Taking on liberatory power helped me refrain from asserting power over others, or to do so carefully when necessary. As the CPR members' direct supervisor, I found myself highly aware of my positionality. One of my professors reminded me that the "job title as the assistant superintendent" yields authority. With this realization, I intentionally built trust with the CPR members by demonstrating vulnerability, calling out my quirks and shortcomings, and owning mistakes publicly. Demonstrating humanity became my commitment to act mindfully so that I did not abuse my authority intentionally or unintentionally. Over the course of the study, the CPR members demonstrated new knowledge, skills and emotional confidence to support their subordinates in a humanizing fashion. As stated in the previous chapter, the team focused on building and modeling shared leadership by cultivating their instructional leadership teams (ILT). Through practicing critical self-reflection, they focused on leveling the power dyanmics so that their staff felt more empowered and developed a greater level of relational trust.

I was challenged to practice this same high consciousness level in enacting liberatory power outside of the CPR team when working with other leaders who were not as thoughtful or as competent as the CPR group; I initially perceived them as unwilling to change. However, instead of jumping to conclusions, I asked questions to seek clarity and understand the context comprehensively. As a site leader supervisor, I knew my responsibility was to make difficult personnel decisions when appropriate. However, I practiced critical self-reflection, allowing me to pause and reflect before making swift decisions. Even within the last semester, I became more aware of the power dynamic and I practice liberatory power when interacting with the CPR members and other site leaders under my supervision.

Listening as a Researcher Tool

As a developing researcher, I value incorporating CLE activities as a methodology for gathering data. However, the new learning allowed me to develop an ear or heightened awareness to code information in real-time to inform my leadership moves or actions. For example, while conducting member checks, the CPR team emphatically articulated their appreciation and preference for having the space for problem-solving and learning from each other. Their expressed desire was substantiated by their verbal and non-verbal cues in participating in the critical friends protocol when they shared their school-related dilemmas. While coding is still a complex process, I found myself looking or listening for keywords, phrases, or actions to inform my leadership actions in designing the CPR meetings. I developed a greater sensitivity in listening for sightings—words, demeanors, actions, and other indicators—and categorizing them to make meaning, thus informing my immediate- or long-term leadership decisions or actions (McDonald, 1996). I practiced these skills in different contexts outside of the PAR. Becoming a listening leader, like the presenter in the critical friends group, I could hear

and understand what previously I had missed. When I listened more consciously, the CPR members were capable of being those closest to the issues and collaborating to address issues (Safir, 2017).

Recently, I applied these research skills in a school situation. I was invited to meet with school staff while their school principal was on medical leave. The school staff had concerns about an African American mother's reaction to her daughter being bullied at school. This parent was demonstrative in her interaction with the staff; her interaction approach did not match the school-based epistemologies and the school staff wanted to know what the district could do to prevent this mother from entering the school premises. I recalled reminding myself not to be triggered and to listen to their concerns. The staff provided a list of concerns, yet they never wondered about the root cause of the mother's reaction. As I listened to their words, their fears of interacting with a Black woman who represented one of a few Black families in the entire school surfaced. I knew that no matter what I said at the moment, most of the staff would not be able to hear a different perspective. As a culturally responsive practitioner, I offered a tempered perspective. The staff walked away with more significant frustration at the end of the conversation based on their body language. However, I was coding during the entire meeting and drafted a reflective memo as I returned to my office. My takeaway from that meeting was that the appropriate action was to take a step back, listen attentively, and reflect; as a result, I did not make a rash decision. The listening and coding in my head helped me assess the situation in real-time and make a thoughtful decision.

Finding My Voice

In reflecting on that staff meeting, I saw that I used my voice to unite and to inform. I

spoke my truth as someone advocating for equity and social justice. The context was uncomfortable but providing a perspective to illustrate stereotype threats and systemic oppression was essential for me to exercise CRSL behaviors. At the start of the convening, I noted that two critical voices were absent from the dialogue: the school principal and the student's mother. In practicing critical self-reflection, I was reminded that school-centric epistemologies often clashed with community-based epistemologies. Equipped with this growing knowledge, I emphasized at the staff meeting that there are always two different perspectives. In my development of an adaptive leader, I suspended preconceived judgements and emphathized the school staff as well as the mother's perspectives. Khalifa (2018) asserted that "for educators, understandings of good or aggressive behaviors, disengagement, disrespect, grit, and even achievement are subjective, and how parents, students, or community members might understand them can differ vastly" (p. 11). This fluidity of leadership practices may not have had an immediate impact at that particular meeting, but the use of the adaptive strategies helped me to be courageous and raising awareness of multiple perspectives in finding positive solutions.

I told the staff that we needed to heal and repair the harm to this mother; the school-family relationship had fractured when the school staff contacted the police to address an upset mother rather than finding a positive resolution within. When a staff member unapologetically recalled that "we already called police on her before. What else can we do to ensure our safety?" I mustered the courage and responded, "When you call the police on a Black individual, we are exercising violence against them." I attempted to educate the staff that historically, African Americans have been marginalized not only by society but in our educational systems. When we assert that type of power, we further exclude and deny this mother from trying to provide her daughter with a good education. As predicted, in that moment, the meeting did not go smoothly.

I found myself controlled but needed to speak from a voice of advocacy and empathy, even if the audience did not want to hear. Reflecting on the moment, I exercised Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). I spent the last three semesters with our CPR members to learn and practice CRSL behaviors, and I would be a hypocrite if I did not share my truth or provide a different perspective to school staff with a myopic frame at that time. Even a few years ago, I would not have used my voice to advocate or speak to the power. This example illustrated how I continue to grow and leverage my voice to advocate for those who might not be able to advocate for themselves and to stay true to my beliefs.

I am humbled by my leadership journey and am committed to my continuous improvement and leadership development as it is vital to practice and honor humanity, form relational trust and equalize power dynamics, exercise active listening as a form of research, and leverage my and others' voices to create equitable outcomes for all, especially the students and families who have been marginalized by oppressive systems.

Conclusion

> *In the Wabanaki tradition, being a warrior meant that you were both a helper and a shield to the community.* (Mitchell, 2018, p. 151)

The concept of a warrior often connotes fighting, combat, and warfare. We must reimagine a different way to lead if we want to improve the outcomes of students who are most vulnerable and marginalized by our educational system. An equity warrior means being a helper and a shield to the community (Mitchell, 2018). The co-practitioner researchers and I embarked on the PAR project to increase our capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders. School leaders cannot enact Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) behaviors (Khalifa, 2018) nor any promising research-based leadership practices if we, at the district level, do not create the conditions to learn and provide the support network vital for their growth and

sustainability. School leaders acquire new knowledge by co-constructing themselves in a place or space where they feel safe to be human, make mistakes and learn from each other, and know how the personal informs how they enact their values in public spheres.

We learned the importance of synchronizing the lifeworld and the system world (Awati, 2013; Habermas, 1973; Habermas, 1984) in leadership development. When the personal and public worlds are in sync, the organizational actors are affirmed and not alienated when they lead for change efforts. We must attend to cultivating relationships so that we can form a support network to develop the systems thinking to tackle the most challenging work to come, dismantling oppressive systems within our schools strategically and methodically to maximize the opportunity for students to thrive in their academic and social development and affirming their identities and agencies as future leaders.

The PAR project influenced my professional and personal work by driving me to become the leader who puts people first. During this leadership journey, I learned new pedagogical practices that anchored my fundamental beliefs about how adults learn and improve. The work with PAR changed me as a leader, challenged me intellectually, academically, morally, and spiritually to further develop as a culturally responsive and social justice leader, and kept me grounded in being a lifelong curious learner. I remained committed to changing outcomes for minoritized students and supporting and building a network of equity warriors to remain steadfast for social justice and equity. I offer this final quote not as a final word, but as a charge to continue to grow and develop as an educational leader: *Leadership is not a rank; it is a responsibility. Leadership is not about being in charge, it is about taking care of those in your charge. And when we take care of our people, our people will take care of us* (Sinek, 2015).

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APPENDIX A: ECU–IRB APPROVAL LETTER

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Wesley Tang
CC: Matthew Militello
Date: 8/24/2021
Re: UMCIRB 21-001529
Equity Warriors

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 8/24/2021. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Interview Protocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Post-Observation Conversations Protocol(0.01)	Data Collection Sheet
Tang_ConsentForm.pdf(0.01)	Consent Forms
TangW20_DissertationProposal_Chpt1-3.pdf(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
TangW20_InvitationScript.pdf(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: CITI TRAINING CERTIFICATE

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 06-Jan-2021
Expiration Date 06-Jan-2024
Record ID 40241921

This is to certify that:

Wesley Tang

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Research
(Curriculum Group)
Group 2.Social / Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

East Carolina University

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w2c1ff869-d6fd-4d5d-b394-e1c5d0cb2674-40241921

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Equity Warriors: Building Principal Capacity to Enact Culturally Responsive Leadership
Principal Investigator: Wesley Tang
Institution, Department or Division: East Carolina University, Department of Educational Leadership
Address: 555 Franklin Street, San Francisco, California 94102
Telephone #: 1-628-222-0357
Supervisor: Enikia Ford Morthel
Telephone #: 1-415-241-6310
Study Coordinator: Dr. Matthew Militello
Telephone #: 1-252-328-6131

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?
The purpose of this Participatory Action Research (PAR) project is to learn more about Culturally Responsive School Leadership and how it can impact student learning and outcomes. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a school administrator working toward effective greater learning outcomes for especially marginalized students. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn more about how central office supervisors support school leaders in building their capacity to enact culturally responsive instructional leadership practices. If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of a number of participants from SFUSD in cohort 2.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at the central office building at 555 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102 in the conference room. You will need to come to central office building conference room approximately ten times during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately ten hours over the next eighteen months.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to do the following:

- If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in interviews and/or observations; they will be recorded, and the lead researcher will transcribe the notes and code

them based on emerging themes. The interviews or observations will focus on your personal experience and leadership practices that would create culturally responsive school environment in supporting greater learning outcomes for marginalized students.

- The Co-Participant Researchers will meet monthly and lead Community Learning Exchanges (CLE) quarterly over eighteen months.
- You will be asked to participate and facilitate in Community Learning Exchanges, all of which will focus on Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices.
- You will also be asked to help the lead researcher with the data analysis process in order to ensure the validity of the data collected.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. The PAR has some minimal risk to participants; in the case of action research by district supervisors and staff, some of that risk might come in the form of discomfort or concerns about unfavorable evaluations and privacy concerning judgment by colleagues. As the lead researcher, I will make every effort to establish norms for our meetings and mitigate any participants' concerns.

We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study

Will it cost me to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms, audio recordings, data from interviews, observations, and meeting notes will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made or written reports that could link you to the study. In addition, participants have the right to withdraw data from the study.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at phone number 1-628-222-0357 (weekdays, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm) or email tangw20@students.ecu.edu. You may also contact the supervisor of the Principal Investigator at phone number 1-415-241-6310 (weekdays, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm) or email fordmorthele@sfusd.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____ _____

Participant's Name (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT) **Signature** **Date**

APPENDIX D: SFUSD LETTER OF SUPPORT TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

SFUSD SAN FRANCISCO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

RESEARCH, PLANNING & ASSESSMENT

research@sfusd.edu

San Francisco Unified School District • 555 Franklin Street, San Francisco, California 94102-5299

Dear Institutional Review Board Chair:

We understand that your institution requests letters of support from applicants seeking to conduct research in educational agencies. We appreciate the rationale for this precaution as a means of confirming that the research is consistent with district and school protocols. However, this expectation does not align with our review processes, as we approve research applications contingent on their IRB approval.

Because we are not a certified institutional review board or research ethics review committee, we require proposals to provide documentation of external IRB approval or exempt status prior to our review process. We depend on the sponsoring research organization's external IRB review to ensure compliance with federal regulations and ethical standards for research in the field. This allows our review process to focus on whether the research is aligned to district priorities and whether the procedures are feasible and consistent with district policies and practices.

If the proposal has received prior IRB approval and passes our review process, then we would permit study recruitment and data collection in accordance with the terms of the approval. Please accept this explanation of our review process as documentation of our intent to support projects that have met both external IRB and internal SFUSD review standards.

Sincerely,

Research Support Team

APPENDIX E: COMMUNITY LEARNING EXCHANGE (CLE) ARTIFACTS

Each semester for the duration of the Participatory Action Research study, the researcher will host a Community Learning Exchange on a topic related to the research questions in the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project. At the CLE, the researcher will collect and analyze artifacts that respond to the specific questions listed below. The researcher will collect qualitative data based on the activities in which the participants engage at the CLE. The data will be in the form of posters and notes that participants write and drawings that participants make in response to prompts related to the research questions.

Participants will include the Co-practitioner researchers and other participants who sign consent forms. If students are participants, consent and assent forms will be used.

- **Date of CLEs:** Fall 2021/Spring 2022/Fall 2022

- **Number of Participants:** 10-20

- **Purpose of CLE:** The purpose of the CLE is to gather qualitative data from participants regarding their understanding, practice, and needs in order to increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders.

- **Questions for Data Collection:**
  1. To what extent do school leaders develop the knowledge and dispositions to be culturally responsive instructional school leaders?
  2. To what extent do school leaders develop the skills to enact culturally responsive instructional leadership practices?
  3. To what extent does reimagining the central office supervisor's role support school leaders in enacting culturally responsive instructional leadership practices?
  4. How have I developed as a culturally responsive assistant superintendent?

APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL WARRIORS

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is Wesley Tang. The purpose of this study is to learn how school leaders increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders. I hope that we can learn more about the Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices, decide as a team to test out certain practices, implement them, and learn from that experience. I also hope to share the emerging findings with other school leaders and other departments to support and inspire professional development opportunities for others.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the interview data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used.
- The interview will last approximately one hour.

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:
"This is *Wesley*, interviewing (*Interviewees Name)* on *(Date)* for the Culturally Responsive School Warriors Study."

Create 5-10 Questions on your topic. The questions should be open-ended and aligned to the research questions. Avoid asking questions that lead you down a rabbit hole.

- What is the Culturally Responsive School Leadership action that you are trying out?
- What have you tried?
- What's working?
- What's not working?
- What are you hoping to accomplish?
- What insights have you gained in this process?
- What are your next leadership action steps?

APPENDIX G: GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL WARRIORS

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is Wesley Tang. The purpose of this study is to learn how do school leaders increase their capacity to be culturally responsive instructional leaders. I hope to that we can learn more about the Culturally Responsive School Leadership practices, decide as a team to test out certain practices, implement them, and learn from that experience. I also hope to share the emerging findings with other school leaders and other departments to support and inspire professional development opportunities for others.

Disclosures:

- Your participation in the study is voluntary. It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be digitally recorded in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept confidential. Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used. It is our hope that everyone will contribute to the conversation.
- The interview will last approximately one hour.

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:

"This is *Wesley*, interviewing (*Interviewees/School Name)* on *(Date)* for the *Culturally Responsive School Warriors* Study.

Create 5-10 Questions on your topic. The questions should be open-ended and aligned to the research questions. Avoid asking questions that lead you down a rabbit hole.

What is the Culturally Responsive School Leadership action that you are trying out?

- What have you tried?
- What's working?
- What's not working?
- What are you hoping to accomplish?
- What insights have you gained in this process?
- What did you take away from the team that you might try?
- What are your next steps?