WALKING THE "TALK"?: THE CONNECTIONS BETWEEN A CULTURALLY

RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADER'S BELIEFS AND ACTIONS AND

OPPORTUNITY GAPS FOR LATINX STUDENTS

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Council of
Texas State University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
with a Major in School Improvement
May 2022

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DEDICATION

To my son Jude Armand Chapa who was born into this world at the beginning of my

journey. You have never known a time that momma wasn't reading, studying, and

writing. I hope that this inspires you to follow your passion, push through obstacles, and

always believe that through hard work anything is possible. I love you the "biggest!"

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
AP	Advanced Placement
CLD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRP	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
CRSL	Culturally Responsive School Leadership
CRT	Culturally Responsive Teaching
DAEP	District Alternative Education Program
ELs	English Learners
ELLs	English Language Learners
ESL	English as a Second Language
GT	Gifted and Talented
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Act
IR	Improvement Required
IRB	Institutional Review Board
ISS	In School Suspension
JJAEP	Juvenile Justice Alternative Education Program
L1	Native Language/First Language
L2	Second Language

LEP	Limited English Proficient
NAEP	National Assessment for Academic Progress
NCATE	National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education
NCES	National Center for Education Statistics
OCR	Office of Civil Rights
ODR	Office Discipline Referral
OSS	Out of School Suspension
PBIS	Positive Behavior Intervention and Support
PEIMS	Public Education Information Management System
PLC	Professional Learning Community
RCELD	Racially, Culturally, Ethnically, and Linguistically Diverse
RtI	Response to Intervention
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SPED	Special Education
TAKS	Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills
TAPR	Texas Academic Performance Report
TEA	Texas Education Agency

TELPAS	Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment
TPRI	Texas Primary Reading Inventory
UCEA	University Council of Educational Administration

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between (a) beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and (b) opportunity gaps for Latinx students in a predominantly Latinx school. The study was conducted at a Title I suburban elementary school in the Southeastern Region of Texas. Using a qualitative case study approach and guided by Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis' (2016) Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework, the study data were acquired through remote semi-structured interviews of 10 participants (including school leaders, teachers, and parents), remote observations, and archival data analysis. Findings from this study indicated the beliefs and actions of the school leader reflected values of equity, inclusion, critical self-reflection, continuous learning, challenging the status quo, building capacity, and purposeful data disaggregation. Generally, findings related to opportunity gaps in academic achievement for Latinx students were inconclusive. The findings showed movement toward a more proportional representation of Latinx students enrolled in special programs (i.e., special education, gifted and talented), and a comparative decrease in documented disciplinary ISS (in-school suspension) placements. Overall, documentation of the principal's journey to address inequities and opportunity gaps for Latinx students suggested she was evolving, or in the process of "becoming" a culturally responsive school leader and beginning to make a difference on her campus. Additional findings highlighted barriers to CRSL (Culturally Responsive School Leadership) at the

school, district, and state levels. These findings indicate the need for structured leadership

preparation programs developed through a social justice and equity lens, implementation

of leadership practices focused on critical self-reflection, and professional development

directed at culturally responsive practices. Findings additionally demonstrate a need for

education reform including a call to revamp standardized assessments, along with

development of policies on implementation of culturally responsive and trauma informed

educator leadership training.

I. INTRODUCTION

"We live in a world with a long history of oppression that manifests in virtually every aspect of society, including schools" (Esposito & Swain, 2009, p. 46). Throughout my career as an educator in Texas, I have worked only at Title I campuses where the majority of students identified as Latinx[1] or Hispanic. As a White person who has held several leadership positions, I have always hoped that I did not contribute to the continued oppression of the students I served. However, upon revisiting my experiences and acknowledging my naivety, my struggle with "White fragility" is highly evident (DiAngelo, 2018). It was not that I purposefully avoided topics of racism and inequity, but, in my opinion, I did not do enough to encourage those difficult, uncomfortable but highly necessary conversations. I can also admit that, early on in my educational career, I subscribed to the detrimental racial "color-blind" mindset from which I thought that by not acknowledging student diversity, I was somehow encouraging equity. In actuality, racial color-blindness ignores and perpetuates a deficit mindset by rendering people unable to address racism because of a refusal to acknowledge that these issues exist (Neville, Gallardo & Sue, 2016). How do we, as educators, navigate the matters of equity and access for all students? Is it an issue with the state? The district? Or is it something that can be mitigated by school leaders who understand how to both adhere to

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[1] Latinx is a gender-neutral term that has recently replaced Latino/a as identification of persons of Mexican, South, or Central American descent, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Demographic information and study data have been gathered from numerous sources for this literature review. At the time they were conducted, each source utilized the terminology deemed appropriate for their specific studies. In the interest of maintaining cohesiveness and consistency, the term Latinx will be utilized throughout the dissertation. However, through the process of the subsequent research within a specific community, terminology may change to reflect the identification preferences of the research participants.

accountability standards and simultaneously promote equitable opportunities for students of diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds? I often questioned my role and responsibilities as a school leader in matters of equity, while additionally wondering what part the school principal plays in the promotion of equity and whether it results in student success.

"School leadership is widely regarded as a key factor in accounting for the difference between underperforming schools and schools that foster student learning" (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2020, para. 1). In school environments that promote shared leadership, the principal does not determine the direction for the school alone, but involves all community stakeholders in the decision-making process. Thus, effective leaders create opportunities for teachers, parents, and other members of the school community to "become leaders and decision makers" (Lummis, 2021, p. 4). Although school leadership can be a collaborative effort within a school community, often times the decision-making, direction, and success or failure of the school becomes a sole reflection of the school principal. For the purpose of this study, the term school leadership encompassed the actions, beliefs, and operational role of the school principal.

Traditionally marginalized students need school leaders to engage in practices directed toward meaningful change while also addressing issues of race and privilege (Peterson, 2014). Latinx students and other marginalized students are often viewed through a deficit lens (Valencia, 1997; 2010), meaning that educators focus on plights they need to overcome, rather than the knowledge and skills they possess as a foundation for learning. "Modern education embodies a sense of powerlessness when presented with achievement data which documents students of color and poverty performing at

2

significantly lower rates than their white, middle-class counterparts" (Chenoweth, 2009;

Muhammad & Hollie, 2012; Peterson, 2014). Students are often deemed unsuccessful

based on biased, arbitrary standards that do not adequately acknowledge students'

intelligence or academic ability. The highly debated achievement gap places the

responsibility for success, or perceived lack thereof, on the students rather than on the

educational system.

Unfortunately, conversations about leadership and diversity in educational

training programs have rarely challenged the notion of "disadvantage," which in turn

reinforces the status quo in educational leadership, fails to initiate acceptance of the

diverse experiences of students, and ultimately stagnates social change (Jones, Guthrie, &

Osteen, 2016). School leaders need to be prepared to demonstrate multicultural

leadership and respond to increasing student diversity, and this need highlights the

importance of having critical conversations in educational training programs (Riehl,

2000). The majority of students in Texas schools are Latinx (Texas Education Agency,

2018c; 2019); yet, this reality has not deterred educators from focusing on how to "fix"

what they have deemed broken in the students. Further, culturally and linguistically

diverse (CLD) students are met with continued maintenance of the status quo when

curriculum and assessment are created with White middle-class students as their target

audience (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Oakes, Quartz, Ryan & Lipton, 2000; Theoharis,

2009; Weems, 2013).

The increasing diversity of the United States highlights the importance of building

educators' knowledge and skills to meet students' different needs, beyond raising test

scores; nevertheless, there is an opposition to change (LaNier, 2006). Rather than meet

diversity with indifference, school leaders must embrace "demographic change and cultural difference as enriching and educative" (Cooper, 2009, p. 27). Effective school leaders are adept at striking a balance between state and national pressure to meet accountability standards and at implementing curriculum that validates students' cultures, languages, and the needs of their community (Dutro, Fisk, Koch, Roop, & Wixson, 2002; Howley, Woodrum, Burgess, & Rhodes, 2009; Larabee, 2000). A thorough understanding of the various cultures of the students and families served by the school, while desirable for everyone, is essential for leaders if they are to lead effectively (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Fullan, 1991; Schein, 1992; Sergiovanni, 2001). In turn, school and student success is largely dependent upon the effectiveness of school leaders (Andrews & Soder 1987; Blase & Blase, 2004; Fears, 2004; Madhlangobe, 2009).

School leaders who promote cultural competence: (a) explore and challenge inequity; (b) collaborate purposefully; and (c) cultivate socially just learning environments (Teacher Leadership Institute, n. d.). Instead of shaping or changing the cultures cultivated within students' homes and communities, school leaders should "seek to build bridges…allowing for multiple cultures in the school community who are able to construct and define their own values" (Fraise & Brooks, 2016, p. 8). School leaders who seek to create inclusive schools cultivate new definitions of diversity as a catalyst for change, they promote inclusive instructional practices, and they build vital connections between schools and communities (Riehl, 2000).

John Dewey and Lev Vygotsky did not view education as an individualistic practice, but rather a social one that is aligned with the interests and needs of

communities (Osterman, 2000). Although school leadership practices often encourage parent and community involvement, leadership practices are rarely shaped through critical consideration of community norms and values (Howley et al., 2009). Consideration of the needs of the school community are vital to student success (Khalifa, 2018; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Theoharis, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). "Many leadership theorists view cultural leadership as primarily being directed inward to the culture *of the school* rather than outward to the culture *of which the school is a part"* (Howley et al., 2009, p. 13). School leaders do not always have an initial moral calling to advocate for equity, but for those who acknowledge its importance, it can be actively developed over the years. The school principal has the responsibility as a leader for the community, so putting community needs and perspectives at the epicenter of their leadership behaviors is vital to student development (Khalifa, 2018). School leadership should seek to empower children and families, through close collaboration with the community emphasizing an "equitable power-sharing relationship" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 13).

School principals not only occupy the most recognized position in a school, but they are also the most empowered by district and state policy. As McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) put forth:

> The best route to influence teachers is through the principal, who, research repeatedly shows, is the key to school change. For a principal to change both, their own, and their teacher's attitudes, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviors as they work with students of color, the principal must be able to identify and understand barriers to equity. (p. 628)

School principals are chiefly held responsible for student progress, or lack thereof

(Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016), and they have the challenging role "to support, nurture, and exercise the kind of leadership that creates a learning environment that transcends any obstacles that block learning" (Kelley, 2012, p. 1).

Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is a necessary component of effective school leadership, resting on a core unique set of behaviors that must be consistently promoted by school leaders (Khalifa, 2018). Principals are often in the most optimal position to endorse and strengthen school-level reforms (Khalifa et al., 2016; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990), and research suggests that that unless "promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school; and conversely, district level mandates are only effective to the extent they are locally enforced" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274). Researchers have identified principals across the nation who are transforming schools and increasing success for traditionally marginalized students. The commonality among the principals is a consistent focus on leading with equity and justice (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Theoharis, 2009). Motivation, performance, and learning are influenced by social relations, as well as by the extent to which students feel respected, welcomed, and included. As Lewis and Diamond (2015) remind us, our students' "intelligence is less stable and more fragile than we typically acknowledge, and a host of contextual factors influence whether any of us are able to realize our potential" (p. 84).

Statement of the Problem

Statistics of immigration and birth rates show that the U.S. population is becoming increasingly diverse. Latinx students make up more than half the total population of the United States indicating that soon there will be no majority racial or

ethnic group in the United States (Bauman, 2017; Crouch, 2007). These trends are also reflected in the student demographics of Texas public schools, with Latinx students accounting for over 50% of student enrollment in 2018 (Texas Education Agency, 2019). Despite this, educational institutions continue to organize instruction based on an archaic set of norms geared toward maintaining the status quo, such as tracking students, determining student success based solely on test scores, and centering educational decisions on the needs of White middle-class families in lieu of seeking parent and community input—all practices that set marginalized students up for failure (Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009). In comparison to their White peers, Latinx students are not always afforded equitable educational opportunities. For example, in Texas, the persistent achievement gap across academic content areas, the propensity for higher rates of discipline and special education referrals for Latinx students, and the lower rates of nominations for gifted and talented programs among Latinx students continue to exist as factors that widen opportunity gaps for Latinx students (Texas Education Agency, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2019). Thus, as schools continue to become more culturally and linguistically diverse, leadership practices need to shift (Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey Roberts, & Jones, 2005).

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) proposed school leadership as a crucial component to any educational reform. Khalifa et al. (2016) expanded on this notion by articulating that school context is often influenced by CRSL, which, in turn, addresses the cultural needs of students, parents, and teachers. The development of CRSL provides opportunities to counter historically oppressive structures that are often reproduced by educators and schools (Khalifa et al., 2016). When major cultural divides

are perpetuated in schools, they become a point of contention and further the challenges

of educational success for students from marginalized communities (Maxwell, 2014).

Although there is considerable scholarship educators can draw on to understand

the fundamental principles of CRSL, there is minimal research on what embodies

culturally responsive school leadership in action and its relationship to student

achievement. This qualitative case study utilized Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Culturally

Responsive School Leadership framework, to identify connections between beliefs and

actions of a culturally responsive school leader, and opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between (a) beliefs

and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and (b) opportunity gaps for Latinx

students in a predominantly Latinx school. This study defined "opportunity gaps" as

gaps in students' progress in literacy, over referral of Latinx students for discipline

incidents and special education, and under referral of Latinx students for gifted and

talented programs. Although student achievement is often determined by state testing

data (i.e., the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness, *STAAR*), for this study

district-wide literacy measures were employed to determine trends in Latinx students'

academic growth and achievement. Academic success is dependent upon students being

able to learn through the process of reading; therefore, literacy is an "essential vehicle"

for learning in all subject areas (Munro, 2003, p. 328). My rationale for using data from

district-wide literacy measures was that, compared to the STAAR assessment, they

offered more than a "snapshot" of yearly achievement and gave a more accurate picture

of students' achievement, given the issues that have resulted from the recent COVID-19

pandemic (2019-2020 state testing was not completed and, although STAAR testing for the 2020-2021 school year was administered, outcomes were not reported for the purpose of campus ratings). By utilizing a case study approach, I assessed multiple viewpoints (e.g., those of the principal, assistant principals, teachers, and parents), collected observational data, and analyzed archival reports to increase reliability and validity of the study findings.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this qualitative study was:

What connections exist between the beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and opportunity gaps for Latinx students attending a predominantly Latinx school?

Secondary questions were as follows:

1. What are the principal's beliefs regarding culturally responsive school leadership?

2. What actions does the principal take as a culturally responsive school leader?

3. How are the principal's beliefs and actions reflected in opportunity gaps for Latinx students at the school?

Importance of the Study

The primary importance of this study is the continued lack of success for Latinx students as measured by pervasive opportunity gaps. Additionally, there is a comparative imbalance between growth in the Latinx student population and the stagnant state of educational leadership for culturally and linguistically diverse students. The findings from this study added to the research by proposing additional evidence of

characteristics and actions that define CRSL. Currently, there is minimal research on culturally responsive leadership in action and identifying characteristics of culturally responsive school leaders. Further, much of the research on CRSL focused on predominantly African American student populations (i.e., Khalifa's [2018] case study), leaving a gap in the literature on CRSL as it related to the relationship between a culturally responsive school leader's beliefs and actions, and opportunity gaps for Latinx students. An urgent need for this study was evident based on the continuous rise in the Latinx student population for the state of Texas, juxtaposed with significant lack of academic success for Latinx students. The intent of this research was to inform the current practices of school leaders, while also shaping professional development for district leaders, campus leaders, and classroom teachers.

Scope of the Study

A case study approach was used investigate the beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and relationships to opportunity gaps for Latinx students. Case studies allow researchers to create a deep, data-rich analysis of their particular area of study. It is an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context…" (Yin, 2002, p. 18). The scope of the study was limited to an elementary school principal who graduated from a state university's Educational Administration Master's Program between the years of 2002-2016. A graduate from the state university was chosen because of the social justice focus of the educational administration program. Principals considered for this study must have led a Title I campus that served a 50% or greater Latinx population and must have held a leadership position for a minimum of three years. Following the principal selection, the participant

10

sample also included two campus assistant principals, three teachers, and three parents from the community.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and archival data and reports. I analyzed and evaluated the data using Creswell's (2016) process for converting text into code. I utilized a predetermined set of codes derived from Khalifa and colleagues' (2016) Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (see Appendix G) for organization of the data, and followed the direction of the data by adding supplementary codes when necessary.

Limitations

Limitations of the study design existed in part due to my former position as an assistant principal at a school that served a predominately Latinx population. My positionality as the researcher could have created bias based on preconceived ideas of what to expect when researching CRSL, and I needed to be aware of this potential bias by documenting the research as authentically as possible. In my experience, there has been a general assumption that the success of a culturally responsive school leader is reflected through state testing outcomes (in the case of Texas, STAAR results). Although I don't personally agree with this assumption, there is so much focus on the results of one test that this viewpoint could be problematic. Also, because there is minimal research and documentation of what truly constitutes culturally responsive school leadership *in action*, the pool of participants is limited to recommendations from experts on cultural responsiveness. Furthermore, this study only consisted of one principal participant, resulting in a more limited viewpoint.

An additional limitation was that the participating principal selected teachers

interviewed for this study. Principal selection of teachers is potentially problematic if they choose friends, or people with viewpoints historically aligned with their own, as opposed to a true representative sample of their faculty and staff. Because the interviews were not anonymous, selected teachers may have been hesitant to honestly express their concerns and challenges regarding the principal's level of cultural responsiveness for fear of retribution, therefore skewing the data. Additionally, my positionality as a White person investigating issues that affect Latinx students may have impacted the interviews and potential relationships with the interviewees. The participants might have felt uncomfortable or apprehensive discussing issues of race/ethnicity and privilege with someone whose culture is dissimilar to their own. Hammersely and Gomm (2008) stated that what people say in interviews will often be shaped by the questions they are asked, and what they perceive the interviewer wants to hear. Although I requested participants be selected from a representative sample, it was at the principal's discretion to adhere to that particular request. Further limitations may have existed due to the lack of student participants and subsequently, student voice as components of the study.

Finally, the current COVID-19 pandemic posed additional limitations and restrictions on data collection methods. The original study design entailed the researcher shadowing the principal and conducting observations of the research site, as well as meetings on campus. However, health and safety regulations did not allow for in-person observations and, therefore, this method of data collection was replaced by remote observations through Zoom, which limited the level insight achieved and richness of the data.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study included data collection methods and purposeful selection of research participants. Qualitative interviews can be challenging and time-consuming methods of data collection. The interview process is a largely subjective and interpretive process. Similar to interviews, observations are a subjective form of data collection. Due to this subjectivity, bias of the observer may be present in the data. Additional delimitations included the researcher's purposive selection of graduates from a state university's Master's in Educational Administration between the years of 2002 and 2016, as well as the study's exclusive use of Texas Title I elementary public schools with Latinx populations of 50% or more.

Definition of Terms

Opportunity Gaps- Disparity between White and racial/ethnic minority student

achievement and opportunities demonstrated through disproportionate

representation in discipline referrals, gifted education, advanced placement

courses, college tests, and special education referral and identification within the

education system. Marked differences among test scores, grade point averages,

and high school and/or college completion rates among Whites, African

Americans, and Latinx students (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Valencia, 2015).

Critical Consciousness- Allows people to question the nature of their social and historical

situations (read their world) and act as subjects in the creation of a democratic

society. Consciousness that is understood to have the power to transform the

world (Freire, 1974). It also refers to "Knowledge about the systems and

structures that create and sustain inequity (critical analysis), developing a sense of

13

power or capability (sense of agency), and ultimately committing to take action against oppressive conditions (critical action)" (El-Amin et al., 2017, p. 20).

Cultural Competence- "Cultural competence is having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations" (National Education Association, 2017).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy – A pedagogical framework that "serves to empower students to the point where they will be able to examine critically educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society. It uses the students' culture to help them create meaning and understand the world" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 106).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)- The promotion of inclusive school climates, continuous through shifting school demographics, that addresses the cultural needs of the community. Leadership practices include: (a) continuous self-reflection; (b) development of culturally responsive teachers; (c) culturally responsive school environment; and (d) engagement of students and parents in indigenous contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Cultural Knowledge- Familiarity of cultural characteristics, history, values, beliefs, and behaviors of another ethnic or cultural group. Awareness of historical development of social relations and rules of individuals and their communities (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Culture- Practices reflective of customs, traditions, values, and social norms of a group.

Deficit Thinking Model- The model utilized to explain student failure, particularly among

economically disadvantaged, racial/ethnic minority students. The deficit thinking

model "…posits that students who fail do so because of internal deficits or

deficiencies. Such deficits allegedly manifest in limited intellectual abilities,

linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation and immoral behavior" (Valencia,

1997, p. 2). The lack of academic achievement is placed on the students, rather

than educational institutions.

Disproportionate Representation- Refers to higher incidence of special education

identification or, conversely, a lower incidence of identification when teachers do

not refer appropriately or in a timely manner because they assume the educational

difficulty is related to second language learning (Artiles, Kozleski, Trent, Osher,

& Ortiz, 2010; Fletcher & Navarette, 2003; Theoharis, 2009; Zhang, Katsiyannis,

Song & Roberts, 2014). The term also refers to a higher rate of discipline referrals

(Blake, Gregory, James, & Hasan, 2016) and lower incidence of gifted and

talented referrals (Ford, 2014; Milner & Ford, 2007; Valencia, 2015) for Latinx

students in comparison to their White peers.

Equity- All students are treated with fairness and justice. Students are given "the real

possibility of an equality of outcomes" (Nieto & Bode, 2012, p. 9).

Funds of Knowledge- The strategic and cultural resources or bodies of knowledge found

in everyday functions of the home (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992;

Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992).

Hispanic - "Persons of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or

other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

Hispanic refers to "people who speak Spanish and/or who are descended from

Spanish-speaking countries" (Cole, 2020).

Latinx- The gender-neutral term references anyone from Mexico, Central or South

America, and the Caribbean, and within this group there are varieties of races

(Cole, 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010) and native languages spoken.

Marginalization- Oppression of specific groups that relegates them to peripheral and/or

insignificant levels of importance. A group's social and cultural capital are not

recognized as valuable and are excluded from the center of dominant society

(Ginwright, 2004; Khalifa, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lopez, 2001; Ream &

Rumburger, 2008; Theoharis, 2009).

Minoritization- Individuals or groups who have "historically been marginalized in school

and society" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 2).

Race-based Status Beliefs- Current racial patterns supported by "structural inequalities,

institutional practices, and racial ideologies" which mutually reinforce each other

(Lewis & Diamond, 2015, p. 8).

School Leadership- For the purpose of this study, school leadership will encompass the

beliefs, actions, and operational role of the school principal.

Social Justice Leadership- Leaders who create agendas to "deconstruct social inequalities

and marginalization due to race, class, and gender while constructing strategies

for resistance and reconstruction" (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Theoharis, 2009).

Status Quo- The familiar practices and policies of the school and community based on

White middle-class norms; the way things have always been done, leading to

inequities for marginalized students (Theoharis, 2009).

Student Engagement- "Engagement can be viewed as active participation in the learning process, and contributes to deeper and more meaningful learning" (Huang, Liu, Wang, Tsai, & Lin, 2017, p. 96).

Summary

As the population of Latinx students continues to increase, the educational opportunity gap remains unchallenged. School leaders are charged with growing educators' cultural competency but often revert to maintenance of the status quo because of numerous perceived or actualized barriers. "Leaders must get comfortable with living in a state of continually *becoming*, a perpetual beta mode" (Mikkelsen & Jarche, 2015, para. 6). By staying on top of societal changes, being receptive and willing to learn, and renewing one's perspective, school leaders solidify educational relevance. The goal of this study is to explore the beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and analyze the proposed connection with opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

This study is organized into four remaining chapters. Chapter II presents the literature used to support this study, including information about the growth of the Latinx population and the consequent effects on educational process and policies. This part of the literature reviewed details the negative consequences of current educational policy and practice for Latinx students, such as academic underachievement, high drop-out rates, higher incidence of discipline referrals, and disproportionate representation in special programs. Chapter II also describes literature that explores how educators' knowledge of students' culture, funds of knowledge, and second language development

impacts Latinx students, their families, and instruction. The last sections of the literature review examine the history and evolution of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) and analyze CRSL, along with barriers for implementation and factors that facilitate the growth of CRSL practices. The literature review concludes with a summary of the literature and a diagram of the guiding theoretical framework for this study developed by Khalifa et al. (2016).

Chapter III specifies the research questions and provides a detailed description of the study's methodological approach. A rationale for qualitative research is described, along with the reasoning behind using a constructivist perspective. The chapter then describes the process for site and participant selection, data collection measures, and procedures for analysis. Chapter III concludes with a discussion of proposed techniques for verification and ensuring trustworthiness and credibility of the study, such as member checking and triangulation, and describes my positionality and research bias.

Chapter IV describes the study's findings. It begins with a description of the study site, a comprehensive descriptive profile of the school principal, and brief profiles of the assistant principals, teachers, and parents within the school community who participated in this study. Then, findings are presented organized by themes and integrated with discussion of relevant literature as appropriate. Chapter V provides a discussion of findings as they relate to the literature on beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leaders and the connection to opportunity gaps for Latinx students. This final chapter discusses the findings in relation to the components of this study's framework (Khalifa et al., 2016), along with considerations associated with barriers to culturally responsive school leadership. I conclude the dissertation with recommendations for

leadership preparation, educational practice and policy, and future research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The state of Texas is one of the nation's leading states for growth in the Latinx population. Along with California, Florida, and New Mexico, Texas has been deemed a majority-minority state, meaning that the percentage of ethnic minority groups have grown to larger numbers than the White population. The "U.S. Census Bureau projects that by 2043 the new collective majority of minority students is projected to reach 50.3%," with the overall number of Latinx, African-American, and Asian students outnumbering the White population (Maxwell, 2014, para. 3). A report compiled by Potter and Hoque (2014) for the Office of the Texas State Demographer, noted that the growth of the Latinx population is projected to increase by nearly 2.3 times its size in 2010 to reach 21.5 million by 2050.

In Texas, overall student enrollment in public schools reached a total of 5,399,682 students in the 2017-2018 school year, representing an increase of 15.6% over the previous decade. Trends in enrollment numbers in Texas public schools mirror the growth in the Latinx population and the decrease of White students enrolled in public schools found across the United States. The Texas Education Agency (2018c) reported that the Latinx population accounted for 52.4% of enrollment in Texas public schools, in large contrast to 27.9% enrollment for White students. Additionally, the percentage of identified English Learners (ELs) enrolled in Texas public schools grew from 16.6% in 2007-2008 to 18.8% in 2017-2018. Howard and Rodriguez-Minkoff (2017) asserted "while demographers had predicted this shift for some time, it still symbolized the changing racial dynamics in the country and was a watershed moment in the changing make-up of the nation that will only intensify over time" (p. 1).

The demographic shift in Texas directly affects school district personnel, principals, teachers, and students. The dramatic growth in the Latinx population and a simultaneous decline of enrolled White students highlight the need to diversify teaching practices to address the needs of Latinx students (Maxwell, 2014). Currently, teachers and administrators are unprepared for the minority to become the majority. A larger portion of the student population will "require English-language instruction, and their life experiences will differ from those of their teachers, who remain overwhelmingly White" (Maxwell, 2014, para. 6). There are gaps in educator and administrator knowledge of how to connect with students whose background, experiences, and core knowledge is dissimilar from their own. In the 2011-2012 school year, among the 3.4 million public school teachers, 82% were White, with 7% Black, and 8% Latinx (Maxwell, 2014). This imbalance between teacher and student populations is not exactly new; for example, data from the 2003-2004 school year shows the percentage of White teachers was at 83%.

Negative Consequences for Latinx Students

The main focus of education system in the United States is on student achievement, and one of the most pressing issues discussed today is inequality of educational outcomes among racial and ethnic groups (Brown-Jeffy, 2006). Although perspective and opinion on what constitutes "achievement" differs, the general emphasis has been placed on students' performance on academic measures. However, student achievement can be assessed in a variety of manners in addition to standardized testing, such as examining school completion rates, teacher/student relationships, and opportunities for academic growth and enrichment. For Latinx students, research has ascribed partial responsibility for the perpetuation of the achievement gap to the

21

disconnect between the cultures of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RCELD) populations and the institutions that serve them (Griner & Stewart, 2012). However, the achievement gap cannot be attributed to one single factor; rather it consists of a "complex web of social, economic, and educational conditions" (Gandara, n.d., para 7). When examining the achievement gap for Latinx students, we not only need to consider standardized testing outcomes but also high school completion rates, disproportionate placements in special education and gifted and talented programs, and the tendency to over-refer Latinx students for disciplinary action.

Standards-Based Academic Achievement Measures and Latinx Students

As the Latinx population grows and remains disproportionate to number of teachers of color serving in public schools, the discrepancy in academic achievement for Latinx students compared to their White counterparts remains. Despite the Latinx population being the "most rapidly growing ethnic minority in the country," academically, Latinx students continue to perform at alarmingly lower rates than their non-Latinx peers (Gandara, n.d., para. 2). Gandara (n.d), noted that 42% of Latinx students entering kindergarten are in the lowest quartile for reading readiness, while only 18% of White students entering kindergarten are unable to meet reading-readiness expectations. As students' progress to fourth grade, the gap remains, with 41% of White students reported as proficient in reading, in contrast to 16% of their Latinx peers. The continued discrepancies in reading achievement are reported in eighth grade with 15% of Latinx students reported as being proficient in reading compared to 39% reading proficiency among their White counterparts.

Another statistical measure utilized to identify gaps in academic achievement is

the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) conducted through the

National Center for Educational Statistics. The NAEP reports focus on fourth, eighth, and

twelfth grade to ascertain student performance data in mathematics and reading. In 2011

the average score in reading for White students was 233, while Latinx students

represented a 23-point gap with an average score of 210. Identical reports for 2017

reflected a 25-point gap among averages, with Latinx students continuing to achieve

below their White peers. Mathematics scores for White students in 2011 and 2017

averaged 17 to 24 points higher than their Latinx counterparts. Griner and Stewart (2012)

proposed that a major cause of the achievement gap is linked to a disconnect between the

cultures of racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RCELD) students

and the educators that serve them. Academic achievement gaps continue to be

perpetuated through an American school system historically based on Eurocentric ideals

and beliefs. Eurocentric knowledge is built upon ideas that give justification to the belief

that those who are not White, heterosexual, male, and of European descent are ultimately

inferior (Baker, 2012).

In the state of Texas, academic achievement is measured by the STAAR test (The

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness). Through the TAPR (Texas

Academic Performance Report), STAAR data is generated to demonstrate student

proficiency in math, reading, writing, and science for third through fifth grade students.

In 2012, the state average for third-grade students who met or exceeded state standards

for reading was 78%. The passing rate among Latinx students was 73%, which was not

only below the state average but also 14% below the 87% passing average among their

White peers (see Figure 1). STAAR data for fourth grade mirrored the gaps reported in

third grade reading, with an average of 77% of total students, 72% of Latinx students, and 88% of White students meeting or exceeding state standards (see Figure 2). The TAPR data for fifth-grade students demonstrates a similar discrepancy in student reading achievement scores. The state average of students who met or surpassed state standards was 78%, with 87% of White students and 73% of Latinx students meeting or surpassing state standards (see Figure 3).

2012 STAAR 3rd Grade Reading

State Average	78%
Latinx Students	73%
White Students	87%
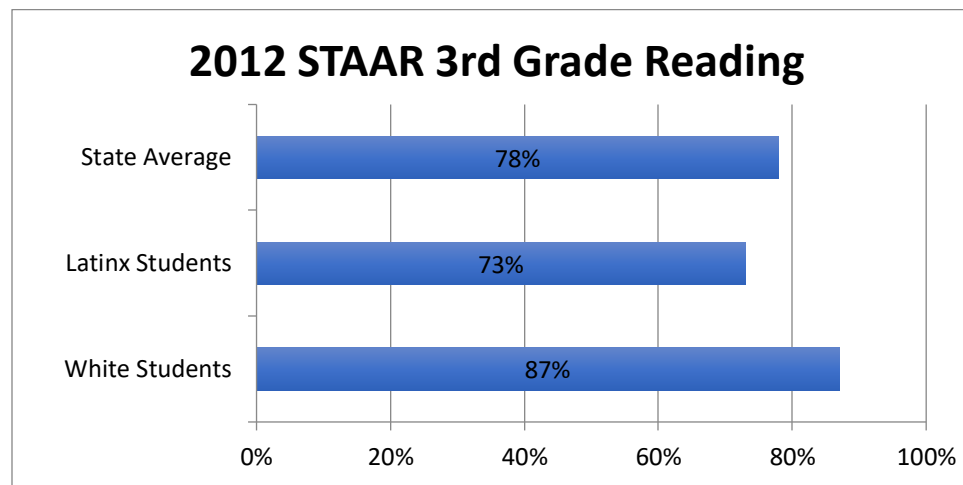
Figure 1. 2012 3rd Grade STAAR Reading Data

2012 STAAR 4th Grade Reading

State Average	77%
Latinx Students	72%
White Students	88%
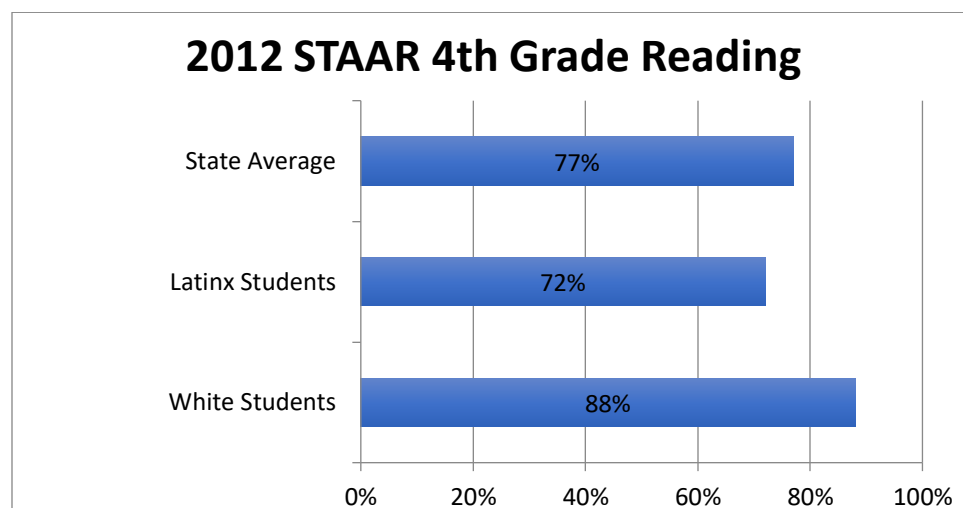
Figure 2. 2012 4th Grade STAAR Reading Data
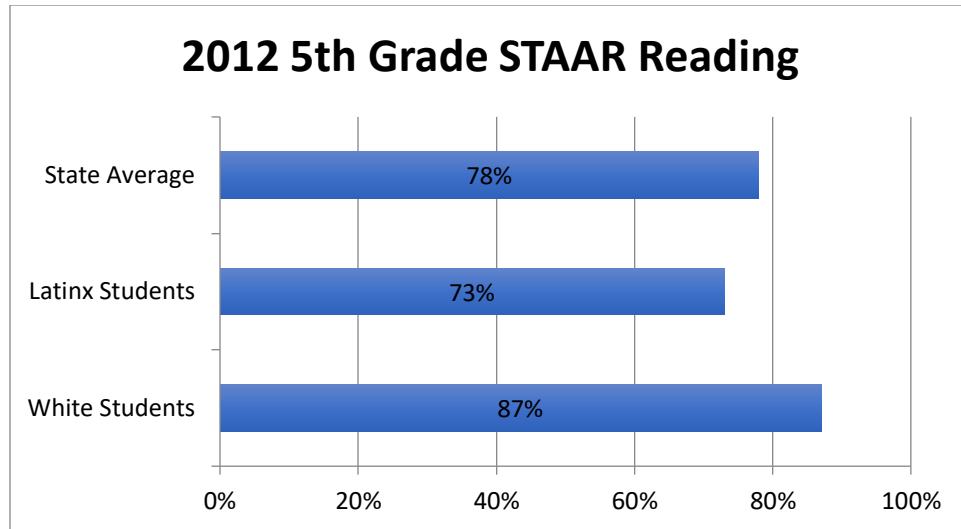
Figure 3. 2012 5th Grade STAAR Reading Data

Examination of the TAPR for 2017 showed little improvement in proficiency gaps for Latinx students. While the overall state average for third grade reading decreased to 73%, White students' proficiency levels surpassed the state, with an 83% average, and Latinx students continued to perform below the state average at 68% (see Figure 4). In each subsequent grade level, Latinx students reading proficiency levels were at least 5% below the state, and 12-17% below their White counterparts.
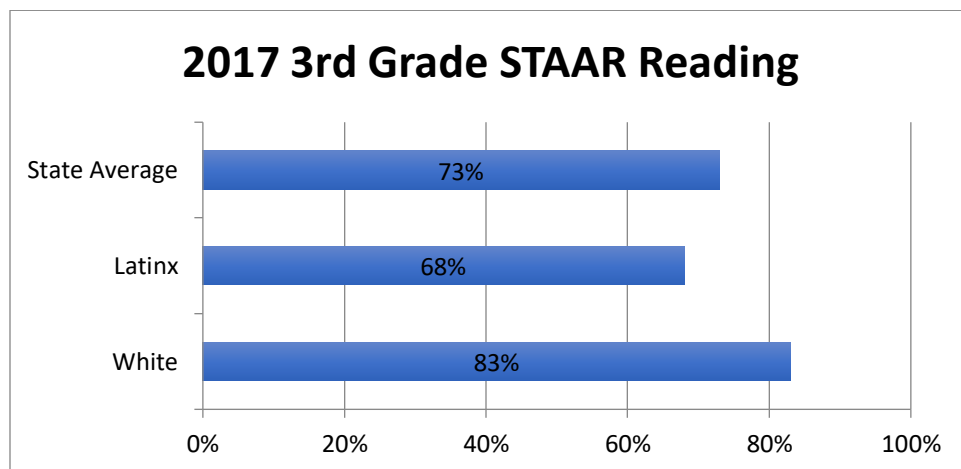
Figure 4. 2017 3rd Grade STAAR Reading Data

High Dropout Rates

Although the most common measure of the achievement gap has historically been standardized tests, student dropout rates are also indicators of student achievement. As Christle and colleagues assert, "Dropping out of high school culminates a long-term process of disengagement from school and has profound social and economic consequences for students, their families, and society" (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007, p. 325). Students who prematurely discontinue their education have fewer opportunities for employment, ending up in low-skill, low-paying jobs. In addition to lack of employment opportunities, there exists higher probability toward engaging in criminal activity and ultimately ending up as a statistic in the penal system (Christle et al., 2007; Valencia, 2015).

In 2004, Balfanz and Letgers conducted a study on the dropout crisis in the United States. Utilizing two cut-points for their analysis, they identified high schools across the country with high dropout and low graduation rates. High schools with 50% fewer seniors than freshmen four years earlier were classified as having the lowest power of promotion. The identification of high schools with 60% or fewer seniors than freshmen "provided a solid estimate of the number of high schools with severe dropout rates" (Balfanz & Letgers, 2004, p. 3). Additionally, they found that nearly 40% of the high-school aged Latinx students in the United States attended high schools where graduation was not the norm, in sharp contrast to a mere 11% of their White peers. The study also categorized Texas as one of 15 states where almost 80% of schools producing the highest number of dropouts are located. With Texas deemed a majority-minority state, Latinx students enrolled in schools are directly affected by these findings. Balfanz and Letgers

(2004) affirmed that a majority-minority school is more likely to promote 50% or fewer students from freshmen to senior status than one whose population majority is White.

In 2015, Valencia acknowledged the discrepancy between the dropout rates for Latinx students with their White counterparts. Valencia (2015) referred to the issue as "school holding power" instead of "dropout rates" because the term placed the responsibility on schools and not the students (p. 9). He mapped out percentages for "school holding power" by race and ethnicity and pinpointed gaps between Latinx and White students. Although there has been significant growth in the rate of student retention for Latinx students (44.5% in 1980 to 65% in 2012), the variance between the two groups remains substantial. In 1980, the retention rate for White students was recorded at 71.9%, while the percentage for Latinx students sat at 44.5%, a difference of 27.4%. Similarly, in 2012, Latinx students' school holding power rate was 65% in comparison to White students' rate of 92.5%, with the gap remaining at 27.5% (Valencia, 2015).

The National Center for Education Statistics (2018) defines dropouts as students between the ages of 16-24 who are not enrolled in school (this definition does not include completion of GEDs). According to NCES, from 2000-2016 dropout rates for Latinx students were consistently higher than those of their White peers. White students maintained below a 10% dropout rate over the reporting period (6.9% in 2000 and 5.2% in 2016), while Latinx students' dropout rates were reported at 27.8% in 2000 and 8.6% in 2016. Despite the different methods of obtaining student data utilized by the aforementioned research studies, there is a consistent discrepancy between the dropout rates of Latinx students and their White peers.

Higher Incident of Discipline Referrals

Along with academic measures and dropout rates, student discipline practices are an additional factor in perpetuation of the achievement gap. Discipline data over the past 25 years has demonstrated that Latinx students are more likely to receive expulsion or out-of-school suspension for similar infractions than their White peers (Skiba et al., 2011). In theory, school disciplinary interventions are enacted to maintain safety and order by removing students who disturb the learning environment and preventing other students from "committing future rule infractions" (Gregory, Skiba & Noguera, 2010, p. 59). Conversely, student removal from classroom instruction contributes to the disruption of students' learning and their overall achievement. The most common discipline practices in the United States are affecting the neediest students and likely contributing to lowered academic achievement (Gregory et al., 2010). The use of expulsion and out of school suspensions are associated with the loss of vital learning time, disjointed relationships, negative school climate, and lower school-wide academic achievement (Craven, 2017).

In 2016, Blake and colleagues conducted a study to address the racial disparities within school suspension by examining office discipline referrals (ODR). The data was extracted from two racially diverse high schools in the northeastern region of the United States, referred to as school A and school B. The racial/ethnic makeup of both schools were comparable in ethnic makeup, with a majority White population. The study examined the two most common categories of referrals, the number of students with multiple referrals in these categories, and the percentage of students from each racial and ethnic group receiving one or more ODRs in the top two common categories (Blake et

28

al., 2016). Through examination of ODR records, the researchers identified the top two

most common categories: missing class and misconduct/defiance. The top categories

were then disaggregated for the percentage of each racial/ethnic group that received more

than one ODR. In the category of missing class, 47% Latinx males and 39% Latinx

females received referrals, in contrast to 19% White males and 15% White females. In

the area of misconduct/defiance, 40% Latinx males and 22% Latinx females received

referrals, compared to 11% White males and less than 10% White females. Findings

demonstrated an overrepresentation of Latinx students receiving ODRs in both

categories, even though both schools had a high population of White students.

The second piece of the study aimed to examine campus teachers and detect

patterns of persistent discipline while determining whether or not racial/ethnic disparity

was present within the data. Utilizing the same two schools, 19 teachers from school A

and 11 teachers from school B participated in the study. Of the teacher participants,

almost 75% were women and all but one teacher identified as White (Blake et al., 2016).

Overall, the findings showed that teachers who demonstrated a high propensity to issue

referrals issued more ODRs to students of color than their White counterparts. On

campus A, 40% of the persistently disciplined students were Latinx, while 22% were

White. The data for campus B also exhibited racial/ethnic disparities, with 62% Latinx

and only 8% White students categorized as persistently disciplined.

Data from the Texas Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS)

show similar trends to the studies previously discussed. PEIMS (Texas Education

Agency, 2018a; 2018b) discipline reports are divided into the following categories: in-

school suspension (ISS), out of school suspension (OSS), district alternative education

program (DAEP), juvenile justice alternative education program (JJAEP), and expulsion. PEIMS data for the 2016-2017 school year reported state total enrollment numbers at 5,500,606 students, with 236,531 Latinx students (52%), and 110,112 White students (28%). Overall discipline data for the state reflected minute discrepancies; for example, 50% of students assigned OSS were Latinx, with only 15% White students. Additionally, discipline placements such as JJAEP and expulsion reflected rates of 55% and 58% for Latinx students, and 19% and 22% for White students respectively.

Although there were small gaps in overall discipline numbers for the state of Texas, larger margins existed when examining regions across Texas where populations among Latinx and White students were more similar in numbers. For example, in Fort Worth (Region 11), Latinx students account for 36% of the population, with White students at 40% of student enrollment. Even though matriculation numbers are slightly higher for White students, data shows that disciplinary actions weighed heavier for the Latinx population. In the 2016-2017 school year, 33% of students assigned to OSS were Latinx, with only 23% assigned being White students. Additionally, the Fort Worth region's percentage of JJAEP delegations demonstrated the same trend, with 30% of students in JJAEP being White, while 38% were Latinx.

Similarly in Austin (Region 13), the number of in-school suspensions totaled 28,441 during the 2016-2017 school year. Despite the fact that the Latinx population encompasses 48% of student enrollment compared with 37% White students, more than half (57%) of the students assigned to in-school suspension were Latinx. The number of students whose behavior resulted in out of school suspension totaled 11,522, with only 20% of disciplined students being White (57% were Latinx). The percentage of DAEP

placements and expulsions were 57% and 56% for Latinx students and 25% and 30% for White students. As another example of these trends, data from the Abilene area (Region 14) also show higher numbers of discipline incidents for Latinx students. The student demographics Region 14 indicated a slightly higher percentage of White students, with 49%, in contrast to 36% of the population being Latinx. However, the percentages for student discipline, with the exception of ISS, demonstrated a higher number of incidents for Latinx students. Latinx students were referred for OSS, DAEP, and JJAEP at rates of 40%, 44%, and 48%; while White student percentages were lower, with OSS at 34%, DAEP at 34%, and the minimal percentage of JJAEP placements masked to protect student confidentiality.

With the Latinx population growing at an accelerated rate, examining discipline data through a lens of disproportionality becomes a challenging task. If a specific population of students is the largest in a state, region, or district it is within reason to expect the rate of referrals to be higher than that of their peers. However, the data examined in the research study conducted by Blake et al. (2016), along with state and regional data from Texas, highlighted a larger percentage of referrals for Latinx students even when the population was comparable or significantly lower than their White counterparts.

Disproportionate Representation of Latinx Students in Special Programs

Special education. Cultural and historical processes that form educational opportunities and experiences of underserved student groups contribute to disproportionality in special education. Research and practices in special education are rooted in narrow views of culture that are "ahistorical and rely on proxy indicators such

as race and ethnicity" (Artiles et al., 2010, p. 295). The disproportionate placement of Latinx students in special education is an additional factor that contributes to widening of the achievement gap. Students of color are overrepresented in remedial, general education track, and special education classes (Artiles et al., 2010; Fletcher & Navarette, 2003; Theoharis, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014). As Morgan and colleagues point out, "Reports of minority overrepresentation and concerns that schools are misidentifying children as having disabilities based on their race or ethnicity have led increasingly to federal legislation and policy" (Morgan et al., 2018, p. 262). In 1997 and 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was amended to address issues of overrepresentation and put procedures in place for monitoring disproportionality in state trends (Morgan et al., 2018). Systemic issues of inequity, prejudice, and marginalization perpetuate the continued incidence of disproportionality in special education (Sullivan, 2011).

In 2003, Fletcher and Navarette examined issues associated with the overrepresentation of Latinx students in special education. The authors' most concerning findings pointed to the misuse of testing and assessment procedures, teachers' lack of preparation, the ineffectiveness of bilingual and ESL (English as a Second Language) programs, and disparity in school funding (Fletcher & Navarette, 2003). Specific to the standardized testing used to identify learning disabilities, the authors argue that such measures are not valid due to assumptions that student's academic deficits are purely biological. Standardized testing does not account for the impact of processes such as language development and acculturation undergone by students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The authors put forth that, since standardized testing

has a lack of demonstrated validity for identifying learning disabilities in monolingual students, the effectiveness of accurate identification for bilingual students is questionable (Fletcher & Navarette, 2003).

Zhang and colleagues (2014) conducted a study to evaluate minority student representation trends in special education. They utilized growth models and analyzed national data obtained from the U.S. Census Bureau to identify trends from the 50 states over a five-year period. Findings from the study reflected a decrease in Latinx students being identified as intellectually disabled (ID), but an increase in the percentage of Latinx students categorized as learning disabled (LD). Overall, the study showed trends for minority representation in special education as similar to those from the previous decade (Zhang et al., 2014).

Sullivan (2011) conducted a subsequent study utilizing existing state data to examine disproportionate placement of English Learners (ELs) in special education relative to their White peers over an eight-year period. The study took place in a southwestern state with Latinx students comprising 39% of enrollment, and 91% of students identified as ELs as having Spanish as their predominant language. Latinx students accounted for 39% of those receiving special education services, while 46% were White. The researcher sought to analyze the disproportionate representation of ELs in the following high-incidence special education categories: mild mental retardation (MIMR), specific learning disability (SLD), speech language impairment (SLI), and emotional disability (ED). Additional research questions examined the extent to which ELs were receiving special education services in the least restrictive environment. For the purpose of this study, the least restrictive environment constituted students remaining in

the general education setting for the entirety of their school day. The study reported findings at the state level indicating an overrepresentation of ELs in both SLD and MIMR, in conjunction with an underrepresentation of ELs identified as ED. District-level data revealed a general increase of overrepresentation of ELs in special education, particularly in the categories of SLD and SLI. In reference to least restrictive environment, 51% of ELs spent at least 80% of their time in general education. In contrast, ELs were less likely than White students to receive special education services in the least restrictive environment, and "increasingly represented students who spent part of their day in a separate setting (resource room etc.)" (Sullivan, 2011, p. 324).

While disproportional representation generally lends itself to the idea of Latinx students being over-referred to special education, the disparity also manifests in other forms. According to Guiberson (2009), the inaccurate placement of students in special education can take on various configurations including overrepresentation, underrepresentation, and misidentification. Guiberson's review of the literature found that Latinx students continue to be overrepresented in the categories of learning disabled and speech-language impairment. However, they are generally underrepresented in disability categories of emotional disturbance and mental retardation. The patterns of student placement contribute to the achievement gap for Latinx students. Keeping misidentified students in special education programs can hinder academic potential, whereas other students are not receiving services necessary to promote their educational success (Guiberson, 2009).

Enrichment programs. Placement in gifted and talented programs, a curricular change usually occurring in elementary school, is the height of achievement for many

students (Valencia, 2015). Underrepresentation for Latinx students in enrichment programs, such as gifted and talented (GT) or advanced placement (AP) courses in secondary schools, denote a pervasive contribution to the achievement gap and inequitable school practices (Ford, 2014). Students identified for services through gifted and talented programs have educational advantages not available to students in "regular" classes, such as highly challenging school curricula, placement in AP courses in high school, and eventual access to college (Ford, 2014; Milner & Ford, 2007; Valencia, 2015, p. 14).

Utilizing data collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) from the 1998-2006 biennial elementary and secondary school civil rights surveys, Ford (2014), calculated trends for underrepresentation of Latinx students identified as gifted and talented. During the time of Ford's study, data was only available for the state or district, not the national level. Ford's research utilized an unnamed district for data comparison. Enrollment discrepancies were determined through the Relative Difference in Composition Index (RDCI) formula. The RDCI evaluates the difference between the composition of Latinx students in gifted and general education, which is then expressed in a percentage (Ford, 2014). In 1998, Latinx students comprised 14.3% of the student population, but only 8.63% of students in gifted and talented, a discrepancy of 39.7%. Subsequently in 2006, 12.79% of Latinx students were identified at gifted and talented compared to their overall population of 20.41%, a discrepancy of 37.33%. Over the eight-year period, the incongruities reported through the surveys indicated the highest enrollment discrepancy at 41.5% and the lowest at 34.9%.

Data collection during the 2011-2012 school year mirrored previous findings from

1998-2006. Across the country Latinx students represented 25% of overall enrollment

while only accounting for 16% of students in gifted and talented classes. These

representative numbers equated to an almost 40% discrepancy for Latinx students

(Wright, Ford, & Young, 2017).

Valencia (2015) conducted a disparity analysis of gifted enrollment by ethnicity

for the state of Texas. Utilizing data from 2012-2013 school year, Valencia reported

Latinx students constituted 51.3% of the student population in contrast to 30% non-White

Latinx students. However, not only were Latinx students underrepresented in gifted

education by nearly 21%, White students were overrepresented by 38.7%. Similarly, in

the 2017-2018 school year, Texas public school enrollment for gifted and talented

programs continued to reflect a disproportionate ratio for Latinx students. Latinx student

representation was smaller at 42% than in the overall student population of 52%.

Conversely, White students had a higher percentage of membership in gifted and talented

programs at 38%, compared to their overall enrollment of 28% (Texas Education

Agency, 2018c).

As with numerous forms of assessment (teacher nominations, state testing, special

education evaluations, etc.) when seeking to identify gifted students, consideration for

student culture has historically been absent. Gifted programs and their successive services

are disproportionally allocated to students who are White, English-speaking, and in

higher income brackets (Borland, 1996; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Valencia, 2015). As such,

intelligence tests tend to penalize students of color through "verbally loaded and highly

culturally bound" assessment practices (Valencia, 2015, p. 15). With the growth of the

Latinx population, teachers and school systems cannot continue to teach, test, and operate

as if what works for White students also works for students who are culturally and linguistically different (Ford, 2014). Data in the previously discussed studies show that progress in equalization of gifted education has not been significant and continues to demonstrate underrepresentation for Latinx students.

The Influence of Culture and Language on Instruction for Latinx Students

Culture and language influence learning through a variety of ways; students have cultural and linguistic influences from school, home, and their peers, and each shapes the ways students interact and conduct themselves behaviorally, verbally, or in writing. Culture is co-constructed through interactions with others and influences how we approach people, how we respond, and how we react to different situations. Students' life experiences and unique views of the world are shaped by their culture, which includes interactions within their homes, with their families, and with members of their communities. Examination of the historical development of individuals and communities, social relations, language practices, rules, and the division of labor facilitates understanding of both individual and community learning (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Formed through life experiences, culture influences student learning through the distinctive beliefs, values, and language practices students bring to the classroom.

The Influence of Culture on Teaching and Learning

Learning is influenced by culture through students' prior experiences and background knowledge. The relationship between the values of children's cultural roots and their learning expectations and experiences in the classroom is directly related to the child's success academically, socially, and emotionally (Burke, Guild, & Garger, 1998; Valenzuela, 1999). The beliefs and values students bring with them to the classroom play

a role within the interactions students have with teachers and other faculty members. Villegas and Lucas (2002) reaffirmed this view, stating "Teachers who respect cultural differences are more apt to believe that students from non-dominant groups are capable learners" (p. 23). Additionally, Adair, Colgrove, and McManus (2017) found that teacher and administrator beliefs regarding the capabilities of students and their families heavily influenced the depth of educational experiences they offered in "everyday classroom life" (p. 328).

Students' early life experiences and cultural values affect both their learning processes and how they perceive themselves as learners. As maintained by Martinez, Morales, & Aldana (2017), children develop useful tools within their homes and communities, which are pertinent for mediating their learning and development in schools. Children's views of themselves as learners are largely influenced by their early experiences in education (Adair et al., 2017). Students who see their community's cultural norms reflected in their classrooms are more likely to be engaged, which leads to higher levels of achievement. Culture is central to learning, and curricular content must clearly relate to the cultural backgrounds of the students who engage with it (Garland & Bryan, 2017). Guidance on appropriate cultural norms comes through socialization. If students' cultural norms are similar to those implicitly taught in schools, teacher focus is on reinforcement and academic content. Conversely, for students whose cultural norms are dissimilar, school becomes not only about academics but also learning to navigate systemic cultural norms (Nelson & Guerra, 2014).

Utilization of student culture to bridge the gap between school, home, and communities is a vital component for student success and gives students access to a larger

spectrum of resources. This wide range of resources that stem from personal experiences is central to student learning, but if they are discounted, teachers inevitably "deny students access to the knowledge construction process" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002, p. 25). The process of constructing knowledge through experience and personal perception allows for expansion of learning through inquiry. In contrast to instructional approaches that support the development of mainstream and dominant educational practices, utilization of diverse students' cultures to influence or guide learning builds on their present skills, lived experiences, and resources that they bring to the classroom (Martinez et al., 2017; Rios-Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, & Moll, 2011). Students are granted opportunities to arrive at a conclusion through multiple methods rather than a prescribed standard path. This process of acquiring knowledge can alleviate educator bias toward students who do not hold the prior background knowledge of the dominant culture, open up an inquiry process that allows for personal investment, and create learning opportunities for all students. (Martinez et al., 2017; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

When students are denied access to the process of constructing knowledge, teaching and learning becomes a compilation of Valenzuela's (1999) concept of "schooling": a rote process with minimal investment (p. 5). Further, learning produces a nominal return when teachers use what Freire called a "banking concept of education," or the view that knowledge is deposited by the teacher, and students accept the knowledge without further inquiry (1970, p. 71). Actively engaged learners utilize prior experiences, familiar ideas, and vocabulary to make sense of new information; yet, when new content is not presented in a manner relevant to the learner, it is unlikely that the learning will

result in meaningful connections or be retained as valuable knowledge. In the context of the current educational system, Sugarman (2010) argues "power resides with educators; students are at best carrying out the school's agenda, and worst passive recipients of knowledge and skills" (p. 97). Students' educational growth is connected to a complex social and cultural network. Utilizing these social and cultural networks positively enhances students' experiences and outcomes in the processes of teaching and learning (Barnes, 2006).

Teachers lack of cultural knowledge. Teachers who lack understanding of students' cultures often make blanket judgments about students' ability to learn and become successful (Adair et al., 2017; Glenn Paul, 2000; Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003; Jordan & Lovett, 2007; Lewis & Diamond 2015; Rodriguez, 2014; Valencia & Black, 2002). Unfamiliarity with students' cultures may lead to broad assumptions about students, such as "all African American students need *a, b, c,*" while "all Latinx students don't like *a, b, c.*" In some cultures, a young person making eye contact with an adult is considered unacceptable, while, according to the culture of school, not making eye-contact is seen as a sign of defiance or disrespect. Some student behaviors, although viewed acceptable at home and in the community, may be interpreted as a "behavior problem" at school. When cultural continuity between school and home is non-existent, it can lead to "cultural misunderstandings, student resistance, low teacher expectations for student success, and self-fulfilling prophecies of student failure" (Glenn Paul, 2000, p. 247).

Generalizations about homogeneity. A caveat to viewing student learning from a cultural perspective is teachers' tendency to lump all students from one cultural

background into one group. When this happens, students' cultures are addressed as traits

and no consideration is given to the variability of individual needs. There exists an

underlying assumption that experiences, skills, and interests are commonalities among all

group members (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). In turn, students are often categorized by

learning styles automatically connected to their cultural backgrounds, which can

ultimately hinder appropriate support of their academic progress. Students may be

characterized as analytical, cooperative, or individualistic learners solely based on group

membership (Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003). Additionally, assumptions about homogeneity

can perpetuate negative stereotypes about students' ethnic or cultural group, or their

families and communities. Research suggests that students' cognition is negatively

impacted by negative racial stereotypes (Jordan & Lovett, 2007; Rodriguez, 2014). These

negative stereotypes obstruct teachers from being able to recognize the potential of

culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, a potential that is enhanced by their

cultural perspectives and experiences (Wright et al., 2017).

 Assumptions about students' abilities and knowledge. Seasoned and new teachers

alike often give merit to overarching assumptions regarding students' knowledge and

academic abilities. Assumptions regarding students' learning capacity are evident in the

study conducted by Adair and colleagues (2017), which focused on what is termed the

"word gap argument." The authors proposed the term word gap as a basic description of

the socioeconomic and academic divide that "conveniently begins and ends with deficit

ideas about families struggling with poverty and about families and communities of

color" (p. 314-315). Beginning a few years prior to the word gap study, the authors

utilized the video-cued ethnographic (VCE) method to understand the impact of student

agency on social and academic development. Recorded during one year in two predominantly Latinx first-grade classrooms, the film was then used to prompt discussion for a follow-up study.

The subsequent study was carried out among four school sites with a Latinx student majority. Teachers and administrators were shown the film and asked to respond to the following questions: "What do you think about this? Is this good learning?" (Adair et al, 2017, p. 311). Although teachers and administrators collectively appeared to acknowledge the positive impact of agentic practices, initial responses reflected reasons why these practices would not work for their students (Adair et al., 2017). Teachers and administrators concurred that their students lacked the vocabulary to reach the level of agency depicted in the film, and they were "unable to handle or justify a more sophisticated learning experience" (Adair et al, 2017, p. 312). These authors contend that teachers and administrators viewed vocabulary as key to unlocking a higher level of learning. When negative assumptions are made about students' abilities, the low-level of performance expectations impact student outcomes (Lewis and Diamond, 2015). Student learning experiences are not only impacted by teachers' pedagogical knowledge, but largely in part by daily interactions, as well as the beliefs and attitudes of their teachers and administrators regarding their academic abilities (Adair et al., 2017; Lewis & Diamond, 2015).

Assumptions about families. There is an assertion in scholarly literature that Latinx parents, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, do not value education. As far back as 1927, studies have propagated the notion that Latinx families put little to no value on formal school and learning. Taylor (1927) placed blame on lack

of knowledge in English, excessive school transfers, poor nutrition, and inconsistent attendance. Through the years, additional studies have been targeted at discovering deficiencies in Latinx families with which to assign blame for lack of student academic achievement. In fact, the term "at risk" (popularized in the 1980s) has become a person-centered explanation of school failure constructed of perceived deficiencies "rooted in familial and economic backgrounds of [Latinx] students" (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 87).

Valencia and Black's 2002 study was likely born out of continued negative assumptions and ideas about culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and their families. Through a case study, Valencia and Black's study aimed to discredit the myth that Latinx families do not value education and demonstrate Latinx familial involvement in schools. All six families in the study were either bilingual or English-speaking and had resided in Texas for two to five generations. For the purpose of the study, parental involvement was defined as "attitudes and practices concerning school that are initiated by the family and found exclusively in the home itself" (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 97). The study was comprised of interviews conducted with ten adults (four grandparents and six parents), from a total of six Latinx families in Austin, Texas. Although the majority of literature on parental involvement in schools focuses on *public* involvement, such as attending meetings or volunteering at school, interviews revealed a "more subtle type of parental involvement" (p. 96). Parents and grandparents described how they demonstrated a high level of value on education through engaging in family conversations about ambitions and goals, helping with homework, and walking children to and from school in order to assure attendance. It is often visible, or public, behaviors

that are used to determine families' measure of educational value; however, as demonstrated in this study, Latinx families utilize opportunities at home to emphasize and reiterate the importance of education to their children.

Educators often attribute academic failures to the inadequate abilities of culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and their families (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Assumptions related to the academic and social abilities of students and their families perpetuate a paradigm of deficit thinking. Deficit thinking, which will be explored further in a subsequent section, is defined by Valencia (1997; 2010) as locating the basis of economic failure within students and their cultures due to perceived internal defects that impede the learning process. In order to address these deficit views of families, teachers must be intentional in their efforts to understand the cultural and linguistic resources students bring to school (Sugarman, 2010). Because culture influences the instructional process and students' educational experiences, teachers' capacity to ascertain and attend to the unique strengths and resources students bring from home is key to addressing problems of inequity and underachievement in schools (Gay, 2002, 2010; Griffin, Watson, & Liggett, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Premier & Miller, 2010; Watson, 2012).

Cho and Decastro-Ambrosetti (2005) conducted a study that examined attitudes of teachers prior to and after completing a course on multicultural education. The study found that a majority of the participating pre-service teachers believed that the qualities of students' home lives and the "parents' lack of value toward education" were the cause for CLD students' low academic achievement (p. 27). A group of 18 secondary pre-service teachers, with an equal distribution among majority and minority ethnic groups,

completed both pre- and post-tests. The results from the pre-test demonstrated a rate of 56% support for multicultural education, while only 44% of teachers advocated for multicultural education after completing the course. Additionally, following completion of the course, some teachers still felt ill-equipped for teaching CLD students due to "their limited knowledge, teaching experience, and exposure to issues of diversity" (p. 27). Therefore, even though the teachers participated in the multicultural education course, a number of teachers still felt inadequately prepared to teach students from diverse backgrounds, and others continued to place blame on student backgrounds and home environments for lack of educational achievement. This study demonstrated that even after completing a course on multicultural education and its benefits for students, teachers continued to make negative assumptions about families of CLD students and those assumptions are connected to beliefs about students' lack of academic achievement. Further, the study suggests that overcoming deficit ideas in relation to families of CLD students is an undertaking of a highly complex nature.

Nelson and Guerra's (2014) qualitative study demonstrated that teachers were found to have deficit beliefs about diverse students and their families while additionally demonstrating the lack of a deep level of understanding the influence culture has on teaching and learning. The study examined beliefs that practicing educators held about culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse students and families, while additionally examining educator knowledge of culture and its practical application. One-hundred and eleven educators were selected from two predominantly White suburban school districts, one in Texas and one in Michigan.

Belief surveys comprised of nine scenarios depicting culture clashes were

administered with the intention of revealing educator beliefs about diverse students, knowledge of culture, and application of cultural knowledge in practice. Educator beliefs were coded as either "deficit" or "pluralistic," while knowledge of culture was rated on a scale of "no awareness of culture" to "deep understanding." Finally, educator application of cultural knowledge in their practice was evaluated as either "subtractive," (suggestive of assimilation) or "additive" (for responses that advocated utilization of student and community funds of knowledge). The three categories were then placed on a continuum to determine where each educator fell on the scale of cultural awareness. Understandably, the educators that held less-severe deficit beliefs about diverse students also held greater levels of cultural awareness. Conversely, even though teachers in the study seemed to have more cultural knowledge than educational leaders, teacher deficit beliefs were more numerous and more severe (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Out of 111 educators, "one (>1%) was identified as culturally responsive, three (3%) culturally aware, forty-nine (44%) held a general awareness of culture, forty-three (39%) had little awareness of culture, and fifteen (14%) were classified as culturally unaware" (p. 78).

The studies conducted by Cho and Decastro-Ambrosetti (2005) and Nelson and Guerra (2014) present evidence that pre-service and practicing teachers lack cultural knowledge. The scope of an educators' cultural knowledge has an effect on both their perception and understanding of student behavior, as well as students' academic performance (García & Guerra, 2004). Teachers' lack of cultural awareness was demonstrated in both studies through the continued perpetuation of deficit beliefs and resistance to the benefits of incorporating student culture into teaching and learning.

Utilizing Funds of Knowledge and Student Assets for Teaching and Learning

Prior knowledge and student's lived experiences are vital to a student's ability to contextualize or make connections. Students use the process of contextualization to link basic learning skills and academic content to subject matter specific to their interests and backgrounds. The Center for Research in Education and Diversity asserts that contextualization allows students to connect learning to previous knowledge, or *funds of knowledge*, which in turn strengthens newly acquired knowledge and increases student engagement (CREDE, 2019). Much literature has emphasized the concept of *funds of knowledge* and the value of drawing on students' cultural and linguistic assets in teaching and learning.

The term *funds of knowledge* was first introduced by Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg (1992) to "provide a broad anthropological context for educational reform of the public schools that serve U.S.-Mexican populations" (p. 313). Funds of knowledge refers to strategic and cultural resources or bodies of knowledge found in everyday functions of the home (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Although coined by Velez-Ibanez and Greenberg, the qualitative study conducted by Moll et al. (1992) brought the term to the forefront of research. Set in an Arizona working class Latinx community, the purpose of the study was to tap into knowledge and skills found within the community (funds of knowledge) to develop teaching innovations. Moll et al. (1992) found that a more equitable relationship between school and home developed through visits to student homes where teachers assumed active roles as learners. These collaborative relationships contributed to creation of rigorous and innovative academic content while simultaneously

reducing the myopic classroom environment.

Funds of knowledge is characterized as the connection between school (teaching and curriculum) and students' lives, experiences, and skills garnered through the strategic and cultural resources of local households, families, and communities (Esteban-Guitart & Moll 2014(a-b); Moll et al., 1992; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Across households within a community, although made up of similarly organized networks, exists a unique cultural structure (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). The social exchange between these unique household structures not only affords access to historic funds of knowledge, but also provides the "cultural matrix" for incorporating new understandings (Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, p. 329). According to Freire (1998), "the experience of comprehension will be all the deeper if we can bring together, rather than dichotomizing, the concepts emerging from the school experience and those resulting from the day-to-day world" (p. 19). The funds-of-knowledge approach deems these resources from families and within the community as invaluable, and when they are incorporated into teaching and learning, they can serve as support for students' educational experiences (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Sugarman, 2010; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992).

Sugarman's (2010) study on reframing what educators often categorize as student deficits examined the daily life of a second-grade student to ascertain existing funds of knowledge. Utilizing interviews and conversations with the student and his parents, along with neighborhood and home visits, the researcher was able to view the student in the context of his strengths and identify assets to support his learning. As revealed through the interviews and home visits, parents' investment in a college fund represented a deep

belief in the importance of education. Parent employment in the business of carpentry and car maintenance could generate knowledge in both literacy and numeracy practices. Additionally, another powerful form of cultural and economic literacy presented in the study was the ability of parents to navigate the educational system and advocate for themselves and their children (Sugarman, 2010). Utilizing students' funds of knowledge allows for creation of new knowledge comprised of both home and academic content knowledge (Sugarman, 2010). Although it cannot be expected that teachers perform funds-of-knowledge analyses for all students, "deliberate inquiry into funds of knowledge helps define how a community is imagined and how it will be imagined in the future, with new generations of students" (Moll, 2000, p. 264).

Rios-Aguilar (2010) conducted a study utilizing an "integrated theoretical framework-funds of knowledge" to determine an alternative explanation for variation in Latinx academic and nonacademic outcomes" (p. 2209). A random sample of 212 students in grades K-12 in the Northeast Region of the United States, was employed to substantiate the existence of a positive correlation between funds of knowledge and academic outcomes (reading/academic achievement) and nonacademic literacy practices. The demographic makeup of the district consisted of 64% African American, 20% Latinx, 14% White, and 2% Native American, Asian, and other racial/ethnic minorities with 80% of students meeting the eligibility requirements for free and reduced lunch.

The data for the study was represented by responses to the *Latinx Hispanic Household Survey (LHHS)* and student test scores (Stanford Achievement, English Language Arts, and GPA). Student test scores were combined to have one single objective measure of student outcome. The *LHHS* contained questions in five broad

categories that served as proxies for funds of knowledge, and questions in two categories related to English/Spanish literacy outcomes. Through a multiple regression analysis, outcomes indicated a relationship between some components of funds of knowledge and student academic and nonacademic outcomes. Although the study found a positive correlation between students' reading and academic achievement and parental education levels, there was not a significant link between "funds of knowledge (i.e., social reciprocity, parental educational philosophy, frequent activities, and parental language acquisition) and students' reading and academic achievement" (p. 2244). The researcher argues that the lack of relationship between the two can be attributed to the idea that standardized assessments measure academic skills valued by the dominant society and not the social and literacy practices prevalent in Latinx households. Conversely, the data indicated a positive and significant correlation between English and Spanish literacy-oriented activities and funds of knowledge such as social reciprocity, frequent activities, and parental educational philosophy. Findings from this study indicate that literacy development in both languages is enhanced when children and parents engage in consistent interactions around regular activities in their daily lives (Rios-Aguilar, 2010).

Although the previously discussed studies employed varying research and data collection methods, both demonstrate positive results of utilizing funds of knowledge to enrich student learning. Specific and unique funds of knowledge are created through social actions and transactions (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014b). Funds of knowledge aid in developing a schema, or one's knowledge base, with which to build upon and extend student learning. The greatest benefit of using a funds-of-knowledge approach in education is that it counteracts deficit views of students by emphasizing and valuing the

resources embedded in students, families, and communities (Olmedo, 1997; Rios-Aguilar et al., 2011; Sugarman, 2010).

Understanding Second Language Development

Research has found that there is a critical connection between language development and academic learning (Lucas, Villegas, & Freedson-Gonzalez, 2008). Accessing academic curriculum and demonstrating knowledge require the medium of language; thus, a double demand is placed on CLD students to learn language and academic content simultaneously (Lucas et al., 2008). DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, and Rivera (2014) contend that, across academic disciplines, there are norms and patterns of language that are never explicitly taught to a large portion of the student population. Sometimes referred to by linguists as a *context of culture*, purposes for using language reflect shared assumptions and expectations among speakers of a particular culture (Gibbons, 2015). Furthermore, the language of academic discourse can be markedly different and more cognitively demanding than language used for social purposes and routine conversations. The increasing array of content knowledge required in educational settings requires English Learners (ELs) to develop academic language (Gibbons, 2015), defined as language necessary for learning academic content and "characterized by the specific linguistic features associated with academic disciplines" (Gottlieb & Ernst-Slavit, 2014, p. 2).

Because language and vocabulary are often specialized and specific to a content area, additional challenges are posed to ELs. The development of age-appropriate academic skills in English is a lengthier and more intensive process than development of age-appropriate communicative skills (Cummins, 1981). Language becomes more

abstract as communication moves from personal and shared experiences, which are often highly contextualized and accompanied by feedback, to academic discourse, with which meaning must be made more explicit (Gibbons, 2015; Lucas et al., 2008, Martin, 1984). Because a high level of language-dependency is involved in learning academic content, learning language cannot be separated from learning of academic content in that language (Lucas et al., 2008; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Marcelletti, 2013). As Gibbons (2015) put forth, "The development of academic language requires planned English support across the whole curriculum and throughout the school" (p. 21).

Expectations of student language proficiency and development are often determined by teachers' own cultural patterns and norms (Lucas et al., 2008). These patterns stem from a teaching majority who do not have the developed experiences of becoming proficient in a second language and lack understanding of the challenges that involved in learning to speak and read in English (Lucas et al., 2008; Wong Filmore & Snow, 2018; Zehler et al., 2003). Cummins' (1981) research acknowledged the insufficient nature of early exit programs for ELs, stating that English proficiency is often based on fluency with conversational level communication skills, rather than aptitude of academic discourse. When students are classified as proficient in English because of their outwardly presented social fluency levels, teachers overlook the need for ELs' academic language development and again place blame on factors within the individual child for their lower academic performance (Cummins, 1981).

Often overlooked by educational personnel, the developmental relationship between L1 (Language one) and L2 (Language two) is an essential component to language development (Cummins, 1981). The strength of ELs' native-language skills has

a direct effect on their acquisition of a second language (Cummins, 2000; Lucas et al. 2008; Thomas & Collier, 2002). However, teachers working with ELs often return to a deficit model of thinking in regards to student language. Often educators make judgments about the level of students' abilities by their aptitude in English, rather than acknowledging that ELs are not yet able to communicate in English and capitalizing on their present L1 skills (Holmes, Rutledge, & Gauthier, 2009). Conversely, an assets-based approach to instructing ELs ensures linguistic assets in a students' first language are utilized to advance their second language development (Cummins, 2000). Furthermore, through an assets-based method, ELs utilize their existing schema and are given countless opportunities to make connections between prior knowledge and new learning, while also purposefully interacting with their peers (Holmes et al., 2009; Kareva & Echevarria, 2013).

In order to maintain a high level of instructional rigor and curriculum, teachers need to be skilled at scaffolding instruction for different levels of language proficiency. Scaffolding is future-oriented and utilizes temporary support "aimed at increasing a learner's autonomy" (Gibbons, 2015, p. 16). Scaffolding supports a unified theory of teaching and learning where cooperative grouping or teacher-assisted tasks allow ELs to approach new undertakings and learn new ways of using language (Gibbons, 2015). Appropriate implementation of scaffolding practices takes into consideration students' varied levels of language proficiency and recognize when linguistic and cognitive demands are high. Rather than simplifying a task, which ultimately compromises the level of rigor, scaffolding of instruction allows ELs access to the same "intellectually challenging work" as their peers (Gibbons, 2015, p. 21). The use of nonlinguistic tools,

53

such as graphic organizers and visual aids, are used to anchor instruction, and students use them to make sense of content. For example, graphic organizers (graphs, timelines, Venn diagrams) and nonlinguistic tools (illustrations, maps, videos etc.) reduce the amount of auditory information needed to process academic instruction. Visual organization of information "helps students clarify concepts, understand causal relationships, and trace a sequence of events" (Lucas et al., 2008, p. 368). Coupled with high-quality instruction, visual representations serve as linguistic accommodations for ELs, giving them access to the core curriculum and providing additional support in development of the academic language needed for school success (Kareva & Echevarria, 2013; Short, Fidelman & Longuit, 2012). In summary, when teachers are knowledgeable of the second language development process, they can capitalize on CLD students' assets and provide the instructional scaffolding needed to support students in accessing a rigorous curriculum.

<u>Importance of Relationships in Teaching and Learning</u>

Valenzuela's (1999) case study of Seguin High School highlighted the essential component of student-teacher relationships and its impact on student achievement. Valenzuela's mixed method data collection and analysis, which included observations, field notes, informal interviews, surveys, grades, and data from school and district documents took place over a three-year period in a Houston, Texas high school. Her "ethnographic investigation of the academic achievement and schooling orientations" emphasized the underlying socio-emotional issues that detract from and deter student achievement (p. 3). Valenzuela found that a vital component of students' motivation to achieve is the extent to which they perceive their teachers are invested in them. Since

Valenzuela's study in 1999, additional researchers have confirmed this finding (Charalampous & Kokkinos, 2018; Davis, 2003; den Brok, van Tartwijk, Wubbels, & Veldman, 2010). The potential for higher academic achievement increases in schools where supportive, reciprocal, and resilient student-educator relationships are established (Brown & Medway, 2007; Cardillo, Cohen, & Pickeral, 2011; O'Brennan & Bradshaw, 2013; Valenzuela, 1999). There is a connection between the level of student motivation to achieve and their relationships with school personnel. The level of these relationships "play a decisive role in determining the extent to which youth find the school to be a welcome or alienating place" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 7). The connections made with others, whether an adult or peer, can be the one factor that increases students' intrinsic motivation. Students often view school as an additional home, and when there is strong emotional support, the level of connection and sense of belonging increases, and in turn so does academic engagement (Ross, 2013).

In Valenzuela's (1999) case study, a prime example of a caring relationship was best demonstrated by Seguin High School's band director, Mr. Sosa. Even though Mr. Sosa was not well received by the students initially, he worked hard to form a positive system of emotional support. He utilized food as an avenue for open communication and trust with his students. Mr. Sosa took the time to understand what the students needed, and he did his part to ensure their physical needs were met. In taking time to meet students' physical needs, he was able to reach them on an emotional level and build relationships. Students acknowledged Mr. Sosa as someone who was genuinely interested in them, not just as a homogeneous group of students, but as markedly different individuals. A small authentic gesture can open avenues for forming relationships which

would otherwise have been non-existent.

Daily interactions between students and teachers communicate to students whether or not they are expected to succeed (Lewis & Diamond, 2015). When students are not given the opportunity to engage in reciprocal relationships, their definition of education is invalidated. The learning process becomes subtractive and denies students' social and cultural resources while increasing their susceptibility to academic failure (Valenzuela, 1999). The subtractive nature of education and removing necessary assets from student learning can contribute to the formation of deficit views regarding student ability and potential.

Deficit Thinking

As introduced earlier in this chapter, deficit thinking is rooted in the notion that student failure is perpetuated by their internal deficiencies. From this view, students' underachievement is attributed to their alleged cognitive and motivational deficits, while minimal attention is given to the role of inequitable school systems' institutional structures in students' lack of opportunity to learn (Valencia, 1997; Valencia & Black, 2003). The outcomes of these alleged deficiencies are utilized as explanations for students' linguistic shortcomings, limited intellectual abilities, lack of motivation, and immoral behavior (Valencia, 1997).

Even regarding early childhood access programs, there is often a deficit view of the purpose of these programs and the students they serve. Programs are provided with the assumption that families of color and/or low socioeconomic status are unable to impart these foundational learning opportunities for their children (Adair et al., 2017; Garcia & Jensen, 2007). This deficit view of families has reinforced barriers to academic

success for children of color in early education, including but not limited to disproportionate discipline, segregation, and lack of engagement with families of color (Adair et al., 2017).

Lewis and Diamond (2015) contend that "current racial patterns are supported by structural inequalities, institutional practices, and racial ideologies" all of which mutually reinforce each other (p. 8). Racial identity is linked directly to sources of and access to power. "*Race-based status beliefs"* [emphasis in original] are influential pieces in our interactions, as well as key components to understanding ourselves and others (p. 11). Through the reinforcement of such beliefs, production of racial stratification continues in school campuses and communities. Overarching beliefs can lead to discrimination, whether conscious or subconscious, which continues to reinforce racial hierarchies.

As Nelson and Guerra argue, "Negative beliefs about diverse students and their families lead to lower educational expectations and blame" (2014, p. 71). According to Yosso (2005):

> Deficit thinking takes the position that minority students and families are at fault for poor academic performance because: (a) students enter school without the normative cultural knowledge and skills; and (b) parents neither value nor support their child's education. (p. 75)

Placing fault on students and families for academic failures puts the focus on perceived student limitations, while neglecting students' assets and potential for success (Valencia & Black, 2002). According to Khalifa (2018), these deficit discourses used to describe parents and students trace to early forms of racism. Oppressive behaviors linked to deficit thinking are historical and reproductive in nature, with minimal effort required

for reproduction. Deficit views then continue to be fueled by educators' lack of willingness to acknowledge their own assumptions about marginalized students. Therefore, efforts toward school reform often collapse or come to a halt and rarely result in meaningful change (García & Guerra, 2004).

Sustaining students' cultural and linguistic knowledge and heritage are foundational to creating bi-culturally and bilingually competent students; however, historically, school personnel "subtract these traits from students to their social and academic detriment" (Ross, 2013, p. 25). Reliance on bilingual education programs alone to address deficit thinking can prove to be counterproductive. Cummins (1986) reaffirmed these ideas when he argued that if students' cultural identity and native language skills are not reinforced through linguistic programs, they too become subtractive in nature. Instead of focusing on a deficit view of Communities of Color, emphasis should be concentrated on learning from the "array of cultural knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts possessed by socially marginalized groups" (Yosso, 2005, p. 69).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Over the years, students' learning needs, as identified through standardized test scores or learning inventories, have been addressed by intervention programs and what has been termed "differentiated instruction." In spite of this, learning differences based on students' language and cultural backgrounds have been overlooked and the educational system falls short in addressing those permeating differences. "Cultural difference is the single most pervasive difference in U.S. schools and until the early 1970s, the most neglected" (Santamaria, 2009, p. 215). Through culturally responsive

teaching, students increase not only their academic success, but retain their social and cultural knowledge. Student communication of thoughts and the molding of their thinking processes are greatly influenced by culture (Garland & Bryan, 2017).

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) utilizes students' prior knowledge and experiences to build a frame of reference for new learning (Gay, 2010). Students use their culture and personal experiences to make connections, enhance their understanding, and "bridge the divide between home and education" (Warren-Grice, 2017, p. 3). Culturally responsive pedagogy serves to empower students to the point in which they will be able to critically examine educational content and process and ask what its role is in creating a truly democratic and multicultural society. It uses the "students' culture to help them create meaning and understand the world" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 106). According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), this set of pedagogical practices

> rests on three propositions (a) students must experience academic success; (b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; (c) and students must develop critical consciousness through which they challenge the status quo of the current social order. (p. 160)

Culturally responsive pedagogy enriches students' cultural and social development while utilizing students' diverse cultures as "conduits or filters for teaching academic knowledge and skills they are expected to learn in school" (Gay, 2015, p. 124).

Brief History and Evolution of CRP

Ladson-Billings initially introduced the term *culturally relevant pedagogy* (later referred to as culturally responsive pedagogy) to address the academic needs of African-American students. Ladson-Billings'(1995b) ethnographic study sought to document the

teaching practices of highly effective teachers of African American students. Eight teachers (5 African American and 3 White) were selected based on parent, principal, and colleague nominations. Through interviews, classroom observations, and collective interpretive analysis, Ladson-Billings found that all eight teachers were culturally relevant regardless of their ethnicity. The teachers who participated in the study viewed parents as educational partners, demanded academic excellence, respectfully managed their classrooms, and students were enthusiastic about attending their classes. Through continued research, this set of practices was deemed beneficial to all culturally and linguistically diverse students**.** Through the years, culturally responsive pedagogy has been introduced, reshaped, and rebranded under different names, including culturally responsible, culturally appropriate, culturally congruent, and culturally relevant teaching, as well as multicultural education (Harmon, 2012; Irvine & Armento, 2001). Most recently, Paris (2012) has made a case to advance the terminology to "culturally sustaining pedagogy." According to Paris, culturally sustaining pedagogy "seeks to perpetuate and foster-to-sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (2012, p. 93). Although Paris' research is the most recent, the bulk of existing studies utilize the terms culturally relevant and/or culturally responsive. While there exists a gradual variation in terminology, the premise of addressing student culture has remained to include teaching practices that consider all learners in a classroom setting and pay "close attention to differences inherent to academic, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity" (Santamaria, 2009, p. 241). Even though the terms culturally responsive and culturally relevant are frequently used interchangeably within the research, the term "culturally responsive" will be used

exclusively from this point on in the literature review to indicate the incorporation of students' cultures into teaching and learning practices.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Practice

A significant landmark in research and theory, culturally responsive pedagogy advances the belief that "students of color possess a rich, complex, and robust set of cultural practices, experiences, and knowledge that are essential for learning and understanding" (Howard & Rodriguez-Minkoff, 2017, p. 4). Most significantly, teachers' instructional behaviors are determined by their philosophies about ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity (Gay, 2015). Classroom curricula that are reflective of students' cultures and the communities in which they live indicate a vital component of the successful implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy (Garland & Bryan, 2017; Gay, 2010; Kozleski, n.d.). Culturally responsive pedagogy actively engages students in learning, while communicating high expectations, and understanding the numerous assets and capabilities students and their families bring to the classroom and their learning.

Teachers utilize a variety of instructional strategies that reflect their students' strengths and varied learning styles (Gay, 2010; Kozleski, n.d.). Culturally responsive pedagogy "builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, as well as, academic abstractions and lived sociocultural realities" (Gay, 2010, p. 29). Ultimately, culturally responsive pedagogy applies the practices of cultural validation and affirmation to connect students to their learning, while increasing the level of relevance and effectiveness of classroom teaching practices (Gay, 2010; Kozleski, n.d.)

Increasing engagement and improving Latinx students' learning through

culturally responsive pedagogy. Bui and Fagan (2013) conducted a study in a Northern California urban elementary school with 49 fifth-grade students. Demographics for the school were comprised of 55% Latinx, 18% African American, 14% European American, 4% Asian/Pacific Islander, and 5% other non-White students. The percentage of students who were categorized as ELs was 37%, while 65% of the school population qualified for free and reduced lunch.

The study aimed to enhance fifth-grade students' reading comprehension while determining the interactive effects of integrating reading strategies through a culturally responsive teaching framework. The authors sought to evaluate reading performance variances among the students who received two different interventions: (a) ICRS (Integrated Reading Comprehension Strategy) and (b) ICRS Plus interventions. The components of the IRCS were grammar, story maps, prior knowledge, and the prediction method. These components were taught through a culturally responsive teaching framework; for example, graphic organizers were used to help students activate and incorporate various lived experiences, involve students' primary languages, and allow for multiple perspectives. While the ICRS Plus contained the previously listed components, multicultural literature and cooperative learning were added strategies. The two participating fifth-grade student groups were divided in half and reconstituted for comparability in terms of ethnicity, ability, and gender.

The study took place over five weeks, with one 80-minute lesson per week. To ensure integrity and fidelity of the intervention lessons, a scripted protocol was designed

and utilized for each session. Before and after each reading intervention, students' reading levels were measured with an informal reading inventory. The reading inventory examined the following variables: (a) background knowledge, (b) word recognition, (c) reading comprehension, and (d) story retell. Prior to reading the passage for the informal reading inventory, students were asked a background question. After they had completed reading the passage, students were asked eight comprehension questions. Oral reading responses were tape recorded and transcribed, and there was a 95% point-by-point agreement of the results amongst the two researchers.

A major finding was that students from both groups made statistically significant gains from pretest to posttest for word recognition, reading comprehension, and story retell. Students' mean reading scores indicated positive effects of the reading interventions. Although there were no statistically significant differences between the two intervention groups, the addition of "multicultural literature and cooperative learning did not impede students' reading performance" (Bui & Fagan, 2013, p. 66). This finding is important because often teachers perceive cooperative learning as unstructured and assume that it lacks rigor; yet, this study did not find that it impedes learning.

Chun and Dickson's (2011) study aimed to investigate the interdependent relationships of parental involvement, culturally responsive teaching (CRT), sense of school belonging, and academic self-efficacy and academic achievement. This study included students from middle schools along the US-Mexico border region, across which 65.2% of the participating student population identified as Latinx. Among the 478 students, ranging in ages from 11 to 14, 13.4% of the student population reported currently receiving English Language Learner (ELL) educational services.

The research examined the influence of *proximal processes*, defined as reciprocal interaction between an individual and environments, on student achievement (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Griffore & Phenice, 2016). The proximal processes for this study were parental involvement and CRT. The ecological systems model of human development theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) focuses on how a person's inherent qualities and their environment interact to influence growth and development. Through this theory, Chun and Dickson (2011) sought to identify the influence of parent involvement and CRT on academic self-efficacy and academic achievement.

The influence of CRT on academic self-efficacy and academic achievement was measured using the Student Measure of Culturally Responsive Teaching Scale (SMCRT), which is comprised of three subscales: "Diverse Teaching Practices (11 items), Cultural Engagement (7 items), and Diverse Language Affirmation (3 items)" (Chun & Dickson, 2011, p. 1585). The 21-item scale reflects students' perceptions of their teachers' culturally responsive practices. The SMCRT utilizes a Likert-type scale with responses to items ranging from 1(*never)* to 5(*always).* Sample items included: "My teachers use things like videos, pictures, and guests to help students learn;" "My teachers help students learn about other students and their cultures" (Chun & Dickson, 2011, p. 1585).

According to study findings, students' perceptions of their teachers' culturally responsive teaching practices greatly contributed to academic self-efficacy, which led and indirect effect of higher academic aptitude. This effect was reflected through self-reported student grades in English, math, and science for the most recent grading period (Chun & Dickson, 2011). Teachers created connections between students and the school community through implementation of various teaching methods, incorporation of

cultural diversity, and value of student primary languages. These connections contributed to higher levels of students feeling "capable of performing better in school settings" (Chun & Dickson, 2011, p. 1590). These findings support the point of view that CRT and teacher responsiveness to student needs influence motivation and the levels of academic self-efficacy and achievement of students from culturally different backgrounds (Gay, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Marchant, Paulson & Rothlisberg, 2001).

Garcia and Chun's (2016) subsequent research study examined different components of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and their effects on both students' academic self-efficacy and academic performance. Through the study, the authors sought to first understand the effect of "diverse teaching practices" on student self-efficacy and academic performance. They conceptualized "diverse teaching practices" as teachers' abilities to use students' cultural knowledge, experience, and prior knowledge reflected in implementation of various instructional methods. Next, they examined whether or not "cultural engagement," defined as "student perception of the extent to which their teachers incorporate students' cultural values, practices, and learning activities in the classroom," had positive effects on the improvement of academic achievement or student views of their scholastic aptitude (p. 181). Lastly, they studied whether the level of teacher expectations had significant bearing on students' self-efficacy and their academic success.

The study was carried out across three public middle schools (sixth through eighth grades) along the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. The study was conducted with 110 students, 84% of whom identified as Latinx. Conversely, teacher demographics reflected a White majority at 66.6%, with 28.9% Latinx. The authors found that high-level teacher

expectations positively influence student academic self-efficacy and academic performance.

Utilizing a subscale of the Expectations for Student Achievement (ESA), students responded to six items, using a 5-point Likert scale to report the level they felt their teachers demonstrated a specific behavior toward them. For example, students could rate the item "I feel my teacher really listens to what I have to say" (p. 177) on a scale ranging in responses from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*always*). The study measured student self-efficacy with the Academic Self-Efficacy scale adapted from Bachman's (1970) School Ability Self-Concept Index (SASCI). The scale contained eight items with responses ranging from 1 (*far below average*) to 5 (*far above average*). The SASCI posed questions related to students' perception of their own intelligence and how they felt they compared to their peers.

Findings from the study indicated that teacher expectations had significant effects on both student academic self-efficacy and academic performance. When adults hold high expectations for their students, students in turn have firmer beliefs in their abilities and are more accomplished in school (Woolley, 2009). In previous research, having high expectations for students has been documented as the strongest predictor of positive student school success (Garcia & Chun, 2016; Murdock, 1999; Woolley, 2009). Students internalize teacher messages generated through verbal and non-verbal methods; these internalized messages become deeply held attitudes and beliefs (Woolley, 2009).

The culturally responsive teaching (CRT) component of diverse teaching was also found to be significantly associated with increased academic self-efficacy (Garcia & Chun, 2016). A seven-item subscale from the Student Measure of Culturally Responsive

Teaching Scale assessed the creation of a culturally respectful environment and teachers' use of various instructional methods. For example, "My teacher(s) explain what we are doing in different ways to help students learn" (p. 177). Student responses were rated using a 5-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from 1 (*never) to* 5 (*always*); higher scores indicated higher levels of culturally responsive teaching. Diverse teaching practices utilize student culture, familiar experiences, and prior knowledge to make connections to new learning. Garcia and Chun's (2016) research found that the increased engagement resulting from diverse teaching practices led to positive student "beliefs about their academic performance" (p. 181).

Summary of CRP

Culturally responsive pedagogy promotes the connection between student's personal experiences with their learning environment at school (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Gay, 2015; Ladson Billings, 1992). In order to address the distinctive needs of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and make progress toward diminishing the achievement gap, it is necessary to implement culturally responsive research-based practices (Bui & Fagan, 2013; Garcia & Chung, 2016). High-expectations and diverse teaching practices are integral elements of CRP (Ladson Billings, 1992). Bui and Fagan's (2013), Chun and Dickson's (2011), and Garcia and Chun's (2016) studies demonstrate that teacher expectations and diverse teaching practices positively impacted students' self-efficacy and academic achievement.

Implementing a Social Justice Agenda: Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Implementing a social justice agenda involves addressing historic and current disparities in "power, privilege, and access that are manifesting concretely" in

educational systems (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 348). As early as 1971, Rawls shaped

a "broad framework" of social justice that consisted of the three principals of equality,

difference, and diversity (Theoharis, 2009, p. 9). Since then, scholars have drawn on

Rawls' (1971) broad tenets to define a social justice framework in education. A present

day educational social justice framework addresses the following principles: (a) creating

equitable learning environments that meet the needs of all students (Brown, 2004; Brown

2006; Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Jacobs, 2014; Villegas, 2007); (b) identifying and

critiquing patterns, systems, and structures that lead to inequities (Jacobs, 2014; Marshall,

2004); (c) promoting equitable access and inclusive practices in curriculum and pedagogy

(Jacobs, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Shields, 2004); and (d) developing professional

learning for teachers through a social justice lens (Jacobs, 2014; Theoharis, 2007).

According to Khalifa et al. (2016), culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) is

strongly connected to the tenets of social justice, and the connection is evident in leaders'

dedication to advocating for the "inclusion of traditionally marginalized students" (p.

1289). The first principle of social justice, creating equitable learning environments that

meet the needs of all students, aligns with the value that school leaders and teachers place

on providing culturally responsive pedagogy. While this overarching framework of social

justice is comprised of several tenets, culturally responsive school leaders are connected

to the specific principles of equity, access, and inclusion.

Khalifa and colleagues (2016) recognize the connection between social justice

leadership and CRSL, but contends that CRSL digs deeper to resist oppression, while

affirming the identities and cultural practices of traditionally marginalized students.

However, Newcomer and Cowin (2018) note that, although in contrast to social justice

leadership, CRSL adds focus on students' cultural identities and practices, as they "share similar goals, characteristics, and praxes" (p. 492). Khalifa and colleagues (2016) identified the following four major characteristics of CRSL: (a) critical self-reflection on leadership behaviors, which encompasses critical consciousness and challenging the status quo; (b) development of culturally responsive teachers, through utilizing culturally responsive assessment tools and professional development opportunities; (c) promotion of culturally responsive and inclusive environments; and (d) engagement of parents, students, and indigenous contexts by developing relationships with the community and utilizing of the community as an informative space. When referring to educational practices for the advancement of equity, access, and inclusion, for the purposes of this literature review the terms social justice and CRSL at times will be used interchangeably because of the clear overlap between the two terms.

Culturally Responsive School Leaders

The leaders on a campus set the stage for school operations, community involvement, and concentration of needs for students' academic achievement. A critical component for improving the education of marginalized students lies in the hands of campus administrators who pursue social justice agendas (Theoharis, 2009). Leaders must be culturally responsive themselves in order to create an environment in which teachers can operate under the same pedagogical beliefs and practices (Jacobs, 2014; Khalifa, 2018). If school leaders do not embrace and promote CRP, teachers are less likely to follow-through with the practices to better serve students (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Culturally responsive leaders possess the skills and abilities that "influence others to know how to respond to the educational needs of culturally diverse groups of students"

(Madhlangobe, 2009, p. 66). The support of leadership and, more importantly, school administrators' knowledge of how to operate under a culturally responsive agenda, an essential aspect of social justice, allows teachers to do the same.

Classroom teachers require strong leadership support and modeling to engage in social justice work (Khalifa, 2018). The support, development, and retention of culturally responsive teachers is furthered by leaders who have the capability to promote and sustain a stable environment built on social justice principles (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Effective leaders promote shared leadership in which administrators, teachers, and community members work to serve the needs of their students and effectively empower the community. Transformation of school culture and climate is dependent upon school leaders responding effectively to the cultural and social needs of their school community (Khalifa et al., 2016). As put forth by Khalifa (2018), "Principals can offer better leadership when they have a strong connection with and reliance on community-based people, perspectives, epistemologies, and voices" (p. 171).

Barriers to Social Justice and Culturally Responsive School Leadership

As Theoharis (2009) acknowledges, principals who seek to advance equity, access, and inclusion, key tenets of social justice, often encounter resistance within their own schools and communities. They also can face barriers to change that come from outside. As will be explored in this section, Theoharis (2007; 2009) documented several barriers at the school, district, and institutional levels that have the potential to derail the plight of social justice reform in schools. Research by Khalifa et al. (2016) and Newcomer & Cowin (2018) indicate culturally responsive school leaders face these same barriers to enacting equity. These barriers include the vast scope of the principalship;

maintenance of the status quo; obstructive staff beliefs and behaviors; insular/privileged parental expectations; formidable bureaucracy and unsupportive district administration; lack of resources; state and federally mandated accountability and assessment; resistance from fellow principals; and lack of effective principal preparation programs.

Vast scope of the principalship. Modern day principals are tasked with increasing student achievement while simultaneously being emotionally consumed by a job for which the parameters are not always well-defined (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003). Theoharis' (2007) study found a multitude of barriers encountered by principals, characterized from narrow (e.g., within the school) to broad (e.g., at the district level and institutional level). Barriers within the school often manifest as a result of the far-reaching expectations placed on school leaders. Principals repeatedly wrestle with the tension of needing to fulfill managerial tasks that detract from their responsibilities as instructional leaders (Langer & Boris-Schacter, 2003). Consequently, a principal's ability to operate under a social justice agenda or CRSL practices (Newcomer & Cowin, 2018) is often impeded by the amount and variety of these mandatory tasks, in addition to the general pressure associated with the job (Theoharis, 2009). Furthermore, Theoharis (2009) noted that the principals he studied felt that mainstream demands of their jobs affected them differently. The reality of being pulled in numerous directions resulted in their high-level frustration and disappointment over never being able to do enough to change the "realities of marginalized students" (p. 89).

Maintenance of the status quo. Although it can serve as a comfort and familiarity for teachers and school leaders, the tendency for communities and schools to maintain the way things have always been done (i.e., the *status quo*) leads to inequities for

marginalized students (Theoharis, 2009). According to Ishimaru & Galloway (2014), perpetuation of the status quo through inequitable leadership practices delegitimizes "voices, values, practices, and cultural ways" of marginalized students and their families (p. 103). Changes of significant magnitude to routine practices and procedures are often anxiety-inducing, and educators may not feel confident in their capacity to achieve change initially or feel like their existing knowledge is being valued (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Systemic change can be uncomfortable, and it requires leaders to reflect on their potential weaknesses or biases; thus, these processes and practices can often be met with resistance. As Garza (2008) asserted, "Leading for social justice incites political unrest because the hegemonic culture will resist change that provides equity to all members of society" (p. 163). Oakes and colleagues' (2000) study found that powerful groups in the community, such as parents, often forced leaders who threatened the status quo out of their positions. Along with Weems (2013), their findings showed that leaders who strove to enact a social justice agenda or CRSL were met with resistance by those who desired to protect their historical privileges (Oakes et al., 2000). Justice-oriented transformation often threatens historic patterns and conditions, and if educators do not receive high-quality support or preparation, achieving equitable change can be increasingly difficult to achieve (Cooper, 2009; Oakes et al., 2000; Theoharis, 2009). Leaders who promote change are called to confront biased practices, those that are often rooted in past institutional racial discrimination and that have resulted in the maintenance of inequitable levels achievement for marginalized students (Kelley, 2012; Shields, 2004; Theoharis, 2007; Weems, 2013).

Obstructive staff beliefs and behaviors. An additional barrier to social justice and CRSL is formed through staff beliefs and behaviors regarding marginalized students' academic abilities. As Gay (2013) asserted, "Teachers' instructional behaviors are strongly influenced by their attitudes and beliefs about various dimensions of student diversity" (p. 56). Peterson's (2014) research showed that not only do the pedagogical practices of teachers matter but also their philosophical beliefs as well. Successfully educating diverse student populations requires teachers to develop cultural understanding in order to make effective decisions for students, schools, and communities (Gay, 2015). Effective teaching practices are hindered through teachers' lack of awareness of their own limited cultural competence (Correa, Blanes-Reyes, & Rappaport, 1996; Taylor, 2010). To promote high-level student learning, school improvement initiatives and social justice reforms must address educators' cultural knowledge and beliefs about diverse student populations (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Additionally, Lopez (2016) noted that the promoting a framework for culturally responsive teaching relies heavily on what teachers know and believe about diverse student populations.

Theoharis' (2009) case study highlighted the overwhelming level of resistance to social justice initiatives stemming from staff beliefs and behaviors. One of the participating principals noted that, too many of their campus staff, particular students viewed as "optional, expendable, and just plain not valued" (p. 93). Among the staff, there existed a lack of consideration toward changing outdated, non-inclusive practices, and resistance in taking responsibility for student learning (Theoharis, 2009). The opposition to social justice reform equated to "an acceptance of failure and mediocrity for

the students of color, students learning English, and students with special needs"
(Theoharis, 2009, p. 93).

Obstructive staff beliefs and behaviors often stem from deficit views of culturally
and linguistically diverse students (Valencia, 2010). Guerra and Wubbena (2017) found
that beliefs and behaviors are "fundamentally interrelated" (p. 35); therefore, teachers
who recognize the need for culturally responsive teaching while concurrently holding
deficit beliefs regarding traditionally marginalized students may continue to perpetuate
academic disparities (Guerra & Wubbenna, 2017; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Negative
beliefs about the abilities of marginalized students function as barriers to high levels of
success for all students. These negative beliefs, along with teachers' perceptions, words,
and actions, can serve as barriers to students' academic progress (Taylor, 2010). Teachers
question social justice efforts and believe that "the causes of low achievement are located
outside of their own control" (Weems, 2013, p. 29). García and Guerra (2004) noted
teachers' negative beliefs about "students' learning potentials" lowered their expectations
for student performance (p. 161). A school staff's lack of understanding regarding present
levels of educational inequity serves as an additional hindrance to social justice reforms.
Inequities develop further when teachers treat differences as deficits and place
responsibility for school success solely on the students (García & Guerra, 2004; Skrla,
Schuerich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004; Theoharis, 2009).

Insular/privileged parental expectations. Parental expectations whether, for social
justice or culturally responsive schools, are often formulated based on previously or
historically held rights and privileges. Theoharis' (2009) study demonstrated that certain
families felt that "their children's education needed to be the foremost priority for the

school, at the expense of other students" (p. 94). Studies have shown cases in which parents opposed equity-based reform, such as eliminating "tracked systems" even when they benefited privileged students and were often detrimental to marginalized students (Peterson, 2014; Theoharis, 2009; Wells & Serna, 1996). Brantlinger, Majd-Jabbari, and Guskin (1996) studied White, middle-class mothers who claimed to operate under a belief system that valued integrated and inclusive education. The study found these mothers "supported stratified and segregated school structures" that often resulted in benefits for middle-class students (p. 572). The principals in Theoharis' (2009) study felt that, although community diversity held value amongst White, middle-class families, there was an underlying sense of charity toward marginalized students, as opposed to a strong "commitment to social justice or change" (p. 95).

Formidable bureaucracy and unsupportive district administration. Principals often come up against what Theoharis (2009) calls a "formidable bureaucracy." Herriott and Firestone's (1984) research on organizations explained characteristics of bureaucracy as having a "single set of goals…[and in bureaucracies] top administrators translate goals into tasks to be implemented" (p. 42). In Theoharis' (2009) study, the principals' personal goals for social justice and equity were not reflective of the single set of goals put in place by the bureaucracy, and thus, represented a barrier to change. Principals may work in districts in which a vision of social justice reform is not shared and in which over-arching initiatives are instituted uniformly, regardless of whether a school needs them or not. These initiatives often manifested in decisions completely devoid of community voice and perspectives, and reflected the power held by district administration (Khalifa, 2018). Demands on principals' time brought upon by district structures lead principals to

perceive their jobs as, "…about compliance with the bureaucracy," when, in fact, "the bureaucracy is not about issues of equity" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 97).

Unsupportive central office administration can add to the list of impeding factors facing principals working to create equitable school practices. Mandates and directives from central office administration can "create enormous amounts of work for no meaningful purpose" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 101). District leadership often blame schools for their academic failures yet remain silent regarding systemic inequities and the district's contribution to those inequities (Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001). Moreover, district policy decisions, such as, measuring student achievement, suspension policies, and school community-boundaries, lacked community epistemology (Khalifa, 2018). According to a study conducted by Touchton & Acker-Hocevar (2001), principals felt that, rather than offering support and funding for their schools, district administration contributed to high stress levels and added to their already stifling workloads. The literature on educational leadership also highlights resistance from central office administration. Brown (2004) found the value of traditional and technical leadership, while Touchton & Acker-Hocevar (2001) proposed that leaders who implement social justice agendas are often treated as inept, labeled as unskilled, and not respected for their innovations (Theoharis, 2009; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001; Vilbert & Portelli, 2000).

Resistance from fellow principals. Sometimes leaders who are motivated to implement a social justice agenda are met with resistance from their district colleagues. Theoharis' (2009) study identified the resistance of fellow principals as stemming from the absence of "drive, commitment, and knowledge to carry out equity-oriented school

reform" (p. 101). Marshall and Ward's (2004) research pointed to a "yes…but" theme among principals and social justice reform (p. 537). Principals in their study expressed the need for action in relation to social justice reform, but they felt there were too many barriers to make meaningful change. Social justice reform has customarily not been embraced by the field of educational administration, nor has CRSL been central in administrator preparation (Marshall, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Rusch, 2004; Theoharis, 2009). Therefore, there is a tendency for principals to ignore issues of race and the educational inequities of marginalized students (Khalifa, 2018; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2009).

Lack of resources. The lack of adequate funding for schools can further derail leaders who are working to achieve socially just and culturally responsive schools. The amount of time and energy spent on fundraising or identifying monetary resources represents time taken away from student and community needs. It lessens the ability of school leaders to "focus on curriculum and structural and human resource issues related to equity and justice" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 104). For example, when principals are overly focused on addressing their schools' lack of resources, they are unable to provide adequate attention to building relationships and providing meaningful professional development. Additionally, principals miss opportunities to be present in classrooms and address overt biases or acknowledge high-quality culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa, 2018). It is well documented that marginalized students face major economic disparities in their classrooms and schools (Kozol, 2000; Kozol, 2005; Theoharis, 2009; Valencia, 1997; Valencia, 2010). The lack of resources and consistent tightening of school budgets, leaves school leaders fighting ever growing deficits in funding (Erickson, 2004; Kinney, 2003; Theoharis, 2009) rather than transforming schools.

State and federally mandated accountability and assessment. The advancement of social justice, including CRSL (Khalifa, 2018), reforms are often hindered by regulations at the state and federal levels (Theoharis, 2009). State regulations compromise school leaders' ability to increase access, improve teaching and curriculum, and create a climate of belonging (Theoharis, 2009). The stringent state standards utilized to plan instruction are the same parameters with which student learning is measured. Dewey warned against evaluating student learning through a lens that is "general and ultimate" (1916, p. 109). However, "for many teachers, curriculum has become a prescribed set of academic standards, instructional pacing a race against a clock to cover the standards, with the sole goal of teaching reduced to raising student test scores on a single test" (Tomlinson, 2000, p. 7). Accountability ratings are deemed more important than students, and test scores become the major focus of a school leader's agenda (McGhee & Nelson, 2005; Nelson, 2002; Weems, 2013).

The underlying pressure for high-test scores and accountability steers school administrators' efforts toward managerial issues rather than issues of social justice and cultural responsiveness (Karpinksi & Lugg, 2006; Weems, 2013). There is an ongoing struggle between teaching test-taking skills and teaching inquiry-based skills that are applicable across the curriculum. Approaching education in a test-centered format creates a deficit in learning and student belief in their abilities for academic success. Teachers need to "think in terms of helping all children develop physically, intellectually, emotionally, and morally, and see that inputs must be considered as well as outcomes" (Noddings, 2011, p. 203).

Our current public education system is focused on rote memorization and high-

stakes testing, and this skewed focus has steered education away from the process of critical and culturally responsive pedagogy. The emphasis on test scores as a measure of student success "…distracts from community well-being as well as other important 'moral purposes' of schooling" (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004, p.48). Since state testing is considered high-stakes, teachers, administrators, and district personnel utilize time and resources to prepare students for a test, rather than for experiential learning and growth in a democratic society (Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001). The focus on high-stakes testing "narrows curricular content to tested subjects and subject area knowledge is fragmented into test-related pieces" (Au, 2007, p. 258) while disregarding culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2007; Khalifa, 2018). The narrow focus on standardized testing and students' scores is often equated with the concept of student learning in schools with a large population of marginalized students (Marshall, 2004; Weems, 2013).

Lack of effective principal preparation programs. The demographic changes in schools highlight issues with principal preparation programs and their inability to address the needs of diverse student populations (Baker-Martinez, 2012). Research in the field of principal preparation demonstrates that university programs and leadership faculty dedicate minimal time in preparing aspiring principals to work with marginalized students, and they hold "limited knowledge or interest in promotion of social justice" (Baker-Martinez, 2012, p. 46; Rusch, 2004). Revisions to the standards for the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) have drawn attention to issues of social justice. Additionally, both the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and some state standards lay out goals correlated to administrators "knowledge, skills, and dispositions related to community, diversity, democracy, and achievement for

all children" (Marshall & Ward, 2004, p. 531). However, the policy lacks clear structure, contains ambiguous definitions of social justice, or lacks requirements for deep exploration of the sources of social injustice (Marshall & Ward, 2004). Although the needs of students in the public school system have changed, studies suggest that programs for preparing principals to effectively serve these students have remained stagnant and fail to prepare them adequately (Baker-Martinez, 2012; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Rusch, 2004).

Rusch's (2004) research aimed to "foster critical self-reflection on gender and race issues in educational leadership preparation practices" (p. 16). The study involved 114 professors of educational administration from UCEA (University Council of Educational Administration) affiliated institutions (52 women; 62 men). Through an 18-item survey, the professor participants rated the frequency of which each of the practices described occurred within their program of study; they also rated the extent to which they valued each practice. The questionnaire utilized a Likert-type scale where participants responded with 1 (*often),* 2 (*seldom or occasionally*), or 3 (*never)* to statements such as, "frequency of department discussions related to race, gender" (p. 25) and "equity or frequency of student-initiated discussion of gender and race related to leadership education" (p. 33). Additionally, participants responded to three open-ended, short-answer questions asking them to describe learning experiences that promoted issues of equity and diversity.

The study revealed that preparation programs for educational administrators were failing to prepare leaders to meet the needs of diverse school communities. Findings further showed that issues of gender and race related to leadership were rarely discussed

and were anxiety-inducing when presented. Professors of educational administration hold the privilege of either restricting or broadening the departmental, classroom, and research discourse related to race and leadership. As the author concluded, "Privilege is a powerful determiner of what counts as important knowledge" (p. 40). Avoiding or limiting discussion and research of race, as it relates to leadership, perpetuates and sustains bias.

Theoharis' (2009) study conducted with seven public school principals found that, collectively, the participants felt ill-equipped to lead schools through an equity lens with a focus on social justice. The content they encountered, generally taught by professors with a lack of practical experience, emphasized administrative skills and effective leadership but "nothing connected to the interrelation of equity and justice" (p. 107-8). Some principals even saw preparation programs as a barrier toward social justice/CRSL and acknowledged a greater disconnect between their learning in preparation programs and what needed to be done to advance equity on campuses. One principal in the study commented:

> I feel that a lot of the preparation was theoretical, but not theory about equity or race or dealing with the big issues… it all lacked substance. I was taught by a bunch of really smart people, but most of them had never been school administrators and the few that had been, had no understanding of equity issues. (p. 108)

Overall, principals felt their graduate studies were generically organized and missed support of their desires to focus on social justice/CRSL and create an equitable learning environment for diverse student populations.

According to Touré (2008), leadership preparation programs lack an emphasis on CRSL content knowledge and fail to address issues of social justice. Lightfoot (2009) reiterated these concerns stating, "traditional school leadership preparation programs are subtractive and inefficient in their ability to prepare school leaders for professional practice" (p. 1289). Levine's (2005) comprehensive analysis found principal preparation programs in the United States to be poor in quality, with research being detached from actual practice and disconnected from the needs of leaders and their schools. Even further, educational administration training historically builds on theory grounded in existing practice, specifically those "constrained by traditional, hierarchical, bureaucratic, and white Anglo-Saxon male realities;" yet, these realities often reject or "discredit alternative modes and stances for leadership" (Marshall & Ward, 2004, p. 532).

Miller and Martin's (2015) case study investigated the preparation of principals leading in urban or demographically changing schools in Missouri. Four principals (1 male; 3 female) were selected through purposeful sampling based on experience, gender, race, and level of principalship. Two participants identified as African American, and the other two identified as White. Utilizing semi-structured interviews, the study sought to examine the principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their preparation programs in addressing equity and social justice issues. Findings from the research indicated that all of the participants felt their programs and preparation coursework lacked the necessary focus on social justice in culturally diverse schools. Although two participants recalled specific courses in which discussion of culture and equity occurred, there was no "contextual or experiential understanding of diversity and equity within their preparation programs" (p. 137).

If as McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) posit, principals are the keystones of good schools with their leadership a foundational component of student achievement, then principal preparation programs must ensure programs instill value and understanding of how to develop schools where all students, including marginalized students, are successful. Additionally, it is necessary for professors of these programs to teach principalship candidates to implement strategies that challenge and counteract barriers that hinder student achievement (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Miller & Martin, 2015).

Finally, previous research reports existing principal preparation programs often do not demonstrate evidence of effectiveness in modifying leadership behavior or organizational change, in positively shaping student achievement, or in preparing equity-focused school leaders (Black & Murtadha, 2007; Barakat, Reames, & Kensler, 2019). Moreover, Barakat and colleagues (2019) note that in spite of significant efforts by UCEA to evaluate leadership preparation programs, there is limited research as to what constitutes CRSL or how to evaluate culturally responsive school leaders and determine clear parameters of success.

Features of Effective Leadership Toward the Advancement of Cultural Responsiveness

Campus administrators are often viewed as the model for school operations. Culturally responsive school leaders are cognizant of and address the needs of students who have historically been marginalized, left out, and underserved (Alston, 2004; Peterson, 2014). Leaders who demonstrate cultural responsiveness are able to influence "the school context and [address] the cultural needs of students, parents, and teachers" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274).

As described earlier, culturally responsive leadership is a vital component of social justice and, thus, focuses on equity, access, and inclusion. A number of studies have explored the beliefs and actions characteristic of principals that demonstrate effective leadership toward social change. Theoharis (2009) investigated the commonalities among beliefs and actions of principals in his study, finding that their actions were "critical to their foundational beliefs in equity and justice and fundamental in their leadership" (p.13). Kelley (2012) explored principals' roles in developing a culturally responsive learning community, including how their own personal behaviors either cultivated or hindered further development. Kelley selected 12 principals across six cities in a midwestern state who served as leaders in campuses with student populations of at least 50% or greater non-White students. The schools served by the principals in the study demonstrated an upward trend in student performance and growth model data for all of their ethnic groups. Among the characteristics found in common among the principals were that they provided intentional learning opportunities for educators to develop their knowledge about culturally responsive practices.

Riester, Pursch, & Skrla's (2002) study, along with subsequent studies conducted by Chenoweth (2009), Kelly (2012), Khalifa (2018), and Khalifa et al. (2016), found that shared aims among school leaders and associated beliefs contribute to the development culturally responsive school leaders. A synthesis of the findings of this group of studies shows that culturally responsive school leaders demonstrate or encompass the following attributes: (a) they hold high expectations for all (Chenoweth, 2009; Kelley, 2012; Riester et al., 2002; Theoharis, 2009); (b) they create a climate of belonging by including community stakeholders in the educational process (Kelley, 2012; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa

et al., 2016); (c) they prioritize the analysis of data and decision-making based on student achievement (Chenoweth, 2009; Kelley, 2012; Riester et al., 2002); (d) they conduct staff development to ensure continuous cultural responsiveness (Kelley, 2012; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016); (e) they promote an inclusive school climate (Khalifa et al., 2016; Riester et al., 2002); and (f) the promote an awareness and knowledge about cultural proficiency practices (Kelley, 2012; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Factors that Facilitate Implementation and Sustainment of CRSL

Although there exists a multitude of barriers to CRSL, there are also factors and practices that may facilitate its successful implementation. The following sections explore factors that facilitate capacity-building among educators to achieve cultural responsiveness, including the practices of introspection and reflection on beliefs and behaviors. Additionally, this section explores systemic factors that can support the implementation and sustainment of CRP initiatives, such as high-quality principal preparation, teacher recruitment practices, and professional learning support for practicing teachers.

Features of effective principal preparation programs. Well-organized, equity focused, and selective principal preparation programs are needed to successfully develop culturally responsive school leaders. Although there are few equity focused principal preparation programs (Baker-Martinez, 2012; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Rusch, 2004), evidence exists showing that specific program elements may " positively correlate" with educational leaders' success and growth in the areas of cultural competence and social justice (Barakat et al., 2019, p. 217); these components of principal preparation programs include (a) diverse cohort and faculty members (Barakat

et al., 2019; McKenzie & Schuerich, 2004; Touré, 2008); (b) selective admission processes that value self-aware, strong teaching candidates with a strong commitment to equity (McKenzie et al., 2008); (c) equity-oriented components embedded throughout the program curriculum (McKenzie et al., 2008); and (d) field experiences and an internship element (Barakat et al., 2019; Black & Murtadha, 2008; Gordon, Oliver, & Solis, 2016).

Moral purpose and the commitment to equity. Culturally responsive school leaders have a strong moral purpose, developed and refined through personal experience or principal preparation, and are committed to values of equity and inclusion (Stevenson, 2007). Scheurich and Skrla (2003) found that leaders who focus on equity, access, and inclusion shared three fundamental traits: (a) they possess a strong ethical and moral core centered on equity in schooling; (b) they believe in the possibility of advancement toward equity; and (c) they refuse to quit striving to achieve equity. Mabokela and Madsen (2005) echoed these beliefs when they acknowledged that school leaders should not only be responsive to inequities but willing to challenge systemic and institutional biases present in schools.

Guerra, Nelson, Jacobs, and Yamamura (2013) study examined the influential role of educational leadership preparation programs in developing leaders who successfully advocate for equity, access, and inclusion. Using purposive sampling, they identified 12 students who graduated from a social justice focused leadership preparation program and completed an action-research project concentrating on issues of equity. Focus group data was collected, coded, and analyzed for themes, and the findings showed the importance of leadership preparation programs in assisting leaders in developing a "moral imperative and persistence in the work when faced with barriers" (p. 144). A

86

portion of the study participants' commitment to equity stemmed from personal experiences with injustice. Their moral imperative was further developed through programmatic elements that allowed them to analyze their personal experiences with injustice and then utilize them as impetus to advance their equity work.

Theoharis' (2009) study highlighted principals' dedication to the values of equity for traditionally marginalized students. One principal in the study focused on the elimination of separate pullout programs for special education, with the aim of providing equitable access to rigorous learning opportunities among marginalized students. Another principal concentrated their efforts toward creating inclusive and accessible structures within the school. Additionally, several principals focused their efforts on navigating issues of race and the collective effects experienced by students and staff. One principal noted that her personal commitment to equity stemmed from her family's experience of emigrating from Vietnam. Through her experience she learned "…that we are not just here for ourselves but for the good of everyone…" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 21). Whether their drive manifested through personal struggles, undergraduate studies, family influence, or an internal awakening, each of these principals carried a sense of moral purpose when navigating matters of equity, access, and inclusion.

Introspection of personal beliefs and values. Developing culturally responsive leadership begins in principal preparation and is achieved through continuous introspection. Developing culturally responsive leadership is achieved through a commitment to self-reflection and an acute awareness of one's own beliefs and values. The knowledge and actions of school leaders are greatly influenced by their personal beliefs (Nelson & Guerra, 2007). Without a critical awareness of one's personal beliefs,

educators' deficit views of historically marginalized students, those that have developed as a result education and life experiences, can remain unconscious or be perpetuated (Nelson & Guerra, 2007). The personal and professional growth of culturally responsive school leaders is dependent upon critical self-reflection and awareness of inner bias, suppositions, and values tied to their privilege and cultural backgrounds (Khalifa et al., 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009).

Critical self-reflection is a key component to the "development of critical consciousness" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1285), which allows for educational leaders to become cognizant of how their practice is ultimately driven by their system of beliefs (Nelson & Guerra, 2007). Educational leaders who are critically aware of their beliefs, biases, and prejudices are often quicker to learn how to advocate and lead change initiatives for traditionally marginalized students (McKenzie et al., 2008). Effective culturally responsive school leaders utilize self-reflective practices to pinpoint and confront inequities within their own buildings (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014).

Critical self-reflection of personal bias and its related influence is "integral to both transformative and social justice leadership" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1285). Khalifa and colleagues' (2016) research on CRSL emphasized the importance of praxis, meaning that commitment to self-reflection must lead to action toward equity. For culturally responsive school leaders to provide supervision focused on equity and inclusion, they need to engage in professional development and the continuous practice of self-reflection (Jacobs, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Creating a culture and climate toward the advancement of cultural competence.

In order to facilitate implementation and sustainment of CRP initiatives, school leaders

have to prioritize developing educators' cultural competence. Culture is reflective of

customs, traditions, values and social norms of a group. It could refer to a group someone

is born into (e.g., familial, ethnicity or race, gender etc.), or it can refer to a group formed

socially (e.g., drama club, band, debate). Integration of students' unique abilities and

cultural strengths into the educational process broadens knowledge and understanding of

individuals and communities (Kelley, 2012). The manner in which students approach

learning, the background knowledge they bring to academic learning, their daily social

interactions, and the way they operate in the world are all influenced and affected by

culture. When student culture is not taken into account, gaps are created, widened, and

continually perpetuated. "Culturally responsive school leaders hire and develop teachers

who will humanize students in their classrooms" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 162). The

humanization of students occurs when an inclusionary culture is established and when

students' cultural beliefs are identified, normalized, and honored by school staff and

leaders (Khalifa, 2018). In 2013, Ross examined four key components of an equitable,

nurturing school atmosphere. Included with educators' holding high expectations and

promoting meaningful inquiry was the significance of genuine caring relationships

among peers and adults. Although each component is undoubtedly beneficial on its own,

the combination of building relationships and creating safe environments generate a

foundation for students' academic achievement and socio-emotional growth. "An

equitable school climate responds to the wide range of cultural, norms, goals, values,

interpersonal relationships, leadership practices, and organizational structures within the

broader community" (Ross, 2013, pp.1-2).

   Building capacity. Capacity building ensures that the ideas and beliefs of the community operates as a whole for the good of the students. It does not feed into a system of hierarchy where campus leaders make decisions based on their own wants and needs, rather identifying the needs of the community in order to best serve them. Through the process of building capacity, school organizations cultivate shared, democratic leadership practices across the community (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). Capacity building takes distributive leadership into the fold by empowering the teachers, students, and the surrounding the community to have a voice in the education of their children and themselves. "School leaders play a pivotal role in shifting power between educators and community in equitable ways; they can choose not only to hear community voice but also *listen* to it, to embrace, validate, and promote it" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 49). Integration of students' experiences and backgrounds solidifies learning through authentic connections.

   Teacher recruitment. Culturally responsive school leaders acknowledge that teacher recruitment is a crucial aspect toward their mission for equity, access, and inclusion. They identify teacher candidates who embody characteristics that enable them to nurture and assist traditionally marginalized students toward academic success (Kelly, 2012; Milner, 2010). Culturally responsive school leaders examine how teachers who may have differing cultural backgrounds from their students work to make lessons engaging and relevant (Kelly, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter, 2001). Culturally responsive leadership hiring practices institute cultural competence assessments while also gathering information on teachers' grasp of equity and how society's history of oppression and privilege influences education (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Reeves,

2007). Furthermore, they emphasize hiring diverse faculty, as well as those whose philosophies are reflective of equity and inclusivity (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2009).

Staff development. Momentum for transformational educational change can be provided through well-developed, explicit professional development (Lawrence, 2005; Peterson, 2014). Culturally responsive school leaders hold a vital role in "*ensuring that teachers are and remain culturally responsive*" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1282; emphasis in the original). Culturally responsive school leaders provide and take part in ongoing, collaborative professional development that intentionally designed to address issues of equity for all students (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Bishop, 2016 Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016; Vergara, 2017). Culturally responsive school leaders must provide high-quality professional learning focused on culturally and linguistically responsive instructional strategies, in addition to support for teachers in accessing appropriate instructional resources (Bustamante et al., 2009). Effective culturally responsive school leaders provide reflective learning experiences, which allow teachers to explore the interaction of culture and systemic power (Peterson, 2014; Scott & Mumford, 2007). They encourage and facilitate professional development that aligns with the existing reality of marginalized students' education, and how their actions and mindsets have contributed to the issue (Landsman, 2004; Peterson, 2014).

In a study conducted by Williams (2006), a principal utilized a scheduled professional development day to allow teachers to learn about their students' community. This experience provided teachers with resources to integrate community concerns and community cultural capital into daily lessons. Ishimaru & Galloway (2014) noted that

exemplary equitable leadership provides ongoing professional development to ensure that

"equitable instruction and student access to high-quality content are deeply embedded in

the organizational practice at all levels" (p. 112). Culturally responsive school leaders

understand that professional development and curriculum are not stable, prescriptive

entities, but rather "living, changing forces" that need to be continuously reconstructed

(Peterson, 2014, p. 99).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is represented by a graphic

representation (Figure 5) of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Theory of Culturally Responsive

School Leadership (CRSL). The outer circles represent characteristics of culturally

responsive school leaders, while the inner circle represents the notion that these

characteristics may have relationships to opportunity gaps for students, such as, academic

achievement, disproportionate representation in gifted programs, special education, and

discipline referrals.
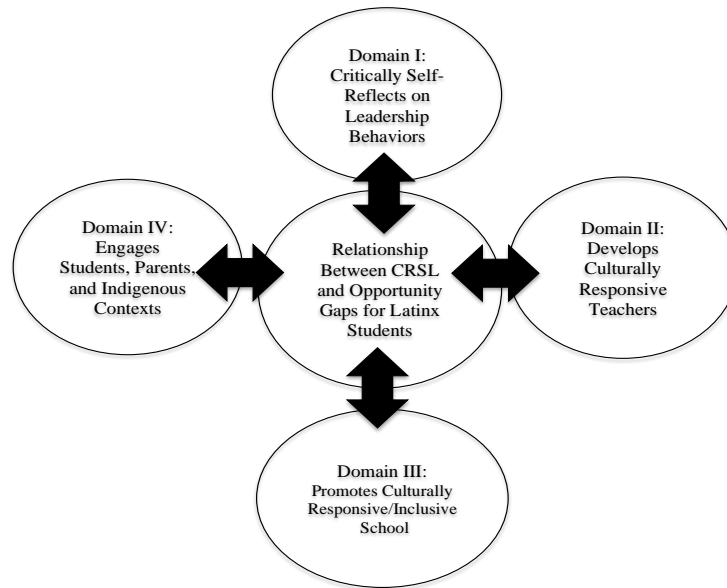
Figure 5. A theoretical framework for studying the relationship between culturally responsive school leaders' beliefs and actions (Khalifa et al., 2016) and opportunity gaps for Latinx students. See Appendix G for full delineated framework.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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The body of research explored in the literature review showed how student demographics have shifted in U.S. schools and described scholarship on the achievement of Latinx students, including the opportunity gaps that have been documented by research. This review also addressed negative consequences that have been perpetuated by educators' lack of cultural knowledge and training in teaching diverse populations. Furthermore, the review proposed that principals face numerous challenges in spearheading reform for equity, access, and inclusion. It was evident through Theoharis' (2009) research that, for the principals he studied, equity was a high priority. However, research points to factors that hinder the drive and desire for equitable education for marginalized students. Finally, the review highlighted factors that influenced the

development and persistence of culturally responsive school leaders in their plight for

equity, access, and inclusion of traditionally marginalized students. In Chapter 3, I

explore the methodology of this study focused on a culturally responsive school leader's

beliefs and actions and probable connections to opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology that was used to conduct the proposed study. I began with a description of my research design, including the population, sample, and sampling procedures. Next, data collection and analysis procedures were described, along with a discussion of the trustworthiness, credibility, and verification of the findings. This chapter concludes with the foreseen limitations of the study.

This study used a qualitative case study approach to investigate the relationship between (a) beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and (b) opportunity gaps for Latinx students in a predominantly Latinx school. Data from principal interviews, site-based observations, and extant data related to students' academic growth, identification for special education and gifted and talented services, and discipline trends was used to examine the potential connections between principal behaviors and actions and opportunity gaps for Latinx students. As outlined in the literature review, the growth of the Latinx student population in the United States has amplified the need for culturally responsive leadership and teaching practices designed for meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population (Brown-Jeffy, 2006; Gandara, n.d.; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Maxwell, 2014). According to Marzano (2003), although the largest influence on student achievement stems from teachers, as a teacher leader, a principal's impact is highly significant. Although there exists scholarly work that leaders can draw on to understand big ideas of CRSL, leaders face challenges in relation to implementation. The research that exists tasks researchers with identifying significant characteristics of CRSL and learning more about the bearing of a principal's beliefs and actions on student achievement.

Research Questions

The overarching research question guiding this qualitative study was: What connections exist between the beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and opportunity gaps for Latinx students attending a predominantly Latinx school? Secondary questions were as follows:

1. What are the principal's beliefs regarding CRSL?

2. What actions does the principal take as a culturally responsive school leader?

3. How are the principal's beliefs and actions reflected in opportunity gaps for Latinx students at the school?

Methodological Approach

The decision between qualitative and quantitative research methodology is dependent upon the type of information the researcher wishes to glean from their study. Creswell (2008) defines qualitative research as "a type of research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in subjective, biased manner" (p. 46). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) defined qualitative research as collecting of data "termed soft, that is, rich in description of people, places, and conversation, and not easily handled by statistical procedures" (p. 2).

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) posit that qualitative research is an interactive process between the researcher and the participants "where the researcher must make meaning from and or/interpret data" (p. 2). I chose qualitative research as my methodological approach because the aims of this study are to gather data related to a principal's

individualized experiences with CRSL and to understand the "meaning that people have constructed…and how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (Merriam, 2009, p. 13).

Although the design of the study included the collection of numerical data related to academic progress and discipline reports among various groups of students (i.e., those identified for special education, and gifted and talented), the data was utilized for comparisons indicative of growth rather than statistical analysis. Therefore, even though numerical data was included in the study, the relevance of the data to the proposed research outcomes did not lend themselves to a quantitative or mixed methods study.

Qualitative research is interested in the relationship among individuals' actions, words, and outcomes. To capture individuals' interpretations and experiences in a particular context, studies using interviews and observations require qualitative methodology (Madhlangobe 2009; Mishna, 2004). Utilization of interviews, observations, artifacts, and archival records were analyzed to create representations "focused on the meaning of the participants, and descriptive of a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 2014, p. 197).

<u>Analytical Paradigm</u>

The epistemological basis for this qualitative case study is constructivism. As early as the 1960s, Piaget and Vygotsky acknowledged the active role the individual plays in the learning process, specifically the construction of knowledge (Zivkovic, 2016). According to Gray (2014):

Constructivism reflects the belief that truth and meaning do not exist in some external world, but are created by the subject's interaction with the world.

Meaning is constructed not discovered, so subjects construct their meaning in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. (p. 20)

Fosnot (1989) defines constructivism through the following four principles: (a) new knowledge is dependent upon what we already know; (b) new learning takes place as a modification of previous notions; (c) learning is the construction of new ideas rather than rote memorization or an accrual of facts; and (d) meaningful learning often incites conflict when reconsidering old ideas to make way for new conclusions. Crotty (1998) reiterated Fosnot's thoughts with the notion that humans make sense of the world through their historical and social perspectives. Additionally, Crotty (1998) acknowledged that data collected from qualitative research is inductive in nature and that the inquirer generates or constructs their own unique meanings from the data. Therefore, new learning is an active process dependent upon an individual's existing understanding (Naylor & Keogh, 1999). According to Hyett, Kenny, and Dickson-Swift (2014), qualitative case study research is approached through an interpretive or social constructivist lens in which the researcher "utilizes a transactional method of inquiry and personal interaction with the case" (p. 2). The constructivist perspective, therefore, posits that knowledge is not passively received from the world or from authoritative sources, but it is constructed by individuals or groups making sense of their experiential worlds (Maclellan & Soden, 2004).

Jonassen (1994) suggests that, within a constructivist paradigm, multiple representations of reality epitomize the complexity of the real world. In this study of CRSL, qualitative data gleaned from interviews, observations, and the analysis of additional artifacts was compiled to represent an intricate individualized experience of

the campus principal. The collection of qualitative data provided rich descriptions of authentic tasks in meaningful contexts (for example, a principal's participation in professional learning communities [PLCs], parent meetings, and data meetings), and qualitative methods can encourage thoughtful and introspective reflection from the principal (Jonassen, 1994). As previously noted, an individual's personal, historical, and cultural experiences shape their interpretation of their world (Creswell, 2014). Therefore, in addition to the principal's interpretation of experiences, the researcher's construction of meaning was also taken into account. In juxtaposition to other epistemologies, such as post-positivism, constructivism does not begin with a theory, but rather, "inquirers generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2014, p. 8).

To determine whether there were connections between opportunity gaps for Latinx students and CRSL practices, beliefs, and actions, I utilized interviews of the principal, assistant principals, teachers, and parents along with documentation of the principal's practices, and examination of archival data. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Theory of CRSL details characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader and how those characteristics may or may not result in change related to opportunity gaps for Latinx students (see Appendix G). The theory was employed in the development of interview protocols and observation or artifact analysis protocols. Additionally, Khalifa et al.'s designated categories for CRSL served as a source for predetermined codes and applied in the data collection and analysis process.

Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a case study approach as "an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" with ethnographic methods of data collection (Merriam, 2009, p. 39). Although Crotty (1998) categorizes case studies as a method, several other researchers recognize it as a "strategy of inquiry, a methodology, or a comprehensive research strategy" (Creswell, 2013, p. 97). Denzin and Lincoln (2018), along with Merriam (2009) and Yin (2002), recognize case studies as a stand-alone methodology for qualitative research. Additionally, case studies offer a level of flexibility not available to studies rooted in grounded theory or phenomenology (Hyett et al., 2014).

Stake (1995) proposed the following three types of case studies: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective instrumental. Intrinsic case studies are utilized to grasp an understanding of a single, particular case. Next, instrumental cases can refine theories or provide insight into a particular issue. Finally, collective instrumental cases are studied as "multiple, nested cases, observed in unison, parallel, or sequential order (Hyett, et al., 2014, p. 2). For the purposes of this study, one school principal was studied. Utilizing Stake's (1995) notion of the intrinsic case study, the study sought to investigate the relationship between CRSL and opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

As with other forms of qualitative research, case studies are an inductive investigative strategy, with the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 2009). Creswell (2013) further explains that case studies take place within a real-life context where the case may be "an object of study, as well as, a product of inquiry" (p. 97). Case studies involve exploration of real-life over time,

through "detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (Hyett, et al., 2014, p. 2). The intriguing descriptions in case studies can create an image or exemplar that can often be applied to similar situations (Eisner, 1991; Merriam, 2009). Each case study is unique and devised to fit the particular research questions and the case of study, while offering a wide range of options for study design (Hyett, et al., 2014). Since case studies are unique in design, this methodology allowed construction of a system of interviews, observations, and artifact analysis specifically aimed at examining culturally responsive school leadership beliefs and practices exemplified by the selected principal. Thus, this study sought to investigate whether there was a relationship between those beliefs and practices and opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

According to Creswell (2008), the overall ability of a case study to present an in-depth picture of the research diminishes as the number of participants or cases increases. Therefore, focusing on a single principal for this study allowed for a comprehensive and thorough analysis. Method selections for case studies are "informed by the researcher and make use of naturally occurring sources of knowledge, such as people or observations of interactions that occur in the physical space" (Hyett et al., 2014, p. 2). Utilizing a case study methodology sustained a correlation to a person's (in this case, a school principal's) purpose and core values (Hyett et al., 2014) and is "particularistic, descriptive and heuristic" (Merriam, 2009, p. 46).

Site and Participant Selection

Site Selection

The site selected for this study was an elementary school campus in Texas. I chose Texas for this study based on several criteria. First, there has been continuous increase of the Latinx student population across the state of Texas. According the Texas Education Agency (2018a), in 2017-18, across the state of Texas, at 52.4%, Latinx students account for the largest percentage of total enrollment for Texas public schools. Also, there are growing numbers of Title I campuses that historically serve marginalized students and/or students of color. Students identified as economically disadvantaged increased by almost five percent across the state of Texas from 2008-2009 to 2018-2019 when 60.6% of students were reported as economically disadvantaged (Texas Education Agency, 2018a). Finally, according to Walford (2010), an important aspect of site selection is consideration of the time, financial, and personal costs associated with distant research sites. Therefore, choosing a Texas school allowed me to spend less time traveling and more time in the field collecting pertinent data.

Participant Selection

Purposive sampling was utilized to create a preliminary list of possible participants, and then applied Dalkey and Helmer's (1963) Delphi technique to select the final principal participant for this study. Purposive sampling chooses participants based on predetermined selection criteria deemed essential to the study (Merriam, 2009). A purposively selected principal participant for this study met the following criteria: was a graduate between the years of 2002-2016 of a state university's Master's

in Educational Administration program that includes a social justice focus; was a principal of a Title I elementary campus with a 50% or greater population of Latinx students; and had served as a principal for at least three years. Selection of a principal who had been prepared as a social justice leader was important to understanding if culturally responsive school leadership practices were related to equitable education for Latinx students.

Following the identification of individuals who met the previously mentioned initial criteria, the Delphi technique was utilized to make a final determination of the principal participant. The Delphi technique for consensus building rests on the concept that "several people are less likely to arrive at a wrong decision than a single individual" (Hasson, Keeney, & McKenna, 2000, p. 1013). The Delphi technique involved consultation with professors whose realm of research and publications were grounded in cultural responsiveness, social justice, and culturally responsive school leadership. Additionally, professors who worked directly with any of the potential participants, in either a teaching or research capacity were involved in the participant selection. Thus, by consulting with those professors, their expertise was utilized to create consensus and final determination for the selected principal participant.

Participants for this study also included two assistant principals on the selected campus. After the principal selection has been made, he or she identified three teachers to participate in the study. The principal was asked to designate an ethnically balanced representative sample of teachers that included: (a) teachers who quickly adopted the principal's vision; (b) teachers who were willing to hear the vision; and (c) teachers who were resistant. As part of this study, I also interviewed three principal-nominated parents

among families served by the school community, to incorporate the community perspective. A total number of ten participants were interviewed.

<div align="center">**Data Collection**</div>

Data collection involved semi-structured qualitative interviews, observations of school meetings, and review of archival data and records.

Interviews

Interviews are often a significant source of data for qualitative research due to the breadth and depth of information they provide. The data collected from interviews are "rich, individualized, contextualized… and centrally important to qualitative research" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 146). Historically, interviewing has been utilized in varying forms to gather information from individuals and large groups of people. Merriam (2009) asserts that, although interviews are often utilized to gather data representative of large groups with an extensive range of ideas, they are often the "best technique to use when conducting case studies of a few selected individuals" (p. 88). The process of interviewing can open avenues to more in-depth conversations and create an intimate level of trust among the participants.

Interviews can provide essential insight related to individual's interpretation of the world around them, feelings, and behaviors that are not always available for observation. In addition, this "research method allows for discovery and description of past events which are impossible to replicate" (Merriam, 2009, p. 88). Interviews conducted through open-ended questioning allows for a conversational flow of ideas and thoughts. Opendakker (2006) found that interviewers glean more than verbal information from the interviewee through social cues, such as voice, intonation, and body language.

In general, open-ended questioning may allow people to feel more at ease and comfortable sharing their stories. When aptly planned for, interviews facilitate a complex development of information through the exploration of people's perspectives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Semi-structured interviews are considered the most common level of structure in qualitative research, as this format can be molded to the subject of the interview, with the predetermined questions utilized as a guide for the interview. Semi-structured interviews can follow a "unique and customized path with each participant" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 154). Qualitative interviews within the case study presented opportunities to form a researcher-participant relationship based on the construction of personal stories and the process of deciphering meaning from those stories. Ravitch and Carl (2016) noted that the interview process "can help to achieve the complexity in thought and method that is central to not only what we consider criticality in qualitative research but also to conducting valid and rigorous qualitative studies" (p. 147). Qualitative interviews foster a personal perspective and allow for interpretation of data through the interviewee's own words or voice. Therefore, even with time constraints associated with data collection and analysis, the method of interviewing to obtain qualitative data is a fundamental component to understanding the phenomenon of study.

Interview guides were developed for the principal (see Appendix A and B), assistant principals (see Appendix C), teachers (see Appendix D), and parents (see Appendix E). Each interview contained broad questions derived from Khalifa et al.'s (2016) framework for Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), with sub-questions for elaboration and expansion. When designing an interview protocol,

researchers' questions are constructed based on the focus of study and methodological perspective. Gathering desired information from the interviewee is heavily reliant on carefully worded questions (Merriam, 2009). To obtain useful data, it is imperative to construct substantial questions for an interview. Ravitch and Carl (2016) acknowledge the importance of understanding the varying nature of interview questions and how to construct questions that are specific to the goals of the research.

The interview protocols were piloted prior to commencement of the study, adding to the validity and reliability of the study. The interview protocols for the principal, assistant principals, teachers, and parents were administered to appropriate counterparts outside of the selected school. Piloting of the interview protocols allowed for feedback and suggestions on the proposed questions, along with assurance that the protocol is aligned with the research questions. In this particular study, questions were designed for the goal of informing research on school leaders' responsibilities, knowledge, and internal beliefs and how they related to culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). Interviews additionally sought to identify the principal participant's training in the area of social justice and how/if training is being applied, as well as possible barriers or fears preventing implementation of a social justice agenda.

In light of government regulations due to the current COVID-19 pandemic, interviews were conducted through video conferencing or via phone to ensure the safety of all those involved. Interviews were audio/video recorded and transcribed verbatim to identify themes and to code using Khalifa et al.'s (2016) framework for CRSL (Appendix G). The principal was interviewed twice, for a length of 45 minutes to an hour per interview. Assistant principals, teachers, and parents were interviewed one time for a

length of 30 to 45 minutes each. The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed manually verbatim, and analyzed to identify common themes.

Observations

In addition to qualitative interviews, qualitative observations of different routine practices of the school principal were observed remotely. Qualitative observations contributed to the research data through "field notes on behavior and activities of the individuals at the research sites" (Creswell, 2014, p. 190). Bustamante et al. (2009) state that "observations are valuable means of collecting 'outsider' data by recording actual behaviors and organizational practices (p. 795). Observations took place during each of the following events: (a) data meetings; (2) PLC (professional learning community) meetings; and (b) parent meetings. As recommended by Creswell (2008), an observation protocol (Appendix F) was developed utilizing Khalfia et al.'s (2016) theory of CRSL as a framework for effective practices (Appendix G). In order to adhere to safety compliance protocols due to the COVID-19 pandemic, observations were conducted remotely through video conferencing.

Archival Records

Along with interviews and observations, archival records and extant student data were collected, adding to the depth and richness of the study. Archival records and extant data refer to files that the school traditionally collects annually. Campuses often keep these files for legal purposes and may refer to them for identifying areas of growth or documenting of success. Archival records collected for this study encompassed but were not limited to the following: parent surveys, climate surveys, Renaissance Learning reports, TELPAS (Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System) data and

other pertinent student scores. Archival records and data collection did not take place in person thus mitigating the issue of health and safety concerns for all participants.

Analytic Memos/Field Notes

Alongside interviews, observations, and the collection of archival data, I incorporated the use of analytic memos and field notes. Qualitative research methods propose that field notes "enhance data and provide rich context for analysis" (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018, p. 381). These personal memos were written during and immediately following interviews and observations to offer a richer description and allowed me to "engage in some preliminary data analysis" (Merriam, 2009, p.130). Field notes enhance understanding of participant meaning through non-textual, auditory, and visual information not always evident through interviews, observations, or archival data (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). The reflective component of field notes goes beyond factual descriptions and incorporates the "researcher's feelings, reactions, hunches, initial interpretations, speculations, and working hypotheses" (Merriam, 2009, p.131). Employing the use of analytic memos and field notes added another layer to the data by bringing attention to the subtle nuances of what was not seen and what was not heard. The addition of field notes enhanced analysis and understanding by allowing me to revisit these memos and create a more vivid and complete picture of the context, setting, and occurrence of events (Patton, 2015).

Opportunity gaps. To address the question of opportunity gaps for Latinx students, data will be collected through the TAPR (Texas Academic Performance Reports), PEIMS (Public Education Information Management System), Renaissance Learning and TELPAS reports. Data were examined prior to the current principal's

tenure and current data to determine referral trends and literacy growth for Latinx students through Istation, Renaissance Learning, and other literacy screeners. TAPR and PEIMS were utilized to examine trends reflective of student discipline referrals, referrals for special education (SPED), and gifted and talented (GT) services. As addressed in the literature review, there is a documented trend of higher numbers of discipline and SPED referrals for Latinx students in comparison to their White peers. Conversely, the percentage of Latinx students identified for gifted and talented (GT) services is consistently lower than their White counterparts.

STAAR (State Assessments of Academic Readiness) were not utilized for determination of literacy growth for the following reasons: (a) STAAR performance standards and indicators of progress are not comparative from one year to the next (prior to 2017-2018 school year, campuses received a designation of "met state standards" or "improvement required," and beginning in the 2017-2018 school year state rating systems switched to a letter grade A-F); (b) STAAR results are not necessarily reflective of student literacy growth, but rather a blanket passing standard which is altered each year; and (c) STAAR testing was suspended for the 2019-2020 school year due to shelter-in-place orders and COVID-19.

Data confidentiality. To preserve anonymity for all participants, multiple steps were taken to ensure any data collected could not be linked to a specific participant or research site. Participants and the selected research site were assigned pseudonyms and all interview transcripts, audio recordings, observation (or artifact protocols), and archival records were labeled using these pseudonyms. Any research data with identifiable information, including consent forms, field notes, transcripts, observations,

and analytic memos, was stored on a password-protected computer, only accessible by me. All hard copies of collected research data will be kept in a locked cabinet at my home and destroyed after a three-year period.

Data Analysis

Interviews, observational data, and archival records were analyzed using Creswell's (2016, p. 155) process for converting text data into codes and deriving emergent themes from transcripts and observation protocols. To begin the coding process, the researcher printed out interview transcripts, typed up observational data, and arranged the data into groups according to the source of the information. All collected data was labeled in the left margin for "codes" and in the right for "themes." The researcher then read through the text to identify meaningful dialogue, quotes, and recorded observations. The next step was to assign initial codes to large portions of data utilizing Atlas.ti (qualitative coding software), followed by reducing passages with multiple codes based on the "main idea being conveyed" (Creswell, 2016, p. 160). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework already contained initial codes that referenced the subsets of culturally responsive school leadership. This is referred to as deductive or concept-driven coding, a predetermined set of codes for data analysis (Gibbs, 2007). These codes were utilized for preliminary organization of the collected data (see Appendix G).

Following the initial identification of codes, the researcher utilized Atlas.ti to visually and manually organize codes and determine which ones appeared most often. The process continued by examination of the codes to eliminate overlapping, redundant, or minimally present codes. Additional codes that emerged through the process of data

collection, were added into the findings and final reports. The researcher collapsed relevant codes into concluding emergent themes categorized by Khalifa and colleagues' (2016) domains for CRSL. The emergent themes were then populated into a Google document for more detailed analysis and organization related to my research questions. The final step was to review all transcripts and observation data to reaffirm that findings and emergent themes were aligned with the data (Roberts, 2010).

As outlined in chapter 2, Khalifa et al.'s Culturally Responsive School Leadership Theoretical framework is organized into four major categories or themes (see Appendix G): the leader (a) critically self- reflects on leadership behaviors; (b) promotes culturally responsive and inclusive school environments; (c) engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts (building relationships through authentic community involvement); and (e) develops culturally responsive teachers. After data collection is complete, I reviewed transcripts, observations and/or inventories, archival records and data to identify connections between the principal's actions, beliefs, and characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) theoretical framework was utilized to analyze data and interpret findings, through common themes among collected data.

Trustworthiness, Credibility, and Verification

In qualitative research, trustworthiness often refers to the concept of validity, and the credibility factor that allows the reader to trust your data analysis (Roberts, 2010). Validation, or credibility of findings, is furthered through member checking and various forms of triangulation (Roberts, 2010). Moreover, acknowledgement of my own bias within the research provided a supplemental validity measure to the study (Creswell,

2013). Maxwell (2005) concedes the relativity of study validation and further explained that it is "assessed in relationship to the purposes and circumstances of the research" (p. 105). The assurance of credibility, or validation, is a fundamental aspect in establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (2009) asserts that credibility relates to the idea of how research findings match reality. She poses the following questions to guide researchers in maintaining study credibility: "(a) How congruent are the findings with reality? (b) Do the findings capture what is really there? (c) Are investigators observing or measuring what they think they are measuring?" (p. 213).

In large part, verification is an iterative process dependent upon systematic data checking wherein the "conceptual work of analysis and interpretation are monitored and confirmed constantly" (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002, p. 17). Verification is the assurance of reliability and validity of the data, chiefly dependent upon researcher responsiveness and the implementation of reflexive structures used throughout the research process (Creswell, 2014; Morse et al., 2002). Because the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative studies, it is important to acknowledge the interpretive and subjective nature of the research. Therefore, verification of outcomes is a challenging task. Keeping the subjectivity of qualitative studies in mind, it was my responsibility as the researcher to "reflexively identify biases, values, and personal background… that will shape interpretations formed during the study" (Creswell, 2014, p. 187).

Member Checking

Member checking utilizes feedback from participants in reference to emerging research findings (Merriam, 2009). Member checking ensures the accuracy of "qualitative findings through taking the final themes back to participants and determining

112

whether the participants feel that they are accurate" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201).

Incorporating member checks into the process of data analysis is a practical technique for

establishing trustworthiness (Kornbluh, 2015). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe

member checking as the "single most important provision that can be made to bolster a

study's credibility" (p. 68).

Maxwell (2005) notes that member checking not only assists in identification of

researcher bias and misunderstanding, but also serves as a vital component in eliminating

misinterpretation of a participant's viewpoint. Solicitation of the participant's perspective

challenges the researcher's personal bias, explores alternative explanations, and gains a

more holistic understanding of the studied phenomenon (Kornbluh, 2015; Lincoln &

Guba, 1985). Member checking for data accuracy not only took place at the end of the

study, but continuously throughout its development. Following the completion of

interview transcription for all participants (principal, assistant principal, teachers, and

parents), I took back a summary of the responses to the interviewees and gathered their

feedback regarding the major points from the interview. This process allowed the

participants to review previous interview transcripts for accuracy, clarify statements, and

provided additional feedback in reference to my conclusions from the collected data.

Triangulation

According to Denzin (1978), there are four basic types of triangulation: (a) data

triangulation; (b) investigator triangulation; (c) theory triangulation; and (d)

methodological triangulation. For the purpose of this study, I instituted the concept of

methodological triangulation, utilizing interviews, observations, artifact analysis, and

data mining. Methodological triangulation applies different data collection methods to

113

verify consistency of research findings (Patton, 2015). Additionally, I employed data

triangulation by obtaining data from multiple sources, such as, PEIMS (Public Education

Information Management System) and TAPR (Texas Academic Performance Reports),

along with Renaissance Learning and TELPAS. Triangulation of data utilizes "different

data sources of information by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build

a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). Patton (2015) acknowledges

that utilizing several types of data or methodology strengthens the study and its

presentation of outcomes. Interviews, observations (or artifact analysis), and examination

of archival records and data allowed the researcher to gather data from multiple sources

and triangulate the data, adding to the validity of the study.

Positionality and Researcher Bias

Positionality refers to the overlap between objectivism and subjectivism. While

attempting to maintain objectivism, our existing subjectivism must be acknowledged and

accounted for in our research and interpretations of findings (Bourke, 2014). An

underlying challenge for qualitative research is the bias and preconceived knowledge that

exists within the researcher. To ensure the validity and reliability of the study, as a

researcher, I was conscious of these biases and separated, or *bracketed* (Creswell, 2013),

my views from the research as much as possible. Bracketing allowed me to suspend

previous understandings, or biases, and institute the process of reflexivity wherein I

openly conveyed my background and how it informs the study (Creswell, 2013). Multiple

and varied perspectives (i.e. data collection methods) can bring understandings which

will propel the advancement of a study (Milner, 2007).

As a former classroom teacher and school administrator with 15 years of

experience, I recognized the need for CRSL. Based on what I have learned from my work history and the literature review for this study, it was evident to me that school populations are becoming increasingly diverse. School principals are charged with leadership that addresses, embraces, and meets the needs of their diverse student communities. The culture of a school is most often created through a top-down process in which the principal sets the parameters for school operations and the teachers follow her lead. I struggled with this personally when I worked with a principal who transferred from another campus in the district. The principal made assumptions that everything that worked for the previous campus would allow for our campus to be successful. There was no accounting for change when necessary, no continuous evaluation of programs, nor open dialogue regarding student needs. The new principal's practices and policies did not take the needs of stakeholders into account, and this resulted in a divided community with minimal success. I tempered my own professional experience as a researcher and diverted from making assumptions that principals adhere to a one-size fits all approach to student education.

It has also been my experience that school leaders who aim to do things differently are met with resistance from district leaders, principal colleagues, and, at times, campus faculty. My responsibility as the researcher was to put aside my assumption that a principal's reaction to this resistance will always be to revert to standard, commonly accepted leadership practices. CRSL is not a prescribed way of conducting daily practices or implantation of a social justice agenda. Each principal operates based on the specific needs of their community of students. I have addressed the idea that some components of CRSL are not traditionally measurable through

115

assessments and concrete data. Thus, I challenged my mental model of CRSL and identified alternative methods of evaluation for equity and accessibility.

As a former assistant principal, accountability was at the forefront of decision-making for principal colleagues. If I challenged systems that did not meet the needs of our students, I was reminded that, in order to preserve our autonomy as a campus, it was best to adhere to the status quo and focus on accountability. For example, at one point in my career I worked to implement guided reading to promote literacy across all grade levels. My principal, along with teachers in tested grade levels, were so concerned with students passing a test they continued to "teach" reading with TAKS (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and skills) passages from previous tests. Not unlike principals facing push-back to a social justice agenda, I too experienced backlash from a system that values testing, which traditionally results in high performance from affluent students. With these experiences in mind, it is imperative that I created a safe environment for participants to be authentic in their interactions. Additionally, I was aware that if participants did not feel comfortable, they may have provided me with what they felt were politically acceptable responses, rather than a true account of their experiences.

In my experience, principals, although cognizant of their student and community needs, allowed those needs to take second place to state-mandated testing. Principals who believe in and are prepared to institute social justice agendas, are often thwarted by federal and state accountability guidelines and lack of support from their school districts. I have personally known school leaders who were hand-picked to lead a "struggling" school only to be placed in an assistant principal position one year later, due to low state test scores. Therefore, when their belief systems are challenged with the onset of high-

stakes testing, they forego their social justice agenda to stay employed and maintain their

position within the school. Although the pressure of state-mandated testing is a

documented barrier to social justice, it is not the only restraint for principals. I remained

open to discovery of additional barriers and the participants' problem-solving techniques

for bypassing those obstacles.

As Theoharis (2009) noted, school leaders often respond to disproportionate

achievement among different groups of students by making "knee-jerk decisions that

support, implement, and defend programs, curricular reform, and policies that fly in the

face of equity and justice" (p. 7). With these things in mind, I was interested to learn how

culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) in practice allowed for management of

pressure for students to perform (i.e. state test scores) while continuing to advocate for

social justice, equal opportunities, and access. Addressing my potential bias in the

research involved maintenance of objectivity, neutral questioning techniques, and a

consistent focus on the human elements involved.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is charged with assuring the researcher

maintains ethical practices throughout the study. The IRB reviewed the proposal prior to

the onset of the research study ensuring the privacy, rights, and welfare of the participant

are protected. In addition, I submitted my CITI (Collaborative Institutional Training

Initiative) renewal certification dated April 2020, as acknowledgement of current training

in ethics and responsible conduct in research.

Engaging human subjects in research comes with elements of trepidation, from

the design through the final study report. Ethical challenges include, but are not limited

to, the following: confidentiality, informed consent, and the potential impact on participants and vice versa (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015; Sanjari, Bahramzhad, Khoshnava Fomani, Shoghi, & Ali Cheraghi, 2014). In order to maintain confidentiality, this study utilized pseudonyms when referring to the study participants, their campuses, and school districts. Additionally, participants were asked to review and sign a consent form detailing the study, along with acknowledgement of their ability to withdraw from the research at any time (see Appendix H). Any hard copies of research data gathered during were masked to maintain confidentiality and kept in a secured file cabinet at my residence. All digital data was password protected and accessible only by the researcher. The data will be stored for three years, and then subsequently destroyed.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology for the proposed qualitative case study aimed at examining how the beliefs and actions of CRSL practices align to decrease opportunity gaps for Latinx students. First, I outlined my rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and choosing constructivism for my epistemological standpoint. Next, I described the research design, site and participant selection, and a detailed description of data collection methods and approach to data analysis. Throughout this chapter, I specified how the chosen theoretical framework guided my research, methods of data collection and analysis, and trustworthiness of the findings. Finally, I noted procedures I put into place to account for researcher bias, assure confidentiality, and ensure the credibility of the chosen data analysis methods and outcomes.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The Latinx student population continues to rise in Texas public schools, yet educator demographics remain stagnant and do not match the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students. Opportunity gaps for Latinx students have been well-documented, and this trend signals a need for diversification of leadership and teaching practices in public schools (Maxwell, 2014). Previous research emphasizes that school leaders are critical components to educational reform, as they have the potential to impact change for diverse student populations (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa, et. al, 2016; Leithwood, et. al., 2004). Additional studies have demonstrated that principals' influence on student success often stem from their strong relationships with students and their families (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2018; Sanders & Harvey, 2002). Although the majority of research in the area of CRSL focuses largely on African-American student communities, this study utilized key points from previous studies to analyze the educator-student relationships within Latinx school communities.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between (a) beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and (b) opportunity gaps for Latinx students in a predominantly Latinx school. The study was guided by the following research question and sub-questions:

What connections exist between the beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and opportunity gaps for Latinx students attending a predominantly Latinx school?

1. What are the principal's beliefs regarding culturally responsive school leadership?

2. What actions does the principal take as a culturally responsive school leader?

3. How are the principal's beliefs and actions reflected in opportunity gaps for Latinx students at the school?

Using a qualitative case study approach, the study data were acquired through interview questions developed from Khalifa and colleagues (2016) CRSL framework (See Appendix G), observations, artifact and archival data analysis. The data analysis for this study was guided by Khalifa et al., (2016) Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework (See Appendix G), with additional codes derived from Theoharis' (2009) barriers to CRSL and codes addressed in the literature review related to factors that facilitate CRSL. Initial codes were assigned to large portions of data utilizing Atlas.ti (qualitative coding software) and a predetermined set of codes (Gibbs, 2007). Following the initial coding process, emergent themes were populated into a Google document for more in-depth analysis and organization. Semi-structured interviews and all observations were conducted via Zoom due to COVID-19 safety protocols. The qualitative data were then coded and analyzed to identify themes.

The chapter begins with a description of the study site, a comprehensive descriptive profile of the school principal, and brief profiles of the assistant principals, teachers, and parents within the school community who participated in this study. Then, findings are presented organized by themes and integrated with discussion of relevant literature as appropriate.

Site Profile

The study was conducted at *Ellis Elementary* (pseudonym), a suburban elementary school in the Southeastern Region of Texas. In the 2019-2020 school year,

Ellis Elementary served 681 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. The majority of students at Ellis identified as Hispanic or Latinx (82%), and the remainder of the school demographics were as follows: African American, 8.1%; White; 7.3%; and Asian, Pacific Islander, and Two or More Races documented as less than 2% of the school population. At the time of the study, the school's student racial and ethnic demographics were reflective of the overall public-school population in Texas. As a Title I school, Ellis served almost 92% students identified as economically disadvantaged, with 82.1% labeled as "at-risk." Additionally, half of the student population at Ellis Elementary were classified as English Learners (EL), which was significantly higher than the state average of about 20%. The cultural, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds of Ellis teachers differed from the student population. Of the 50 Ellis Elementary teachers, 62% were White, 36% were Hispanic/Latinx, and 2% were African American. The majority of teachers were female (88%).

Historically, Ellis Elementary performed at or below the state level, as measured by the mandated State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness (STAAR). For the 2015-2016, 2016-2017, and 2017-2018 school years, Ellis Elementary "met the standard" for STAAR testing. In the 2018-2019 school year, the state of Texas reorganized their rating standards and assigned schools letter grades for academic performance. Ellis Elementary received an overall "D" rating based on achievement levels in reading, math, writing, and science for third through fifth grade students. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all schools in the state were not rated in the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, as Texas declared a state of emergency.

Participant Profiles

Purposive sampling (Merriam, 2009) was utilized to obtain an initial list of possible elementary school principals suited for this research study. A public internet search of the commencement archives from a state university was conducted to identify people who graduated from a state university's Master's in Educational Administration program between the years of 2002-2016. After identifying a list of graduates, a public internet search was completed for graduates who were actively serving in the role of an elementary school principal. For consideration to participate in the study, the prospective principals had to meet the following criteria: a graduate between the years of 2002-2016 of a state university's Master's in Educational Administration program that includes a social justice focus; a principal of a Title I elementary campus with a 50% or greater population of Latinx students; and have served as a principal for at least three years.

Once this determination had been made, an IRB approved recruitment email (See Appendix H) was sent to the principal(s) who met the outlined criteria for the study. Email addresses and contact phone numbers were accessed through publicly accessible district and school websites. After compiling a preliminary list, Dalkey and Helmer's (1963) Delphi technique, a building of consensus among experts in the field of research for this study, was employed to make the final principal selection. Implementation of the Delphi technique involved consultation with professors with expertise in social justice, cultural responsiveness, inclusion, and equity. Additionally, to strengthen the final participant selection field experts directly connected to potential participants through teaching or research capacities were consulted for recommendations.

The remaining nine participants for the study included two assistant principals, an instructional coach, three classroom teachers, and three parents within the school community. For this study, the principal nominated an ethnically balanced selection of three teachers and three parents, representative of the Ellis community. Table 1 gives an overview of the study participants, and the following section provides more comprehensive profiles of the principal, assistant principals, instructional coach, teachers, and parents who participated in the research study.

Table 1. Demographics of the Participants.

Pseudonym	Race/Ethnicity	Current Role (at time of study)	Number of Yrs. at Ellis
Lena	White	Principal	7
Joanne	African American	Assistant Principal	3
Jaime	Latinx	Assistant Principal	3
Sarah	White	Instructional Coach	9
Alejandra	Latinx	3rd grade teacher	3
Rosa	Latinx	4th grade teacher	2
Suzanne	White	5th grade teacher	9
Alma	Latinx	Parent	8
Marisol	Latinx	Parent	7
Serena	African American	Parent	3
Note. Column one, Pseudonym, lists participants by assigned pseudonym to protect their identity; Column 2, Race/Ethnicity, identifies participant ethnicity/race information; Column 3, Current Role, defines the participant's role at the time of the study within in the Ellis community; and the last column, Number of Yrs. at Ellis, lists the number of years participants had been a part of the Ellis school community.			

<center>**Principal Profile**</center>

Lena's Early Experiences

Lena was born in and spent her early school years in Texas. She remembered a great deal of turmoil in her household before her parents divorced when she was three-years old. Even though her mom struggled financially, she felt education was of the utmost importance and found a small apartment near a "good school" so that Lena could access the best opportunities. However, Lena said she was acutely aware of the economic differences between her and her classmates:

> So, it was always different for me. As far as being in school, just because I felt like I was different than my classmates, just being from a different socioeconomic background. And, most of the kids in school, their parents were still together as well. That was just the dichotomy I had growing up.

Even though Lena struggled with the acute disparities between her and her classmates, she felt that with her mother's sacrifices and help from her grandparents, she received a good education. Lena's outlook on her education changed when she started middle school and she felt that "school wasn't so great for me anymore." After middle school, students were "bussed in" from other neighborhoods, and she felt like a lot of them weren't happy because they weren't attending their community school.

> I just kind of felt like I went from this strong school community that I was involved with to just kind of being a number, the teachers weren't very engaged.

Lena's middle school education in Texas was inconsistent, moving from a public school to a private school, and back to a public school before her and her mother relocated to California. Once arriving in in California, the summer before ninth grade,

<center>124</center>

Lena decided that school was not really for her and she wanted to do alternative school.

> So, my mom let me basically do like school from a box. It was like Indiana University and we ordered it and I stayed home and did school and got a job at Baskin Robbins. And that wasn't really good for me because I had all this free time and I started getting into more trouble. I just kind of ended up dropping out of high school altogether at one point until my mom sent me to a boarding school in Ensenada, Mexico, which was like, you know, one of those troubled teen places. And that was very interesting. Through that experience, I got to experience what it was like to be in another country and not know the language.

Lena's experiences in the program in Ensenada, Mexico allowed her to become completely immersed in the regional language and culture. She learned Spanish and completed four years of high school in one calendar year.

> I got a 4.0…I don't know what that means when you're doing it like that (school courses) … and did pretty well somehow without really having been in like formal schooling since eighth grade.

Lena's "Why?"

Lena credited her early educational experiences and her time in Ensenada, Mexico as the foundation of her "why" in her aspirations for cultural responsiveness as a school leader. Last year, Lena was initially hesitant to share these experiences when the faculty and staff took part in a "what's your why?" narrative exchange, but she realized how her experiences helped her to better relate to her students:

> I told them all about my experience. I think I was just embarrassed to admit that I didn't have the greatest experience in education and I became an educator. I don't know. I just had guilt with that and thought that wasn't an example of education. But I think going through that has helped me relate to my students, who some, you know, like being kind of in this limbo of like loving learning, but not always fitting into the formal schooling environment or different things that were going on with me.

She is also married to a Mexican immigrant with many family members still living in Mexico and whose mother who only speaks Spanish. Her husband's educational experiences in the border town of Del Rio, Texas allowed her to be more empathetic to the disparities that often exist for immigrant students of color. "At first they [school faculty] thought he just wasn't smart…he has vision problems and they just threw him into classes. They really didn't have formal bilingual education." Lena and her husband are raising their children in a bilingual household. Lena speaks English and Spanish to the children, and her husband speaks predominantly Spanish, in the hopes that their children will develop true biliteracy.

Her passion for biliteracy extends to her professional life and her students at school. Lena recognizes the importance of building a strong foundation of literacy at the elementary level:

> I was able to get a master's degree without really having like a real high school experience because I [have] been able to access any information I wanted on my own because I was a strong reader and writer.

Lena's Educational Journey

Lena's journey to become an elementary school principal was not a direct path. She began college with the intention of earning a Bachelor's degree in Art Education, and then she majored in Spanish with the thought that she would teach Spanish in schools. Ultimately, Lena earned a film degree and worked on social justice documentaries that explored family environments and systemic racism. One of her films, which focused on adolescent females and the transition from elementary school to middle school, reignited Lena's interest in teaching. After Lena completed her bachelor's degree, she returned to Texas with the intent of moving back to California.

> I was still doing a little like freelance film work, but it was 2008, the economy, it was really crappy and I wasn't getting enough really. And I hadn't planned on staying here. I was planning on going back to San Francisco, but you know, things, just one thing led to another, my uncle was doing the alternative certification and my mom said, well, why don't you try that?

Although Lena began her career in education with the goal of teaching in high school, her first opportunity was as a teaching assistant at the elementary level. In October of that same year, a full-time position opened, and Lena was offered a fifth-grade

teaching position. After the district reorganized their attendance zones, Lena was transferred to another campus where she taught third and fifth grade. At the end of her fifth year of teaching, Lena began graduate classes toward a Master's in Educational Administration. In the middle of her master's program, she transferred to a newly constructed elementary campus (Ellis) as their instructional coach for two years. When one of the assistant principals left, Lena was moved into the vacancy. She described her final transition to her current role as a principal:

> I was only an AP [assistant principal] for like six months because the principal got a job as the elementary director for another district. And, so she said, "You're ready. I've never met an AP that's as ready as you are." I'm like, *what are you talking about? I barely, I have no idea what I'm doing.* I'm like, *admin is crazy.* And luckily when I was an instructional coach, I did a lot of AP stuff because I wanted to be in administration, but yeah, I was kind of thrown to the wolves. And so, yeah, I was interim principal for three months. And then now I've been a principal for going on three years.

In her third year as a principal, Lena acknowledged that this is her calling. She feels that, at her core, this is where she was meant to be:

> I just feel like this every little, like piece of the path happened for a reason, even to get my master's. I didn't want to be a principal, that wasn't my…what I thought I wanted to do. I wanted to do curriculum. And once I got into the program, I started learning a lot more about leadership.

Lena wanted to find a way to make the biggest impact on the lives of her students, and she recognized that campus leadership was one of those avenues. During our

interviews, Lena reflected on how she often misses the classroom, but to reach her goals of challenging inequities and creating an inclusive environment, she felt strongly that she could reach more students and make more significant changes in her role as a campus principal.

Lena attributed her current belief system and values to her indirect path to becoming a school leader. Her myriad of experiences, including those often deemed negative or counterproductive, shaped her journey toward being culturally aware and responsive. Lena's attitude toward education changed during her transition from a school with high levels of teacher engagement to one where she felt like "just a number." Her time spent in Ensenada, Mexico was an integral part of realizing what it's like to not fit into a predetermined idea of education. Those events brought about her understanding of the need for students to feel valued and part of the school community. Lena believed that a strong foundation in literacy allowed her to be successful across the curriculum, and valued that foundation for the students at Ellis.

Participating Administrators

Joanne

Joanne, an English-speaking, African American female, was one of the assistant principals at Ellis Elementary. She started her educational career as a fifth-grade teacher and held that position for three and half years. She earned her principal certification during her tenure as a literacy coach at an elementary campus. Upon completion of her principal credentials, Joanne transferred to an assistant principal position at a middle school, then moved into her current role at Ellis Elementary. At the time of this research, Joanne had been an assistant principal for three years, working alongside Lena.

Jaime

Jaime, a bilingual (English/Spanish) Latinx male was the other assistant principal at Ellis Elementary. He began his career in education teaching eighth-grade U.S. History. Midway through his sixth- year teaching U.S. History, Jaime obtained his administrative credentials and worked as an instructional administrator in West Texas. He then relocated to South Texas and served as an assistant principal at a middle school for a year before being transferred to an elementary school within the same district. At the time interviews were conducted, Jaime, Joanne, and Lena had worked together as the Ellis Elementary administrative team for three years.

Sarah

Sarah, an English-speaking, White female served as the instructional coach for Ellis Elementary. Sarah had spent her entire teaching career in the home district for Ellis Elementary. At the time of the study, she had been at Ellis for nine years (six years as a classroom teacher, three years as the instructional coach). While serving in multiple capacities at Ellis Elementary, Sarah had worked with Lena for over five years.

<u>**Participating Teachers**</u>

Alejandra

Alejandra, a bilingual/biliterate (English/Spanish) Latinx female, had been teaching at the elementary school level for seven years at the time of the study. She began her teaching career in another south Texas school district, where she taught a bilingual kindergarten class for two years and third-grade monolingual and bilingual classes for three years. When Alejandra transferred to Ellis Elementary, she initially taught fourth-grade Spanish dual-language then moved to third-grade dual language. At the time of this

interview, Alejandra was in her third year at Ellis Elementary, and she had worked with Lena for the entirety of her career as the campus principal.

Rosa

Rosa, a bilingual (English/Spanish) Latinx female, at the time of the study, had seven years teaching experience in the district that houses Ellis Elementary. She taught fourth-grade Spanish dual-language for her entire teaching career, with five years at another campus and two years at Ellis Elementary. At the time of the study, Rosa was teaching fourth-grade Spanish dual-language writing, reading, and social studies, as these content areas were departmentalized in grades 3-5 (i.e., teachers are assigned to core subjects, and students rotate among subject-area teachers).

Suzanne

Suzanne, a White female, had been teaching at Ellis Elementary for nine years. A self-taught Spanish speaker, Suzanne taught fifth grade for the entirety of her tenure at Ellis. Suzanne had been working toward obtaining her bilingual certification, and during her interview expressed her strong desire to become fluent in Spanish. She had worked at Ellis Elementary under previous administration, and worked with Lena as Lena transitioned from instructional coach, to assistant principal, and then to her current role as campus principal.

Participating Parents

Alma

Alma, a bilingual (English/Spanish) Latinx female, had three children who were attending Ellis Elementary in kindergarten, third grade, and fourth grade. Although her first language is Spanish, Alma was comfortable enough with her level of English that a

translator was not needed for the interview. Alma's oldest child was attending the middle

school but had been a student at Ellis Elementary previously. Her family has been a part

of the Ellis Elementary community for over eight years.

Marisol

Marisol, a Spanish-speaking Latinx female, had one child who was enrolled in

fifth-grade and an older child who previously attended Ellis Elementary. The family had

been living in the community for seven years. During her interview, a translator was

present to assist with communication and ensure understanding.

Serena

Serena, an English-speaking, African American female participated as the

grandmother and appointed guardian of two children, eight and ten years old, who were

attending Ellis Elementary. Her family had been living in the Ellis community for three

years.

Study Findings

In the following sections, the study findings are presented by themes. Due to

COVID-19 restrictions and safety protocols, data were collected through virtual

interviews, virtual observations, artifacts, and archival records. The themes were

initially organized to align with the four domains of the study's theoretical framework

for culturally responsive school leadership: (a) critically self-reflects on leadership

behaviors; (b) develops culturally responsive teachers; (c) promotes culturally

responsive/inclusive school; and (d) engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts

(Khalifa et al., 2016). Although some themes emerged more frequently in one domain

than another, and some across domains, the themes are presented in *Figure 6* based on

their relationship to the specified domain. Following the organization by domains, the themes were then further analyzed and organized to answer the research questions. The analysis presents Lena's beliefs and actions separately, with the understanding that during the investigation found Lena's beliefs and actions were found to be highly intertwined, at times making it impossible to completely separate the two components.

The following nine themes were identified through this research: (a) inclusivity and equity; (b) critical self-reflection (critical consciousness); (c) continuous learning; (d) importance of community voice and relationships; (e) building capacity; (f) leading by example; (g) challenging the status quo; (h) providing professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy; and (i) engaging in data-driven instructional decision making. One additional theme emerged: facing barriers to culturally responsive school leadership. Figure 6 below shows Themes organized by domains of the theoretical framework.

Culturally Responsive Beliefs of a School Leader

The way we view and operate in our world is influenced by our core beliefs and values. The beliefs and values of a school leader determine the nature of the school climate and set forth a foundation for the ideals and beliefs of the organization (Andrews, 2007; Auerbach, 2009; Hollowell, 2019). As Vergara's (2017) research pointed out "ideas, beliefs, and values are embedded in people's decisions" (p. 37). The themes discovered through this research explored the influence that Lena's beliefs had on her leadership practices and her decision-making process. Through interviews and observations, Lena's beliefs were categorized under the first four themes: inclusivity and equity, critical self-reflection, continuous learning, and importance of community voice.

Figure 6. Themes organized by domains of the theoretical framework**.**

Inclusivity and equity. Research studies focused on successful culturally

responsive school leadership have emphasized school leaders' beliefs in inclusivity and

equity for all students (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2018, Khalifa, et

al., 2016; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Riester et al, 2002; Theoharis, 2009). Khalifa and colleagues' framework (2016) outlined the importance of a culturally responsive school leader's commitment to equity and inclusivity within Domain III (*Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment*), including decisions regarding instruction, discipline, and the inclusion of student voice. Lena's beliefs surrounding inclusivity and equity stemmed from the value she placed on all students and the knowledge they bring with them:

> I really wanted it [Ellis] to be a learner-centered entity. That's me being culturally responsive because you're focused on the needs of who your learners are, that could change any given day. Being centered on what their needs are, getting to know their families, their backgrounds and where they come from.

The assurance of diverse, inclusive, and culturally responsive school contexts is reflective of principals whose beliefs and values are aligned with accessibility for all students (Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey & Lindsey, 2014). Lena's strong stance on inclusiveness pushed her to acknowledge the barriers students of color often face:

> I feel strongly about not victimizing students of color. I think we are here to empower and really believe that every student can do great things. We have to take away all of those barriers that are in place…and build our kiddos up so that they see themselves as capable and really find their way. I don't think society gives everyone an equal chance.

Sarah, the instructional coach, reiterated the merit Lena placed on inclusion and equity and how she is conscious of the inequality and barriers that exist for the students at

135

Ellis:

> She is very sensitive to what is going on in the world…very inclusive minded and
> extra sensitive to people's culture[s]. Especially the inequality and discrimination
> they face. She's inclusive and encouraging of people's differences and cultures to
> be welcomed and explored within the classroom.

Alejandra, a dual language teacher, acknowledged Lena's beliefs and mission surrounding inclusivity and equity were evident in Lena's words and visible throughout the campus. "She was very explicit to what the mission should consist of…student-centered, equitable. When you enter the campus, it's [the mission] there. I feel like that shows that inclusivity, that responsiveness to all students, not just to a certain demographic." Jaime, one of the assistant principals, remarked that since he, Lena, and Joanne, the other assistant principal, began working together "…at the core of everything she [Lena] does is building a vision of a successful campus, …that culture of inclusivity, making the kids feel at home, making them feel welcome and part of the school."

Suzanne, a fifth-grade teacher, additionally noted that Lena's belief of inclusivity was campus-wide and embedded in numerous facets. "She's also brought on mentors for some kids, and she's very picky about who she brings on this campus and why... She made sure that the mentor those kids had represented them and came from a similar background." Suzanne maintained Lena's beliefs of inclusivity and equity are a model of putting students first, "Having us remember who we're serving and remember who we're helping and we don't want anybody to feel left out and just make it more of a community environment where everyone feels welcome."

Reihl (2000) attests inclusive instructional practices and building connections are

vital to the creation of inclusive schools. When discussing advocacy for inclusivity and equity, Lena stated, "I believe in building relationships with students and discovering what their strengths are and the funds of knowledge that they bring to the table." This belief of utilizing students' funds of knowledge is fundamental to creating inclusive schools. Because they aid in building a more cohesive school community, while their incorporation into teaching and learning serves as underpinning for students' educational experiences (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014a; Moll, & Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992; Sugarman, 2010; Velez-Ibanez & Greenberg, 1992). Furthermore, Lena worked with her faculty and staff on building classroom community by starting the day with morning meetings. Morning meetings created an open forum for the classroom community to discuss problem-solving strategies and share personal news (Tilhou, 2020).

Morning meetings at Ellis took place daily in every classroom as a routine practice for students and teachers. The meetings facilitated open dialogue among students and teachers where students felt valued and understood. Rosa explained that morning meetings promoted student expression of feelings and ideas. She stated, "You can do something as short as share something you did this weekend, or…if you had a super power what would it be and why?" She continued by discussing the increased importance of morning meetings to maintain connections during the COVID-19 pandemic, "We still have our morning meetings to discuss what's going on in their lives, to make sure that we have that family safe environment culture in our classrooms." Lena wanted to create safe spaces for students to share with one another and include every child as part of the community. Suzanne reaffirmed Lena's conscious choices of "making sure that everybody's represented here and feels safe here."

Utilizing funds of knowledge and ensuring students have access to inclusive literature validates students' cultures, languages, the needs of the community and is a vital facet of culturally responsive school leadership (Cooper, 2009; Dutro, et al., 2002; Guerrero, 2016; Howley, et al., 2009; Larabee, 2000). Lena's beliefs regarding inclusive literature for Ellis students were evident in her knowledge of the community and partnership with the school librarian. "We have increased bilingual books in our school library, and I have worked with the librarian to ensure that our library is reflective of our school population." During our interview, Lena referenced the cultural and political dissonance at the forefront of navigating student need:

> Since this summer and the movements happening around anti-racism in schools, we've been getting some additional texts to continue to grow, and make sure that everything we have for our students is the most up-to-date and the most relevant to their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Development of schools that are inclusive of all students encompasses the recognition and valuing of differences, empowerment of historically marginalized students, and valuing of all student voices (Barakat, 2014; Darder, 1995; Garza, 2008; Hollowell, 2019; Irvine, 1989; Kirk et al., 2017; Lac & Mansfield, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1992; Lawrence-Pine, 2015; Sampson & Garrison-Wade, 2010). Lena acknowledged the importance of student voice and allowing students opportunities to make choices based on their interests. She stated, "I think it's very important for kids to have access and be able to self-select books in the language they would like to read in." Rosa, a dual language teacher, highlighted the inclusion of student voice in allowing students to read "and engage in books they really like…to make sure that they are reading

authentic literature, that is diverse, and that they are interested in." She continued by commenting, "I feel like our principal has worked really hard to find ways to engage our kids more." Sarah noted that there was a constant dialogue referencing student need for culturally responsive texts in the classroom. Texts where students saw themselves reflected in the stories, that didn't perpetuate stereotypes, and provided foundational support for all students to have access to classroom discussions.

Culturally responsive school leaders focused on equity and inclusion, continuously examine their hiring practices to assess candidates' cultural competency, and ensure the hiring of diverse faculty (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Reeves, 2007; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2009). School leaders who desire to engage in genuinely equitable actions make a "concerted effort to hire qualified teachers and counselors that reflect the demographics of the student population" (Hollowell, 2019, p. 236). Lena's beliefs surrounding equity and inclusion for her students carried over into her hiring practices and her awareness how the beliefs and values of teachers can impact students. She stated:

> Another factor that has promoted the vision of [inclusivity] has been hiring practices. I was part of a culturally responsive sub-committee with the district to create interview questions with the goal of finding culturally responsive staff members. I've written and vetted questions and presented those to the district. Everyone is supposed to use at least one in every interview. We've been using that [interview questions] as a way to gauge and prioritize finding culturally responsive individuals so I can continue to promote that vision for our students. Jaime spoke to Lena's belief in advocating for inclusivity and equity through

139

hiring culturally responsive faculty and staff. "Within the interviews with teachers that we've hired over the years, specifically asking them questions like 'How do you build inclusivity into your teaching, your activities, and the relationships you build with students?'"

Additionally, Lena understood the significance of staff diversity and her goals for increasing equitable representation for the students at Ellis. She openly reflected on the needs of the student population, "I've talked about increasing the diversity of the staff. When we look at data more, I know that I've definitely increased Latinx staff, but I would like to have more African-American staff, but we are working on that."

Critical self-reflection. To garner an understanding of how the belief in critical self-reflection relates to Lena's leadership practices, teacher participants were asked about their beliefs surrounding self-reflective practices, as well as their perception of Lena's beliefs about the importance of self-reflective practices. The culturally responsive leadership framework by Khalifa et al. (2016) stresses critical self-reflection, under Domain I (*Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors*) as an agent of change for cultural responsiveness. In the sections that follow, participants specifically noted the importance of self-reflective practice for Lena and for themselves in guiding decision-making and changes for the betterment and success of all students.

In this study, as with others (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Nelson & Guerra, 2007; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009), self-reflection requires individuals to continuously examine and become critically aware of their beliefs and inherent biases. The practice of self-reflection is vital to the development of critical consciousness and allows school leaders to understand the extent to which their belief systems influence their educational

practices (Khalifa et al., 2016; Nelson & Guerra, 2007; Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Development of a culturally responsive school leader, is dependent upon introspection, examination, and reconstruction of personal beliefs for the purposes of personal and professional growth.

Change for traditionally marginalized students is often led by those who are critically aware of their own belief system and continuously examine their viewpoints for prejudice or bias (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al. 2016; McKenzie et al., 2007). During semi-structured interviews, the teacher participants were asked about navigating cultural responsiveness through the lens of self-awareness and their understanding of critical self-reflection. Lena discussed how cultural responsiveness is linked to continuous self-examination, and that the most important part is "examining yourself and knowing your community so you can best serve them." She went on to explain that:

> When I talk about examining yourself, it's about knowing your implicit bias, understanding your cultural lens and how that impacts the decisions you make…the thought and belief system you bring to work every day and your interactions with the kids and the community that you serve.

She viewed critical self-reflection as a continuum and a mindset that should be continuously worked on toward improvement. "You have to be able to examine your own cultural lens and how that dictates your beliefs and actions." Lena linked meeting the needs of the students she serves to self-awareness and the ongoing process of critical self-reflection.

> I believe it a lot of it has to do with continually trying to understand the societal systems that are at play. I think to be a strong culturally responsive leader, you

just have to continually examine those inequities and really believe that it is your highest responsibility to respond to that…so you can best meet the needs of all the students in the building.

During her interviews, Lena continued to draw attention to the importance of self-reflection and examining what she termed as the "deep dark side of myself." She went on to explain, "I feel like you are constantly having to look inside and think about why you are doing something, why you might be avoiding something that you should be doing. And what part of yourself might be causing that."

She recognized early on in her principalship that being purposely reflective and intentional with her practice helped her to navigate thoughts and issues that would wake her up in the middle of the night:

Before I went to bed, I would write everything down that was swirling around in my head…knowing that something we're doing isn't right by kids, or you know, like I would try to get all of those things out and so that I can then not just be like reacting emotionally to it, but looking at it objectively as like, okay, what are some actions that we can put in place to, to improve this area?

School leaders are a critical piece to creating a culturally responsive school environment in which teachers adhere to a similar pedagogical belief of intersectionality between learning and student culture and follow practices, such as self-reflection, building relationships, and purposeful analysis of data for inequities (Jacobs, 2014; Khalifa, 2018). Throughout the interviews, it was clear that Lena consistently and openly demonstrated self-reflective practices, and believed these practices to be an integral part of her development as a leader. Administration team members and teachers were aware

of her practices, and made it a point to follow Lena's example. Sarah acknowledged that Lena is incredibly reflective and even stated "it's one of my very favorite things about her. She's always thinking, maybe I should have done this, or maybe this good thing is happening because I set this up or did this." Sarah followed up her thoughts by commenting "I've learned to be very reflective because of her, and I've added reflection as kind of one of my practices before as I'm planning our weekly PLC with each team." Sarah continued by explaining how she utilized self-reflective practices to understand teacher needs and guide them toward implementation of best practices for students during PLCs:

> For example, our first-grade team needs more guidance in lesson planning than say our fifth-grade team… And when it comes to planning [for PLCs] I sit down and [think] how can I schedule our agenda? How can I put our planning template together to facilitate the conversation a little bit more?

Suzanne and Jaime discussed how their reflective practices are influenced by Lena's example of continuously questioning practices and processes to benefit students. Suzanne attributed her growth in the practice of self-reflection to her role as a team leader. She reported:

> I started to become more reflective. As a teacher I was very reflective, instructionally. Let's look at the data, let's go back and reevaluate. But personally, in terms of like, okay, I'm having a hard time connecting with this kid, I wasn't reflective in that way as a teacher.

Jaime accredited his knowledge and practice of self-reflection to his varied experiences in the educational system. He stated:

Lena will be the fourth, fifth principal that I've worked with now as an administrator and again within each of those different people that I've seen in that role like I've seen it [self-reflection] myself in them. You know that key crucial piece to be able to, whoa, okay, I need to take a step back. I didn't think of this properly, or I didn't execute it correctly, or I need to tweak it, I need to adjust it. I've always done it [self-reflection] to a certain extent, however, it wasn't until I stepped into the administrative role where I definitely picked it up more. Those first two years having to learn everything at the elementary level from scratch, I don't know that I could have survived without that ability. It was a constant daily thing of self-reflection. *Okay, what did I do wrong? I need to figure this out. I didn't understand this.* I couldn't have done it without being able to look within myself and see how I could be better.

Jaime additionally acknowledged that self-reflection is "super crucial to anyone in a leadership capacity…especially in our schools. [Without self-reflection] I don't think we could really grow. And I don't think we can be malleable if we don't have that."

Joanne's viewpoints linking self-reflection to growth and change, coincided with Jaime's beliefs as evidenced when she stated, "We have to be able to reflect and make changes if you're a leader, and if you can't reflect, I just don't know how you would grow." She continued by asserting:

You need to be able to reflect back to the previous year and make adjustments for the next year, it should be a constant thing that we're doing. And so, I feel it's [self-reflection] literally one of the most important things.

As a foundational component of culturally responsive school leadership, critical

144

self-reflection is the precursor to any leadership actions (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Through the process of critical self-reflection, school leaders are "recognizing that she or he is a cultural being influenced by multidimensional aspects of cultural identity, even as he or she attempts to do the work of leadership" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1285). The continuous process of self-reflection allows school leaders to challenge their biases and to come to terms with the existence of inequities within their schools (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Continuous learning. Participants acknowledged continuous learning as an integral part of Lena's belief system. In Khalifa et al.'s framework (2016), this component is specified under Domain I (*Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors*) as a commitment to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). The process of continuous learning allows school leaders to critically self-reflect and utilize those patterns of thoughts and findings to "evolve so as to be adaptable to both learners' needs and to the changing circumstances" (Jappinen & Ciussi, 2016, p. 486).

The interviews with faculty participants revealed an awareness of the role continuous learning in their development of cultural responsiveness and their ability to skillfully serve their students. Rosa appreciated Lena's belief and commitment to the importance of continuous learning, noticing that Lena took part in numerous professional development opportunities with staff:

> Every single time I go to a training, she's there. And me and coworkers, we've always asked ourselves, I wonder if she's here to check and make sure we're here. But no, I'm pretty sure she's there because she wants to know what we are doing

so we can come back, meet, and debrief.

Suzanne admired Lena's willingness and belief in doing whatever it takes to serve their students:

> The thing I really like about her too is she's always willing to learn and she's always willing to change for the better of our kids. And if it's for the best of our kids she's going to make it happen. She's always reading books about different strategies…asking for our opinions and our ideas.

Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) acknowledged that inquiry around personal growth and modeling of equity-focused continuous learning helps school leaders to understand how "privilege, power, and oppression operate-both historically and currently…" (p. 20). Lena equated this line of thinking to public education and how she believes continuous learning connects our thought processes to the choices we make:

> I think the whole purpose of public education is to be that great equalizer and meet the needs of an ever-changing country that's becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. It's really a continuum, we're all at different places within our understanding of cultural responsiveness, but you should be continually be working on yourself to improve in that area. You have to be able to examine yourself and understand your own cultural lens and how that dictates your beliefs and actions.

The understanding of one's personal strengths and weaknesses means "taking responsibility for improvement by actively pursuing developmental activities and striving for continuous learning" (Stufft & Coyne, 2009, p. 5). Suzanne valued Lena's willingness to change and take responsibility for her missteps.

She's also not one to be prideful. She will suck it up anytime she knows that she's

wrong or that she's made a mistake and she'll own up to it…I think that's very

important in leadership that the people who are under you see you as a person.

Lena's process of continuous learning demonstrates a desire to keep abreast of

current literature and her own learning. She stressed the importance of knowing what's

going on socio-politically in the world, reading about different experiences, listening to

her staff and their experiences learning about their educational history "and how that

[their experiences and education] might impact the way that they teach and the way they

interact with their students." Lena explained, "there's so much out there to learn, and I

just want to get deeper." Sarah reiterated Lena's desire to learn and described how it

motivated her to take part in the process. "She's always learning and reading…she's very

educated and continuing to educate herself. I think that kind of motivates me to want to

be just as knowledgeable and educated and to keep up with her."

Importance of community voice and relationships. The CRSL framework

developed by Khalifa et al. (2016) identified the component of community involvement

and serving the community's needs under Domain IV (*Engages Students' Parents and*

Indigenous Contexts). Previously cited research points to addressing and identifying the

needs of the school community as a fundamental component to student success (Khalifa,

et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Theoharis, 2009; Valenzuela,

1999). Through close collaboration with the community, centering leadership behaviors

and beliefs on community needs and perspectives is essential to student development

(Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018.)

During our interviews Lena discussed the importance of community voice and

how that helps to build relationships with faculty, students, and parents. "I definitely believe that parents and students should be the loudest and strongest voice in our school community…as educators, we're really here to serve what that voice wants." She utilized surveys, community family nights, and principal coffee chats to get an understanding of the community Ellis serves and how to address their specific needs. School leaders are more responsive to the cultural and social needs of their schools when they connect with voices from the community (Khalifa, et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018). Lena expanded on how her beliefs in community voice manifested through her development of forums for community members to express their points of view:

> I was listening to more of their concerns, through principal coffee chats, having a forum for them to ask questions and talk about their concerns…providing a written survey where they can write things down. I have done surveys with parents after meeting with them. I always ask them how we are doing in certain areas…and I take that information and that's how I steer the campus. So, it's never really about just what I want. It's about what everybody, all the stakeholders want.

Lena utilized survey responses as an opportunity to pinpoint community needs and keep open lines of communication to continue building relationships. "We asked them [parents] what they want and a lot of our Latinx parents wanted computer assistance. We've held classes on how to access your child's grades in Skyward, or how to start a Google account." As an answer to minimal responses from parents through email, Lena added all the parents to the REMIND application (text messages) and she started sending communications through the application. She wanted parent feedback and

to facilitate communication with her community.

Alejandra discussed the importance of communication and how Lena consistently focused on building those relationships with students and their families. She spoke of how the COVID-19 pandemic hit while Lena was on maternity leave:

The moment that she [Lena] came back it was like, hit the ground running. 'How are our students doing?' 'Have you reached out to our parents?' 'Have you gotten together with the community?' Even in the school events that we had prior to COVID-19, it was all about how can we serve everyone.

Alejandra continued with the thought that the pandemic was a "blessing in disguise." She explained that Lena navigated the difficulties with the notion of "everyone being on the same page. I want everyone to be informed…to feel like we are connected. We're going to take it one step at a time. We're going to stay connected as much as we can." Joanne took over for Lena while she was on maternity leave and wanted to continue the positive relationships that had been built in the Ellis community. When COVID-19 caused major disruptions in programming, Joanne expressed, "We worked really hard to cultivate parents and kids feeling part of the Ellis community. We need to keep that even when we're online."

Khalifa's (2018) research pointed to the significance of not only hearing the voice of the community, but listening, embracing, validating, and promoting that voice. Joanne considered the significance of Lena taking community needs into account when making decisions. "She's making decisions, because she goes out and talks to people, or attends PLCs…we're meeting with staff all the time. She knows where our needs are and what people want." Additionally, Joanne noted that, "Lena is aware of that [staff, students,

and community needs] and she really tries to know what is going on…responds to what people need and it's really hard to do. But I love the fact that she tries to be in tune with everyone." During our conversations, Lena conveyed the message of how recognition of teacher voice can impact community relationships:

I think having that shift of growth helps teachers and students feel safe. I don't have to be perfect, I just have to get a little better than I was yesterday. Teachers need to feel like they can fail forward. The culture of our campus before was very black and white, like right and wrong, or I'm going to get in trouble. [Everything] was very admin driven, very controlled, micromanaged. People didn't feel like they had a voice. They were just kind of doing what they were told to do. I feel like that has shifted.

Research has indicated that a climate of belonging is often attributed to the inclusion of community stakeholders in the educational process (Kelley, 2012; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa, et al., 2016). Lena overtly expressed the impact of community voice at Ellis, "One of the beliefs I have is really about empowering and valuing all voices. I'm big on honoring the point of view of our students and families." Alejandra acknowledged that Lena's beliefs were evident through her daily interactions with students and families. She stated, "I think that's a huge thing, she [Lena] cares about the welfare of the community… she ensures that when the kids come into school that they're seen, that they're heard. She makes sure that parents are seen, that they're heard, and that they are informed."

Through data gleaned from interviews, observations, and surveys the majority of parents responded positively regarding Lena and the Ellis community. Serena, a parent,

commented on her relationship with the community and how they always call "if they [Ellis faculty and staff] have anything they see may benefit me or the kids. If I get a call from the school, I know it's important… it's informative." She continued by conveying what she felt was the focus at Ellis, "I think the school is very for their children versus it's just a job, that's just how I feel." Additionally, Serena communicated the level of responsiveness she has experienced at Ellis, "Whenever I've talked to someone about an issue, they work on it right away…it's not put on the backburner and then you have to call to remind them." Marisol, another parent, agreed that the Ellis faculty and staff are responsive to her needs and the needs of her children, "She [Lena] has helped her with technology issues [during the pandemic] and her daughter is in a small group setting where she can get more help with her language acquisition."

Marisol and Alma, another parent, both participated in ESL classes offered at Ellis Elementary and spoke about several volunteer opportunities for community involvement. Alma indicated there were opportunities to help with the school carnival and attend field trips with her children. Parent survey responses revealed an overall positive view of campus events at Ellis with some parents expressing the following: "I love that I can see my son's growth firsthand while attending the school activities."; "I think it's great that y'all do a lot of community involved activities."; "There were a variety [of activities] and plenty of opportunity to participate."

During the district's transition to school-wide dual language, Lena expressed concern with the lack of information being offered to the parents. "There isn't any information for parents about what this entails [dual-language], and they need to understand that this is a big shift in our programming and what is it going to mean for

them? For their children?" In response to the limited communication from the district,

Lena held information sessions about the new dual-language program for the parents. She

wanted them to clearly understand how this program would be implemented, "What

subjects are taught in which language and what are the impacts of a program like this?

Why are we switching? What do I want and value for your child?" Jaime agreed that

Lena's efforts were consistently aimed at ensuring "we're reaching the kids…and trying

to build that community, that bridge between school and the families. There's nothing she

[Lena] won't do to try and support parents in helping their kids be successful."

Lena's beliefs were grounded in culturally responsive leadership practices and

helped to build the foundation for an inclusive environment. Her beliefs about cultural

responsiveness included the significance of inclusivity and equity, critical self-reflection,

continuous learning, and the importance of community voice. Lena's beliefs revealed her

aspirations to continuously examine her biases, develop her leadership practice through

continuous research, and develop an equitable and inclusive school environment for all

community stakeholders.

Culturally Responsive Actions of a School Leader

According to Lindsey and Lindsey (2014) and Hollowell (2019) values and

assumptions manifest into actions and behaviors, what principals do reveals what

principals believe. Culturally responsive school leaders understand how their expressed

system of beliefs and their actions intertwine (Sergiovanni, 2007; Taliaferro, 2011). The

themes ascertained through this research were categorized under the following themes:

challenging the status quo, building capacity, leading by example, providing professional

development focused on culturally responsive practices, and engaging in data-driven

instructional decision making.

Challenging the status quo. Multiple studies have highlighted the importance of culturally responsive school leaders' belief in the possibility of social justice and equity as a vital component to challenging the status quo (Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Theoharis, 2007). Along with the conviction of possibility, culturally responsive school leaders recognize the uncomfortable process of systematic change and their role in opposition of school practices that increase marginalization and inequity. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) Domain I (*Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors)* of the framework describes the push for systematic change as the following leadership characteristics: (a) challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011); (b) leads with courage (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1988; Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2017) and; (c) is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O' Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010; Shields & Hesbol, 2020). For the purpose of this research study, these three ideals have been combined into the theme of *challenging the status quo*. Challenging the status quo encompasses school leaders pushing against systems and processes, and confronting barriers that continue to marginalize students (DeMatthews, Serafini & Watson, 2020; Kelley, 2012; Shields, 2004; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Theoharis, 2007; Weems, 2013).

At the time of this study, Ellis Elementary had begun a transition to a two-way dual language program for pre-kindergarten through second grade, where two groups of students (native English and Spanish speakers) are supported to become bilingual, bi-cultural, and bi-literate in both languages. As well as, a one-way dual language for third

through fifth grade students (a program which was implemented district-wide) where students participating in the program are from only one of the languages used in the program model (i. e. native Spanish speakers learn in Spanish and English). However, Ellis educators felt that a standard "one-size-fits all" approach to implementing the model did not account for specific campus-based needs. Jaime acknowledged this issue with the implementation of the dual-language program and spoke to Lena's desire for flexibility and her willingness to voice concerns even when it challenges business as usual:

> She [Lena] had noticed that the way they [district] had tried to implement it [dual-language program] in a blanket sort of way. They don't quite see how it is down to the individual campus and then the individual classroom. Things need to be adjusted and adapted to suit the unique dynamics that you might find in the school and that you might find in a classroom, a lot of principals will just tend to not say anything and she voices these things, I know she does.

Lena's aspirations for a dual-language model that met the needs of the students at Ellis caused her to push back against the district's program format. She argued with district personnel about students being taught Language Arts and Reading in Spanish only, explaining, "and they're just lost because they were never taught to read in Spanish but they're learning how to read in English and it doesn't make any sense." As the conversation continued, Lena shared how she was told to "do the program and stop challenging the district's model."

Lena's beliefs about putting student needs first led her to guide the teachers at Ellis to follow district protocol for the dual-language program with the caveat of examining what students need and serving them appropriately. At meetings with district

personnel, Lena would reiterate that teachers were utilizing math and science for English language development, and then she would direct her teachers: "you're doing English guided reading, just so you know." Sarah offered a possibility for Lena's thought process stating, "our school typically does very well within the district [i.e., the school typically performs well on standardized measures compared to other campuses] and so she knows if she can kind of keep her mouth shut and do what she's going to do anyway, they don't really bother her."

A key facet of culturally responsive school leadership "seeks to identify and institutionalize practices that affirm Indigenous and authentic cultural practices of students" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1278). The majority of ELs at Ellis Elementary identify as Latinx students. According to Lena, the previous structure of the bilingual program was historically problematic for the majority of ELs. During one of our interviews, Lena shared that, prior to her becoming the principal at Ellis, the district had an early-exit model for bilingual students. According to Lena, the previous principal had said things such as "we're in America and they [students] should be learning English, that's the whole point of why we're here [at school]." As early as first grade, former campus administration would start separating bilingual students who were more proficient in English into one classroom where they received more English instruction. Conversely, students who were less proficient in English would receive more Spanish instruction in separate classrooms. As Lena put it, "By the time they [students receiving English instruction] were in second grade, they were fully immersed into English. We weren't building biliterate students. We were building students that couldn't communicate with their parents."

At the time of the study, Lena observed that the onset of dual-language implementation appeared to develop Spanish-dominant students. However, through the continued development of the program she noted "I'm seeing more bi-literacy...we are providing opportunities to develop English language literacy through math and science." She continued by expressing her excitement for second-grade students from the previous year who wrote poems of pride in their native language [Spanish]. Lena stated, "I think our students now see being bilingual as a strength… Something they can offer. We want the kids to be able to utilize the language of their strengths too." Language can often contribute to marginalization of culturally and linguistically diverse students; however, opportunities to learn in their native language lessen marginalization and lead to affirmative outcomes at Ellis (Au, 2011; Gandara & Hopkins, 2011; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018).

Lena's concern for the students at Ellis led to a restructuring of Response to Intervention (RtI) on her campus. Previously, Ellis only implemented English intervention programs and it was difficult for Lena to find appropriate help for her students. As she described:

I'd be in these RtI meetings trying to find help for a kid and we don't even have a bilingual intervention program. They [students] need to have intervention in their language strengths and we implemented bilingual interventionists. We wanted to make sure that our Latinx students, specifically our bilingual students were being served.

The intention to restructure and reform systemic and oppressive structures stemmed from Lena's focus on student equity and inclusion. Culturally responsive school

leaders learn about the communities they serve and advocate for their students by challenging teaching and environments that perpetuate the cycle of marginalization (Cooper, 2009; Khalifa et al., 2016). Jaime reflected on Lena's manner of navigating student and community needs stating:

> Campuses tend to become islands unto themselves, and everyone just kind of does their own thing. Lena's not like that. She will speak up anytime that she feels that something might not be in the best interest of the kids. She has never been hesitant, even if it doesn't garner the response she wanted.

> Sarah echoed Jaime's views regarding Lena's willingness to speak up for the students, "She's definitely not a status quo person, she always says 'I am sure they are tired of me speaking up at principals' meetings.' She's always asking questions and pushing back a little bit."

> School leaders who are willing to challenge the status quo, enact social justice, and seek to change inequitable practices and policies are often met with opposition (Garza, 2008; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005; Oakes et al., 2000; Weems, 2013). Lena expressed the stress that comes from systemic pressure to adhere to the educational status quo:

> You're not going to have everyone that agrees or understands your point of view, that's hard and it takes bravery, but who's going to do that? Our kids have to deal with that opposition every day. So, a little bit of discomfort or the feeling of discomfort for educators or families, you have to be able to get past that because our kids feel discomfort every single day.

> Another area of challenge was unique to the year in which this study was

conducted. As the COVID pandemic resulted in major shifts in practice for educators

(i.e., the delivery of instruction in a hybrid format; distance learning; increased safety

protocols and measures), there was considerable concern about how standardized

achievement measures would be administered, as well as how the data would be used.

Initially TEA decided only in-person students would complete STAAR testing, and then

the parameters changed so that all students (to include virtual) would complete STAAR,

but only the scores of in-person students would be recorded and analyzed. Although the

TEA (Texas Education Agency) decided that STAAR outcomes would not be reflected in

a grade or rating for campuses, students were still required to take STAAR.

Lena described how she and Joanne experienced a "big disconnect" between their

values of student safety and equity and school district personnel's message conveyed

about STAAR testing. Lena expressed her frustration with the idea that "whatever the

state says about STAAR is what they [district personnel] are telling us to care about."

Lena continued by stating, "We were told 'not to worry about our virtual students and

just focus on your in-person kids. So that kid is staying home because granny is high risk,

they don't need to learn anymore?" Sarah expressed that following a principals' meeting

Lena shared information with her about STAAR testing and its potential to perpetuate

inequities:

> At one of their principals' meetings they were told, as you start bringing back
>
> students and things start to open back up, think about who you are inviting back
>
> and get the kids who are going to have higher scores to come back on campus [for
>
> in-person instruction].

Sarah felt that it was implied that staff should encourage the students they knew would

perform well on STAAR to come back and take the test in person. In this case, the value placed on STAAR was perceived as a potential barrier to students' access to in-person instruction.

"Culturally responsive school leaders are explicit and honest about the benefit, or harm, that a focus on testing may have on the communities they serve" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 152). Lena's dissatisfaction with the district's position on STAAR testing and the discrimination between remote and in-person students led her to push back and invite all available students to come in person for testing and return to campus for instruction. She contacted parents and communicated the importance of their child's presence on campus. Lena articulated her belief in opportunities for all students by stating "I'm not going to put all these kids who we know are so far behind at home when they could be here, just because we want the higher performing kids to take the test here."

Building capacity. Building capacity is emphasized in Domain II (*Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers)* as practices in place to develop faculty and staff's competence for culturally responsive practices and meeting the needs of all students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Through conversations with Lena and the faculty at Ellis, it became clear that Lena valued educators' professional growth and collaboration. Lena examined the overarching demands of teacher training and explained how the field of education should focus on foundational skills that can be honed and applied across disciplines:

> We ask a lot of teachers and nobody can get good at a million things all at one time, we move way to fast in education. We throw all these buzzwords at people and it's like the newest, shiniest thing. When really, we should strip it down to the basic high-yield literacy strategies and critical thinking. If you can read and write,

you can access any information.

Jaime expanded on Lena's efforts to ensure that "teachers are teaching with the tools that will help them reach all the students." Lena has facilitated building a school culture where teachers can ask for what they need. Jaime verbalized this mentality by expressing, "If you need more, we will get you that resource, we will send you to that training. We'll have you go watch this teacher. Whatever it is you need, so you can do what you have to do for kids."

Rosa referenced expectations for Ellis faculty after they returned from district trainings. She explained:

> When we go to trainings we are expected to go back into the classroom and start practicing it [new skill or initiative]. She [Lena] will walk around and see if it's working, if it's not working. And if she sees that it's working really well in the classroom then she'll go back and suggest that other teachers come and see us in our classroom putting it into practice. I would say that there is a lot of feedback and turn around on trainings.

Building capacity includes empowering faculty, staff, students and the surrounding community. School leaders who are receptive, who are open, and who demonstrate genuine care in cultivating relationships are highly effective in guiding their peers toward a collective goal (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Lena built capacity in her staff through building their instructional and leadership skills. Suzanne explicitly stated:

> I feel like Lena believes in me. Lena gave me the chance to be team lead and she's given me a chance for leadership opportunities and I would have never had

that with my previous principal. I feel like she really believes in me and she's

really helped me develop, because I was a whole different creature a few years

ago.

Suzanne expressed her appreciation for Lena's continuous support in her personal and

professional growth:

She was so understanding when I told her that this year it was my intention to

transfer. And she was like, 'We're going to be losing a rockstar, but I know what

you want to do and I am always in support of professional growth.'

At his previous schools, Jaime felt bound to his role as a disciplinarian stating that

"most of them [his previous principals] were *old school*," meaning that one assistant

principal was expected to focus on discipline and the other academics, and the "two

worlds rarely mix." However, things were different when he was hired at Ellis. Lena

presented multiple prospects for Jaime to further his development as a school leader. She

gave him the responsibility of expanding his instructional knowledge and capacities

through leading the campus dual-language and pre-kindergarten PLCs. He said:

She's always been very supportive of us and trying to be leaders in that aspect,

myself included. I don't know what would have happened had Lena not continued

to encourage me to step into that position and stick with it and develop my

leadership capacity in that manner.

The process of building capacity fosters reciprocal and trusting relationships

through a unified purpose (DuFour et al., 2008; Hara & Schwen, 2006). Through remote

observations, I noted that data meetings and PLCs were often led by Sarah, the campus

instructional coach. When asked about her role in leading PLCs, Sarah stated, "She

161

[Lena] trusts me because she asks my opinion a lot, she values my expertise, she empowers me and reminds me that I am competent and capable. She gives me important tasks and she allows me to do them."

Alejandra referred to Lena as her "mentor" and drew attention to how Lena clearly defines what she wants the campus community to excel at and what she sees as areas of need. As Alejandra expressed, "Lena has always been very open about having her campus be a biliterate, bicultural campus." When Alejandra first started working at Ellis, literacy was an area in which their campus struggled. Through Lena's continued advocacy for literacy, students were given interest inventories to garner an understanding of what types of literature they were interested in reading. As teachers grew in their practice, students were encouraged to expand their reading competencies by honing in on their personal literary interests. Alejandra summed up her thoughts by stressing, "She really just pushes, she figures out a way for us to give kids the power to read. She empowers the teachers to do more, she pushes us to do more in that realm [building literacy]."

Leading by example. Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) identified modeling as a high yield leadership practice that "prioritizes mitigating inequities for students" (p. 94-95)**.** The action of leading by example, straddles the lines between Domain II (*Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers*) and Domain III (*Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment*) of the CRSL framework (Khalifa, et al., 2016). Additional research emphasized that those in positions of school leadership are charged with the level of cultural responsiveness at their schools through leading by example, modeling desired behaviors, and providing a guide for teachers to enrich their

levels of culturally responsive practices (Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa, 2011; Kiemele, 2009; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Reihl, 2000).

Visibility served as an integral leadership behavior correlated to student achievement and a key facet to "letting both teachers and students see that principals were aware of what transpired in the classroom" (Kelley, 2012, p. 334; Van Vooren, 2018). Through working alongside teachers and being accessible to her staff, Lena's visibility contributed to the vision of inclusive schools (Solberg, Edwards, & Nyborg, 2021; Van Vooren, 2018; Weems, 2013). Alejandra spoke to the importance of Lena's guidance and visibility for Ellis and the surrounding community:

> Lena is pretty clear about what she wants for our campus community. I feel like she's always very, as you've seen in meetings, she's always present. It's never, we have a meeting and she's not there. She's always there to kind of help us, to guide us.

Suzanne reiterated how Lena's visibility contributed to her guidance of expectations and sets an example for the Ellis faculty:

> She's a principal that's very visible. There are some schools where the principal never comes out of their office, and she's always in the hallway. Sometimes she'll go and do her work in the commons area just so she can see the kids walk by and say "hi" to them.

The guidance and modeling of culturally responsive practices are essential to improving the education of marginalized students (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe, 2009; Theoharis, 2009). Joanne communicated the importance of modeling instructional strategies and ensuring that teachers have the information they

163

need to go forward and plan. She said, "Lena will model different strategies to help our

students. We know we can't just tell teachers to do this [strategy] without really showing

them how." Alejandra agreed that modeling had a significant impact, "Trainings are a big

deal and also Lena's modeling of what she wants to see. She's very involved in our

professional learning and our PLCs when we are planning." Lena expanded on the vital

component of modeling:

> We've taken an extra step at our campus through modeling and coaching, and
>
> building that efficacy of teachers. I don't just have someone come in and do a
>
> professional development session, and then it's done…that's not a good use of
>
> our time. I expect them to come in [to the classroom] and model. I would never
>
> want a teacher to fill in the spots, or to have to do something that haven't actually
>
> seen modeled.

Khalifa's (2018) research identified the necessity for culturally responsive school

leaders to "model inclusionary practices *at the moment* [emphasis in original] the

principals observe or encounter oppressive exclusionary requests or behaviors from staff"

(p.140). As part of this study, I conducted a remote observation of a meeting in which

Lena and the teachers discussed data from a recent benchmark. Lena employed

inclusionary language by using "our students" throughout the meeting, signifying

accountability in educating all students at Ellis, versus "these students" which is

sometimes viewed as a lack of responsibility for a particular group of children.

Additionally, there were instances where she modeled her expectations and reframed

exclusionary statements.

For example, in one instance the group was discussing the performance of their

special education students and a teacher consistently referred to a group of students as "they." The teacher continued to state her belief for the low performance on the benchmark, "I feel like it's probably a correlation with reading levels and recognizing things in text. I also think *they* struggle with memorizing rules." Lena asked for clarification on who the teacher was referring to and reframed the statement, "I wonder if our special education students performed lower than they should have due to having to use their strategies online versus the written format that is familiar."

During the meeting Lena continued to model expected behavior and language when discussing students. Another teacher stated that she had six students coded as special education, but felt "like there are more." She continued, "I don't know what else I can do to help *those* SPED kids because they do have inclusion. But they make a difference to how our averages come out." Again, Lena reframed the statement to reflect more inclusive language, "I hope that we can find other ways to support our students who are below grade level in Spanish grammar."

Leading by example aids school leadership in guiding their vision for their campus and community. Through modeling their expectations, school leaders promote and embrace culturally responsive practices, which in turn builds teachers' aptitudes for inclusive and equitable practices (Jacobs, 2014; Jones-Goods, 2014; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). To ensure understanding of the high level of importance, the vision for culturally responsive practices needs to be clearly communicated. Sarah verbalized how important it is to follow Lena's guidance when conducting PLCs and data meetings:

> If the message [regarding inclusivity and equity] is only coming from her [Lena], or the perspective is only seen from her, and she was going into all the PLCs and

all the meetings projecting that belief, viewing through that lens but the staff didn't see any other leadership doing that, how effective is that? Then they take the message and think "that's a her [Lena] thing."

Sarah indicated that she meets with Lena before almost every data meeting or PLC to make sure they are on the same page. As an administrative team, they completed a book study focused on building student and campus culture. The concepts gleaned from the study were utilized to develop team meeting norms, protocols, and build practices toward a positive solution minded campus. Sarah stated that she "leads the meetings under Lena's umbrella" where her belief in cultural responsiveness entailed listening, engagement, and motivation for teachers and students.

When asked about Lena's message regarding cultural responsiveness and inclusive practices, Suzanne expressed that she continues to learn through Lena's example. She said, "I learned a lot, even though I feel like I'm culturally responsive, I'm not perfect. I think she [Lena] really takes charge of that and makes sure that everybody knows it's [cultural responsiveness] a priority on this campus."

Evidence of Lena leading by example was also provided in her commitment to take action in other significant areas of culturally responsive school leadership. Her aspirations to meet the needs of the students at Ellis often led her to challenging the status quo. Her faculty frequently witnessed Lena combating archaic ideals about marginalized students and making decisions based on student needs rather than doing what has always been done. She modeled the importance of community voice by surveying stakeholders (i.e. parents, teachers) and utilizing their input to make campus decisions. Additionally, Lena guided teachers toward using inclusive language and taking responsibility for all

166

student learning at Ellis.

Although instructional supervision is one of the most important practices of culturally responsive school leadership, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunity to observe teacher instruction was not feasible. At the time of the study, teaching was conducted in a hybrid format (online and in-person learning) and did not allow for a consistent collection of instructional observational data.

Providing professional development focused on culturally responsive practices. The research suggests that a significant aspect of culturally responsive school leadership is conducting and taking part in continuous, equity-focused professional development (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Bishop, 2016; Bustamante et al., 2009; Hollowell, 2019; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Kelley, 2012, Khalifa, 2018, Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey, Nuri Robins, & Terrell, 2003; Vergara, 2017). Culturally responsive school leaders utilize an equity-lens to cultivate ongoing professional development that addresses and promotes social justice (Guerrero, 2016; Hollowell, 2019; Lindsey et al., 2003). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework delineates the significance of culturally responsive professional development in Domain II (*Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers*). The faculty participants at Ellis were asked about professional development opportunities designed to build and expand on equitable and inclusive practices, and their capacity for implementing culturally responsive practices.

Lena and faculty members at Ellis spoke about, *Project Success* (name changed to protect anonymity), their partnership with a local university. *Project Success* focused on language and literacy development through a multitiered instructional model for English learners. According to Lena, *Project Success* promoted critical thinking, deep

167

conversations utilizing book talks, and a reflective component for faculty. Books specifically selected and supplied through *Project Success* were reflective of students' cultural backgrounds and lessons were designed utilizing English and Spanish texts, depending on student instructional needs and the campus dual-language plan. Lena explained how she felt the project promoted culturally responsive and equitable practices such as, scaffolding language development through student dialogue and facilitation of student engagement. She pointed out, "Teachers are recording themselves and they're seeing, 'Do I call on my girls more than my boys? Are some of those patterns because of their implicit bias?'"

Sarah discussed how the process of videotaping themselves and reflecting on their teaching practices encouraged teachers to focus on their instruction and the level of student participation. She shared that review and discussion of the videotaped lessons allowed "…us to be more cognizant of how our instruction is affecting our students." The Ellis faculty engaged in "understanding self" which Lena explained encompassed "digging into the life experiences" that made them who they are, understanding of their cultural lens and how that dictated their beliefs and actions. Additionally, Ellis faculty participated in professional growth through reflective professional learning communities.

Culturally responsive leaders ensure professional development for their staff is geared toward guidance on differentiating instruction, integrating students' cultures into the curriculum, and implementing culturally responsive instruction (Bustamante et al., 2009; Jones-Goods, 2014). Sarah participated in professional development sessions focused on understanding student behaviors in the classroom, cultural differences, and using culturally responsive texts in the classroom. She maintained the importance of

students being able to engage with "culturally responsive texts" and to "see themselves in the text and stories that they're reading," as well as have access to texts that do not perpetuate stereotypes.

Suzanne agreed that *Project Success* offered multiple trainings focused on culturally responsive practices:

> We had very specific trainings through our partnership with the university. Lena brought in this team and literally what the training was about was being culturally responsive. There were examples shared, and we talked about different ways that we might not realize that we're being exclusive in the classroom and to help us be more inclusive.

Sarah acknowledged the linguistic support and scaffolding offered through *Project Success* for English learners. "Part of their training [*Project Success*], was all about being linguistically responsive. You have to know your students' language proficiencies. You have to know what their needs are and just giving some context and background to educating English learners." According to Sarah, the linguistic piece of the training led to discussions on "how we can ensure that all of our kids have adequate access to the classroom discussions."

Sarah expanded on the trainings through *Project Success* and explained how there were professional development sessions on how to navigate the instructional routines, along with observations and follow-ups. "They would come and observe how effective the read-aloud routine was for students acquiring vocabulary and language. Then they would talk to the teachers about what was working and what wasn't." As literature shows, receiving specific feedback through an equity lens "facilitates ongoing

professional development in order to hold staff accountable for utilizing equitable

instruction" (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014, p.112).

A vital characteristic of culturally responsive school leadership is supporting

teachers through culturally responsive focused professional development (Hollowell,

2019; Lindsey et al., 2003; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018). In addition to *Project Success,*

Lena described how professional development provided at Ellis aligned with her vision

for an equitable and inclusive campus environment. The faculty received training on

Sheltered Instruction in previous years, and Lena commented on the fact that teachers

received more direct training during the current school year. She and Joanne attended

"Courageous Conversations" training where the facilitation of interracial dialogues is

utilized to address the relationship between race and achievement (Singleton, 2015).

They utilized their learning to create professional development opportunities for their

faculty. "After the Courageous Conversations trainings, we [Joanne and I] spent a year

doing little activities where they [teachers] were examining their implicit bias and doing a

lot of things that were done in the beginning of my university program." Lena

additionally noted that, with the implementation of the dual language program, the

district has provided training for building language-rich classrooms:

> We've worked on structured conversations. We've been really big on utilizing
>
> sentence stems, word walls, really having that print-rich environment in both
>
> languages where students can have all those scaffolds for them right there in their
>
> environment, to be able to use that to be successful with all content areas.

Alejandra commented on the frequency of culturally responsive trainings stating,

"I know they're more of a district mandated thing, but she [Lena] makes sure to carve out

time and that the calendar is pretty open for us to be trained on it." Rosa added, "we've been doing responsive teaching training, I want to say like once a month. It's a district thing, but our principal requires us to go to that." Peterson (2014) emphasized that culturally responsive school leaders understand that professional development needs to be ever-changing and adaptable. Rosa expanded on the importance of continuing professional development by stating:

> We debrief… all the time when we attend trainings, or she'll [Lena] send feedback, an email about what we learned… We are expected to go back into the classroom and start practicing it [new skill or initiative] and she'll start walking around our classrooms to see…if it's working, [or] not working. If she sees that it's working really well, she'll have other teachers come see us in our classrooms putting it into practice.

Rosa also acknowledged that Lena often utilized faculty meetings as an opportunity for professional development. She recalled, "Lena does some [training] at our faculty meetings…like mini development trainings and she'll have other teachers [present] something that they are doing in their classrooms" or a training that they have attended so they can coach other teachers during faculty meetings "instead of scheduling another training for us to go to."

Lena felt that her campus had taken positive steps toward increasing identification of bilingual students for gifted and talented programs. "I've trained teachers on what to look for, specifically for students that are linguistically diverse and other ways that we could get different products for the portfolios." She expanded on this by asserting, "we've made a lot of improvement, and have a lot more of our bilingual students in gifted

and talented as a campus. It's just constantly having that conversation and going beyond looking at test scores. We even include our art and music teachers in all of those trainings."

   Engaging in data-driven instructional decision making. To ensure student needs are met and that they receive the most appropriate educational programming, leaders must engage in regular data analysis, disaggregating data by different student groups (Peterson, 2014; Salend & Duhaney, 2005). In Hollowell's (2019) research study, principals shared meaningful data as a tool used to "identify the needs of their diverse population and to create a data-driven culture to drive the decisions necessary to address the needs of all students, particularly those that have been historically marginalized" (pp. 161-162). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework gives emphasis to engaging in data-driven instructional decision making within Domain II (*Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers*). Data from observations (of data meetings and PLC meetings) and participant interviews showed that continuous engagement in data disaggregation was a valued practice at Ellis and data was used to make instructional decisions for students.

   Under Lena's leadership, data meetings for third- through fifth-grade were conducted after major district assessments, usually occurring at least once a month. For the primary grades, data meetings focused on the Renaissance Learning data, TPRI (Texas Primary Reading Inventory), teacher observations, and anecdotal notes. Different protocols were used for students who receive RtI (Response to Intervention). Lena described the data-meeting process as reviewing student data through a lens of student growth. "Every six weeks we are looking at student data, moving tiers, and seeing if the intervention is successful." If it was determined that a specified intervention had not been

172

successful, the interventionists and leadership team reevaluated their instruction and adjusted plans.

I observed third and fourth-grade educators disaggregate and review student data after district benchmarks. Due to COVID-19 protocols, data was sent electronically to teachers to examine and pinpoint areas of growth and areas in need of support. The teachers reviewed their data based on district criteria for the levels: *approaching expectations*, *met expectations*, and *mastered expectations*. Lena began the data discussions by having teachers dissect the data through the lens of, "I hope…I notice…I wonder…." This led into examination of data by demographic groups and a comparative analysis. During my interview with Sarah, she explained how reviewing data according to different student groups at Ellis focuses teachers' awareness on culturally responsive practices:

> [It keeps CRP] in our forefront because we are forced to look at student populations when we look at data. We do have those conversations about special education, our Black students, our LEP students, our Asian students…we're aware and we're making sure that all of those kids succeed.

In my observation, teachers explored the data by student expectations (SE), understood how to navigate the information, and pinpointed strengths and areas where students needed more support. Lena stated, "We need to look at student strengths, and utilize those strengths to help them master another skill." She continued by adding, "mindset is everything, consistency, focus, belief, and growth." Teachers organized student data through individual growth charts. These virtual growth charts allow teachers to "move" students from where they were after the district assessment, to where they

performed on the benchmark. Additionally, the student growth charts assisted teachers in creating a plan of action for each student based on specific instructional needs.

During my interviews, the teacher participants were asked about their access to student data and how they utilized the information. Rosa noted that she navigated student data through an online system called Eduphoria, explaining that "we can find pretty much all of their information that we have since they started at school, or anything that was sent over from a previous school they were at." Suzanne also found Eduphoria valuable, explaining "I can look at their previous tests and I can see what percentage of my SPED kids got this and what percentage of my Black kids got this, and my Asian kids." Suzanne expanded on how she applies what she learns through data analysis to her instructional practices:

> I'm using the data for my testing and I honestly don't care about their points. I could care less how many points this kid is worth. If they don't understand the concept, we're getting it retaught. I look at the concepts I need to teach and how many they got right. If I see that they got 0% of those [questions] correct, I need to pull them in a group and reteach them. If I see that they got 50% of them wrong, I'll pull them in a small group, but probably not as often as I pulled the other ones [the other group].

Peterson (2014) documented the impact that standardized assessments, local assessments, and program placements have on students' lives. The information gleaned from data meetings led to Lena make instructional changes to small groups at Ellis (with the exception of Dyslexia services). She determined there would be no more "pull-out" for RtI and explained why. "There has been a disconnect from what they [students] are

doing in the classroom and in RtI," she said. "We are not seeing major growth for small groups, so we are switching to an inclusion model." Additionally, Lena's understanding of her students' data led her to switch to an inclusion, co-teach model for special education:

We have reduced our resource numbers. I think it's really important for our Latinx students. There were students that were being pulled out, they were in a bilingual classroom, then they were pulled out for resource in English. We're saying they have a reading difficulty, but we haven't strengthened their L1[first language] and we're confusing them.

Lena's reasoning for changing instructional models, is an example of utilizing data to aid in mitigation of students' instructional gaps.

Suzanne noted that when students are referred for special education "we have to go through this process where we fill out paperwork and describe what we've seen, what we've tried. We then decide as a committee if we want to move forward with SPED testing or not, we need more data." Rosa and reaffirmed the intricate process for referring students for special education services:

They [students] have to go through Tier 3 for a while before we can refer them. We really have to have data showing, especially for our Latinx students… that it's not a language issue, that even in their native language they're not performing well and that we're giving them those supports through Tier 3.

Lena outlined the reasoning for requesting additional data points, observations, and teacher documentation. "I've stopped a lot of referrals that I've seen as lack of educational opportunities. Let's look at what the [prior] schooling system looks like. For

175

example, Honduras their school year starts in January, where they said they finished third grade, only half a year if it's on our calendar." Lena operated under the mindset of "we don't want to refer a student to a special program if we haven't provided multiple opportunities for them to be successful." Lena's utilization of multiple methods for determining students' instructional needs were based in culturally responsive practices. Research has established that culturally responsive education for students is achieved through continuous examination of gaps in achievement across cultural groups, gaps in special education services, and tracking of academic disparities (Khalifa et al., 2016; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2007).

Lena's beliefs manifesting in actions. Lena's actions were reflective of culturally responsive leadership practices and building a culturally responsive campus. Lena's actions demonstrated her desire to push back against archaic systems, develop the cultural responsiveness of campus faculty, and utilize data to ensure best practices for students. In addition to Lena's identified actions in the section above, evidence of other actions that were put into place based on her beliefs were outlined in the first section, describing Lena's beliefs. For the sake of brevity, quotes gleaned from interviews were not repeated in this section, but the following pages and paragraphs indicate specific quotes supporting Lena's actions.

Lena's beliefs surrounding inclusivity and equity were integrated into practice through morning meetings (See pg. 135, para. 2-3; pg. 136, para.) and hiring practices (See pg. 137, para. 2). In response to her belief in the importance of community voice and relationships, she took action through the creation of parent surveys and utilized responses to construct parent classes based on need (see pg. 146, para. 3) and developed

176

information sessions to address the district-wide transition to dual-language (see pg. 149, para 2). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the significance of community voice and relationships led to actions toward keeping parents informed and continued to cultivate Ellis' connections to the community (see pg. 147, para 2). As previously stated, at times Lena's beliefs and actions were so intertwined it was often challenging to completely separate the two components.

Connections of Culturally Responsive Beliefs and Actions to Opportunity Gaps for Latinx Students

There are many ways to conceptualize opportunity gaps for Latinx students. At the beginning of this dissertation, opportunity gaps were defined as gaps in academic achievement, and disproportionate representation in discipline referrals, gifted education and special education for Latinx students. Each of these three separate entities: (a) academics; (b) special programs; and (c) discipline, are interrelated factors for overall student achievement and success.

Academics. Addressing academic opportunity gaps related to Lena's beliefs and actions proved to be the most challenging and complex aspect of this research. Although academic growth and achievement are often defined based on standardized testing assessments (i.e., STAAR), at the beginning of this study, I made a conscious decision not to analyze STAAR due to its documented perpetuation of inequality for Latinx students (Bach, 2020; Hursh, 2005; Hursh, 2007; Knoester & Au, 2017). Opportunity gaps in academics have continued to widen for racially, culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse (RCELD) students relative to the implementation of inherently biased, high-stakes testing and accountability measures (Kornhaber, 2004; Oakes, Joseph,

& Muir, 2004).

As the principal of a dual-language campus, Lena was repeatedly confronted with competing ideologies. She viewed dual-language as a positive component to building biliteracy for students at Ellis. She discussed building "language and print-rich environments, with sentence stems and word walls" and how these components are "crucial to our students becoming biliterate." Lena's work to address opportunity gaps was focused on a high-quality dual-language program, implemented with fidelity. As documented earlier, Lena was often met with resistance when she opted to do what was best for her students versus the uniform, one-size fits all approach championed by district-level personnel.

Research demonstrated that instruction designed through standardized assessments produced (a) test-centered instruction; (b) decontextualized and formulaic literacy practices; and focused on (c) monolingualism over bilingualism (Bach, 2020). With the dual-language program designed to strengthen students primary and secondary languages, STAAR obstructed desired growth for students (Bach, 2020; Hursh, 2005; Hursh, 2007). Lena acknowledged that the year her campus went from a "B" to a "D" rating coincided with the major program changes associated with implementing dual-language. She stated "dual-language just doesn't fit with STAAR."

Through examination of archival records, such as Renaissance Learning (universal literacy screener) reports and previously used iStation (universal literacy screener), I encountered a persistent barrier of inconsistency. Each measure examined different components dependent on students' grade level (i.e., phonemic awareness for kindergarten students versus oral reading fluency for second grade students), so utilizing

the measures to identify growth proved to be unsubstantiated. School districts often move from one screener or monitoring assessment to another within the span of a few years, affecting the reliability and validity of the data.

During the research process, it was noted that TELPAS (Texas English Language Proficiency Assessment System) was the only consistently administered measure assessing student growth in language proficiency. TELPAS data was collected from the 2015-2016 school year (prior to Lena's tenure as the campus principal) through the 2019-2020 school year. Student growth was examined by the ratings for cohorts of students, for example looking for growth in proficiency levels as kindergarteners in 2016 moved to fourth grade in 2020.

TELPAS reports indicated movement for student cohorts through lower percentages of students identified as "beginning" level proficiency, and higher percentages at "intermediate" and "advanced" proficiency levels. Examination of the data generally demonstrated student growth in proficiency of their second language (L2) (see Appendix K and L). Because of obstacles to data collection and inconsistent evaluation methods, determining whether there was a connection between Lena's beliefs and actions to academic opportunity gaps for Latinx students was overall inconclusive.

Special programs. Previously cited research has shown disproportionate representation of Latinx students in special programs (i.e., RtI, special education, gifted and talented) (Artiles et al., 2010; Borland, 1996; Fletcher & Navarette, 2003; Ford, 2014; Guiberson, 2009; Morgan et al., 2018; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Sullivan, 2011; Theoharis, 2009; Valencia, 2015; Wright et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). Overrepresentation of Latinx students in special education is well-documented as a

contributing factor to opportunity gaps (Artiles et al., 2010; Fletcher & Navarette, 2003; Guiberson, 2009; Morgan et al., 2018; Sullivan, 2011; Theoharis, 2009; Zhang et al., 2014). Lena's belief in the process of continuous learning, her actions toward focused data disaggregation, and her fostering of inclusive instructional environments allowed her to recognize when program changes were necessary. She explained, "We have switched towards inclusion in special education. We have co-teach happening instead of pulling so many students out for resource." She was concerned bilingual students being pulled-out for resource in English weren't getting the support they need in their L1 (primary language). Lena continued, "We're saying they [students] have a reading difficulty, but we haven't even strengthened their primary language." To combat this issue Lena hired a bilingual teacher who was also certified in special education. She discussed the reduction in resource numbers and how it reflected a more intricate, detailed process for special education referrals. Lena explained:

> We've had a lot of newcomers in last couple of years, and I'd say people are really quick to refer them [for special services]. I look at their cumulative folders and…let's talk about what their schooling system looked like. What was the school day like? Did they have a shorter year? There are a lot of factors, so understanding that before you're quick to make the decision that there's something more going on.

Lena expanded on these ideas by emphasizing:

> Special education is not a magic wand…the support is often less than what they get with a tier-three interventionist. I'm really trying to keep kids in the classroom with their grade-level peers and add the extra scaffolding they need to be

successful.

Rosa and Suzanne agreed that the special education referral process could be lengthy but understood the importance of examining multiple sources of data to ensure the most appropriate instructional model for students.

Lena approached the model for RtI in a similar manner to special education services. After thorough examination of student data, Lena recognized that students participating in RtI were not progressing academically. To address the academic issues, Lena made the decision to serve students through an inclusion co-teach model. She noted the "disconnect between what the students are doing in the classroom and in small groups in RtI" and how it was affecting academic outcomes. Continued focused data disaggregation assists school leaders in identifying student needs and ensured that students received the most suitable educational programming (Hallowell, 2019; Peterson, 2014; Salend & Duhaney, 2005).

In contrast to special education, Latinx students are largely underrepresented in enrichment programs, such as gifted and talented, creating additional opportunity gaps (Borland, 1996; Ford, 2014; Wright et al., 2017; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Valencia, 2015). Lena commented on how through her research project in her master's program, she learned about non-traditional methods of examining student achievement data through building student portfolios. She explained, "There are other things we could look at [to qualify students] versus just the achievement data. There are so many other ways to measure intelligence."

Lena recalled a fifth-grade bilingual student with autism who was not considered "gifted" by traditional standards. He didn't perform well on the Stanford 10 [intelligence

assessment], but he was "brilliant." With qualifications for gifted programs often absent of consideration for students' cultures, standardized testing often penalizes students of color (Borland, 1996; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Valencia, 2015). Lena described how they created a portfolio with pictures and videos to give him the opportunity to explain the way "his brain worked, even though he couldn't write in that manner."

At the time of this study, Sarah served as the GT coordinator at Ellis. She voiced her concerns surrounding GT nominations and that she felt "second language learners are [still] underrepresented. I think that all of our staff just needs more training on what to look for [to nominate] gifted students." Lena reiterated Sarah's thoughts elaborating, "It's constantly having those conversations and going beyond looking at test scores. We include our music and art teachers in all of those trainings, they may see something in another area that the classroom teacher doesn't see." Lena expressed that she thought her campus has made a lot of improvement and "we do have a lot more of our bilingual students in gifted and talented as a campus."

Throughout our interviews, Lena and the Ellis faculty conveyed the significance of continuously examining special programs to ensure student academic needs were appropriately addressed. Lena actively pursued knowledge and data surrounding the implementation of special programs and consistently put students first. She had teachers dig deeper and examine more data prior to referring students for special education. Additionally, Lena sought out alternatives to achievement testing (i.e., portfolios, videos, photographs) as documentation for student nominations to gifted and talented programs. Aligning quantitative assessment data and observational data demonstrated how Lena made connections between these practices at Ellis and opportunity gaps for Latinx

students.

For the purpose of this research study, I requested data representing the number of Latinx students enrolled in special programs from the 2015-2016 school year to 2020-2021. I was unable to obtain the data from faculty at Ellis, and resorted to requesting the data from a state entity. The data outlined in Table 2 generally reflects change in percentages of Latinx students in special education and gifted and talented programs. Lena's focus on inclusivity, equity, and purposeful data disaggregation, are reflected in the data as continuous movement toward increasingly proportionate representation of Latinx students in special programs. Data for special programs in the 2020-2021 school year may have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall data demonstrates a connection between Lena's beliefs and actions to opportunity gaps in special programs for Latinx students.

Table 2. Comparative Data on Special Programs for Latinx Students.

School Year	Total Student Enrollment	Percentage of enrolled Latinx students	Total SPED students	Latinx SPED students (percentage of total SPED students)	Total GT students	Latinx GT students (percentage of total GT students)
2015-2016	677	79.3%	65	56 (86%)	25	16 (64%)
2016-2017	610	79.7%	73	66 (90.4%)	24	14 (58%)
2017-2018	622	79.3%	80	72 (90%)	36	22 (61%)
2018-2019	634	79.3%	97	82 (85%)	32	21 (66%)
2019-2020	681	82.1%	123	101 (82%)	24	19 (79%)
2020-2021	596	80%	116	84 (72.4%)	15	20 (75%)

Discipline. Research has shown that addressing opportunity gaps and promotion of student success are directly related to fostering positive relationships and building safe environments (Charalampous & Kokkinos, 2018; Davis, 2003; den Brok et al., 2010; Marzano, 2003; Valenzuela, 1999). Social and emotional learning (SEL) structures and systems, such as restorative justice, morning meetings, and PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports), reduce the amount of time spent on classroom management, leaving more time to focus on instruction and learning (Vega, 2012). Lena's beliefs in inclusivity and equity, her commitment to building relationships, and her process of purposeful data disaggregation by race and ethnicity are reflected in the discipline systems and expectations at Ellis.

Ellis is a PBIS campus, which means the focus is to promote positive behavior through explicitly teaching expectations and strategies. Additionally, Lena and the Ellis

faculty paired PBIS procedures with restorative practices (i.e., restorative circles, conferencing, setting classroom agreements and norms) aimed at building relationships:

> We started doing positive office referrals. Teachers gave students referrals showing why they got it and they turned them in to a box outside the office. The first thing we do is call the parents, and it's been really great for building those relationships with parents. It could be that they have a negative viewpoint on school because every time they see our number, it's something bad. When we call [with the positive referral] they'll get so excited.

Building relationships on campus has been positively influenced by the campus-wide implementation of morning meetings. Rosa discussed how morning meetings are part of the everyday schedule, "and help to set expectations…this environment…this culture, to make our kids feel welcome and safe." Joanne reiterated the importance of morning meetings for creating a classroom environment structured toward building a classroom community where "students feel it's a safe space to ask a question about what [they] need." Additionally, Suzanne remarked on her perspective of how PBIS and restorative practices contributed to relationship building:

> They look for the why behind every behavior, because there's always a why. If you ask the right questions, you're going to help the student understand their feelings, give them opportunities to help themselves feel better, calm down, or cope with certain situations.

Although there was initial pushback, several members of the Ellis faculty acknowledged how PBIS and restorative practices positively changed the campus climate. Sarah, who had been at Ellis prior to the implementation of PBIS, pointed out

how the structure "definitely changed the mindset of the way we talk to kids. The biggest thing that came out of it was positive language. It's [PBIS] created more of a culture where it's more pleasant between teachers and students." Alejandra discussed how "it helps a lot of the negative behaviors iron themselves out to a certain extent. We have such clear expectations…tied into the school model and it's full buy-in." Suzanne agreed that explicit expectations have created a more effective system at Ellis. She noted:

> The kids that are in our school from beginning to end [of the school year] know the expectations very clearly and… we build on those strategies we use. We build on those reward systems. I think it has helped with the culture on the campus, more towards positivity.

Previous research surrounding discipline practices for Latinx students has documented higher incidents of referrals and additional disciplinary actions compared to their White peers (Blake, et al, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). When we discussed historically exclusionary discipline procedures, Lena pointed out research on student discipline shows "even if they're subjected to exclusionary discipline in elementary school, that raises their chances of being a high school dropout." Exclusionary discipline practices are evidenced as contributing to negative outcomes for students which include, but are not limited, to the following: (a) disengaging from academics; (b) separating from social interactions; and (c) increasing probability for academic failure (Bakkan & Kortering, 1999; Balfanz, 2003; Bock, Tapscott, & Savner, 1998; DeRidder, 1991; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack, & Rock, 1986; McNeill, Friedman, & Chavez, 2016; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996). Sarah advocated for pushing Ellis to be an environment where teachers do what they can to help students feel successful in the

classroom. She wanted to help create a culture where the first thought is, "let me restore this relationship, let me invest in you instead of punishing you by sending you somewhere [else]." The more time students spend outside of their core instructional settings due to exclusionary discipline practices, the higher the likelihood of increased learning gaps (Christle et al., 2007).

Lena reflected on initial teacher feedback regarding restorative discipline procedures, and she said, "We got a lot of '*you're too soft*' [regarding discipline]." She continued by explaining, "I think a lot of the teachers thought we were being lazy and didn't want to handle discipline, because we didn't want to have ISS or some of the more exclusionary discipline practices." In response to teachers, Lena conveyed a message of looking at discipline from a different perspective. "I'm looking at student growth, not only from an academic lens but from a social-emotional lens," she explained, "we're helping our kids just be better people and have more self-regulation skills." She continued by expressing the following:

> I tell my staff, when students don't know multiplication facts, what do we do? We teach them. When they don't know how to behave, why is that any different? Our job is to teach students self-regulation skills that they can use out in the world.

Rosa commented on how teaching clear behavioral expectations aids in creating a foundation for restorative practices, "We have to create respect agreements in our classrooms at the beginning of the year…partner teachers have the same expectations so we don't have behavior issues. If students have disagreements they come to me, but I'm only the mediator, they have a routine [conference] where they share how what the other person did made them feel." Students being able to navigate their feelings demonstrated

that there were scaffolds in place to guide implementation of expectations and resolution of issues between students. Sarah spoke to the value of supporting students through focused lessons:

> I think it's really important that we have these restorative practices and we have all these socio-emotional lessons because we are teaching young children who are just learning how to understand their feelings and understand their behaviors and understand their emotions. And so that teaching has to be a part of it.

Through the employment of restorative practices and socio-emotional lessons, teachers utilized student input to restore relationships and develop class contracts, while demonstrating an underpinning of SEL strategies.

Lena wanted teachers to consider why they expected students to be sent to ISS (in-school suspension) for behavior infractions rather than employing a positive, restorative approach "Why is that? Is that more convenient for them? Or is that really what's best for this student?" she questioned. She approached the conversation in a reflective manner when there was a lack of agreement on student discipline. "That's the way I approach it when they [teachers] don't understand why they're [students] not getting ISS. We don't really have an ISS any more, we've taken that away."

Although PBIS was instituted district-wide in 2011, restorative practices were implemented at Ellis beginning in 2018. In the 2016-2017 school year, Ellis had twenty-four documented ISS placements compared to the 2018-2019 school year, with only four ISS placements. The data for the 2019-2020 school year was not included in this study due to inconsistency caused by COVID-19 procedures and the hybrid model of instruction at Ellis. The minimal discipline data I was able to gather verified that Ellis had

indeed veered away from assigning students ISS and directed their efforts towards restorative practices to engage students and build community. The practice of high yield strategies, including morning meetings, PBIS, and restorative practices, indicated an association between leadership beliefs and actions and opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

The opportunity gaps for Latinx students examined in this study were academic achievement, disproportionate representation in special programs, and disparate numbers of discipline referrals. Although academic data collection was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic, TELPAS data demonstrated movement toward more proficiency for students in their second language (L2). The data gathered for enrollment in special programs (i.e., special education, RtI, gifted and talented) indicated continuous movement toward an increasingly proportionate representation of Latinx students. Discipline data for Ellis elementary signified the move from exclusionary practices (ISS) to a refocus on PBIS and restorative practices. Lena's advocacy for equity and inclusivity, purposeful data disaggregation, and continuous learning facilitated connections toward change in opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

Barriers to Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Theoharis' (2007; 2009) research outlined the following nine barriers to leadership for social justice and equity: (a) vast scope of the principalship; (b) maintenance of the status quo; (c) obstructive staff beliefs and behaviors; (d) insular/privileged parental expectations; (e) formidable bureaucracy and unsupportive district administration; (f) lack of resources; (g) state and federally mandated accountability and assessment; (h) resistance from fellow principals; and (i) lack of

effective principal preparation programs. Culturally responsive school leaders face these same challenges in their plight for equity and inclusion (Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018), The barriers were categorized from narrow to broad and included barriers at three tiers: within the school, at the district level, and the institutional level. These obstructions can ultimately prevent a school leaders' core beliefs from manifesting into actions resulting in a less culturally responsive environment. During this study, barriers often occurred when Lena's beliefs and actions were not aligned, due to mandates she had to follow or navigating perceived risks to her professional livelihood as a principal. The misalignment of Lena's beliefs and actions were also possibly influenced when she perceived there to be a power structure in place whose authority was more powerful than her own. Through my research, although I encountered evidence of multiple barriers at each tier, I address the barriers most salient at each level below. The barriers were evident in data from interviews and observations within the Ellis community.

School level barriers. Staff beliefs and behaviors relative to Latinx students' academic abilities are an important facet to student success. It is indicated in the research that not only are instructional behaviors influenced by teachers' pedagogical practices, but by their attitudes and philosophical beliefs (Gay, 2013; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Peterson, 2014). Lena acknowledged that, in data discussions about student achievement, teachers' true beliefs often come to the surface. She recalled a special education meeting where the discussion of the student's academic abilities prompted the teacher to state "She can't think." Lena considered how "it takes a long time to shift people's mentalities and they don't even realize it [their opposing beliefs]. If you asked that same teacher

about their students' abilities, they would say 'Of course all my kids can learn.'"

 She further explained:

> These things come out and they sound like [only] words, but they are deep rooted
>
> in beliefs in students that impact how hard we push them or what we believe they
>
> can do. And if we don't believe they can do it, they won't.

Continued disparities in achievement for Latinx students are often perpetuated by

well-meaning teachers who understand the need for cultural responsiveness while

simultaneously holding deficit beliefs (Guerra & Wubbena, 2017; Nelson & Guerra,

2014). These deficit beliefs are often translated into the perpetuation of a savior mentality

where teachers feel it is their duty to rescue students from themselves. Lena indicated

during our interviews that the faculty at Ellis often struggled with this deficit viewpoint.

She elaborated by commenting:

> Something we struggle with at our campus is we do have [teachers] the savior
>
> mentality type. I know it's with great intentions, they're [teachers] going into this
>
> wanting to work with our community. At the same point, they have so many
>
> scaffolds in place, and are constantly rushing to the kid's side, trying to help them
>
> so much that they actually end up disempowering the student.

In addition to teachers' beliefs regarding students' academic abilities, their views

on building a culturally responsive environment can obstruct the growth process.

Multiple research studies have proclaimed that hiring diverse faculty who embody

philosophies of equity and inclusivity can assist in nurturing students toward academic

success (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Kelly, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Milner, 2010;

Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2009). However, Lena pointed out that in some instances

discussion of hiring practices had caused teachers to become distrustful:

> If it's brought up [need for a more diverse faculty and staff], they [teachers] start feeling defensive. We've had people come and ask us '*Are you trying to say all White teachers are bad?*' or '*Are you trying to just hire all people of color and push all the White teachers out?*'

When these interactions with teachers came up in the interviews, Lena described how she explained to them the importance of "having a staff that better reflects our student body." Lena's beliefs and actions regarding purposeful active recruitment and hiring of diverse faculty were well documented in the literature as a key facet of culturally responsive school leadership (Hollowell, 2019; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Jones et al., 2016).

A general lack of understanding about the present levels of inequity are compounded by even well-intentioned staff who treat differences as deficits (Skrla et al. (2004); Theoharis, 2009). Barriers at the school level are often powerful enough to result in pressure for principals to step away from their culturally responsive agenda (Theoharis, 2009).

District level barriers. District-wide mandates and initiatives habitually produce barriers to a culturally responsive agenda. Theoharis (2009) in his study of seven principals, noted, "The principals felt that forces from outside the school and local community played a significant role in obstructing their reform efforts" (p. 97). Lena struggled with the manner in which the district began their implementation of the dual-language program. During her interviews she conveyed that the district did not develop any information sessions for the parents to explain the structure and the purpose of the

new program. Part of being a culturally responsive school leader is working to serve your community and its stakeholders, Lena felt that through lack of communication the district created an unnecessary barrier. Her experiences "depict ongoing resistance to achieve equity and justice…" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 103).

Enacting a social justice or culturally responsive agenda within a system not "set up to support this work, under supervisors who do not understand or support this work…results in district barriers" (Theoharis, 2009, p. 103). Lena received push-back on multiple occasions when discussing the structure of the dual-language program with supervisors and colleagues. She wanted to utilize the dual-language program to meet the needs of the students at Ellis, versus applying a systematic, rigid approach. Lena could not understand the district's model for teaching Language Arts and Reading and was met with constant resistance to her reasoning from district personnel. Through the district's approach to implementation, Lena encountered another barrier at the district level.

State level barriers. The majority of barriers I found at the state level were indicative of pressures stemming from state and federally mandated accountability and assessment. Khalifa (2018) and Theoharis (2009) documented that advancing culturally responsive agendas are often blocked by federal and state regulations. Measuring student success solely through test scores subtracts from the importance of other facets of education (Furman & Gruenewald, 2004).

Lena discussed how there appears to be "this factory school model and it's [instruction] supposed to be a certain way and all the things you have to do to fit in and have the right test scores." She reflected on how she felt judged on her ability as a principal based on her campus test scores:

I feel like when our rating went down, we were all looked at so differently, even though we had accomplished a lot with our school community. We went from a 'B' to a 'D' but there are so many other indicators of success on a campus. That's where I really struggle as a leader, is [between] doing what's right and doing what looks good on paper.

A standardized testing focused approach to education disregards culturally responsive pedagogy and utilizes important resources for test preparation (Gay 2007; Khalifa, 2018; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001). Lena admitted she constantly wrestled between aligning herself with other principals and "pushing reading passages…[because] I'm worried about state testing," and advocating for the importance of early literacy, "because we wouldn't have this issue [teaching to the test] if we were doing all the right things in pre-kindergarten through second grade."

Lena's personal conflict was evident throughout her interviews and in observations of data meetings and PLCs. Although discussion around students often began with a concentration on student growth, the meetings frequently turned to a focus on district or campus benchmarks and how to move students into a higher level of competency based on STAAR measures. Teachers at Ellis also indicated that once they came to a certain point in the school year, literacy development, cross-curricular inquiry-base skills, and culturally responsive practices [through *Project Success*] were overshadowed by the pressure of STAAR testing.

A shift under the pressure of state assessment and accountability often reflects a belief that accountability ratings are more important than students, which steers principals away from issues of social justice and cultural responsiveness (Karpinski & Lugg;

McGhee & Nelson, 2005; Nelson, 2002; Weems, 2013). Lena conveyed the awareness that when instruction is test-centered and "doesn't allow kids time to just be kids" they're solely represented by a test score. As she put it, "to me, you're not worth more than that, that's what that says." A test-centered educational structure generates deficits in student outcomes.

As shown in Theoharis' (2009) case study, schools that are deemed as failing based on state testing scores causes "…the teachers and principal [to] lose more and more control over the operations of the school" (p. 106). Lena admitted that the burden of state assessments and accountability were "definitely in my way of how I want to run things, I'm afraid to take a risk…it's a big risk, are they going to fire you? If you get IR (improvement required), does that make you a bad principal?' Lena elaborated on the incessant anxiety surrounding state accountability:

> There's a constant inner turmoil of what I think is right and what doesn't really fit in with the system. Even watering down the curriculum, we're guilty of not teaching science and social studies the way we should even though I know all the research on comprehension shows it's [dependent on] vocabulary and background knowledge.

State and federal assessment and accountability create an overarching barrier to autonomy and advancement of culturally responsive agendas for principals. Although barriers are not a component of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework, they were included to stress the obstacles Lena faced in her pursuit for student equity and inclusion. The aforementioned barriers to change exist not only within the school community but are also reflective of outside impediments.

195

Summary

This chapter's intent was to identify culturally responsive beliefs and actions of a school leader and analyze the potential connections to opportunity gaps for Latinx students. Through remote interviews, remote observations, and collection of archival data, I examined relationships and identified prevalent themes within the research. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) theoretical framework (*see Figure 6)* guided the qualitative case study and was utilized for initial coding of themes as they related to four domains: (a) critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors; (b) develops culturally responsive teachers; (c) promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment; and (d) engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts. Following the organization by domains, the themes were then further analyzed and organized in relation to the research questions. The final analysis was arranged by the following nine themes: (a) inclusivity and equity; (b) critical self-reflection (critical consciousness); (c) continuous learning; (d) importance of community voice and relationships; (e) building capacity; (f) leading by example; (g) challenging the status quo; (h) providing professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy; and (i) engaging in data-driven instructional decision making. One additional theme emerged: facing barriers to culturally responsive school leadership. The literature acknowledged the identified themes as relevant components to culturally responsive school leadership. In Chapter V, key findings related to deeper analysis of the themes are discussed. Additionally, I explore recommendations for leadership preparation, practice, policy, and future research.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the relationship between (a) beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and (b) opportunity gaps for Latinx students in a predominantly Latinx school. This chapter includes a discussion of findings as they relate to the literature on beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leaders and the connection to opportunity gaps for Latinx students. Khalifa et al.'s (2016) theoretical framework for Culturally Responsive School Leadership guided this study; thus, this chapter discusses the findings in relation to the components of this framework, along with components of the framework that were not evidenced in the findings, and considerations associated with barriers to culturally responsive school leadership. I conclude the chapter with recommendations for leadership preparation, educational practice and policy, and future research.

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

What connections exist between the beliefs and actions of a culturally responsive school leader and opportunity gaps for Latinx students attending a predominantly Latinx school?

Secondary questions were as follows:

1. What are the principal's beliefs regarding culturally responsive school leadership?

2. What actions does the principal take as a culturally responsive school leader?

3. How are the principal's beliefs and actions reflected in opportunity gaps for Latinx students at the school?

According to the findings, the beliefs and actions of the CRSL in this study and

their connection to opportunity gaps for Latinx students is multi-tiered and encompassed nine themes: (a) inclusivity and equity; (b) critical self-reflection (critical consciousness); (c) continuous learning; (d) importance of community voice and relationships; (e) building capacity; (f) leading by example; (g) challenging the status quo; (h) providing professional development focused on culturally responsive pedagogy; and (i) engaging in data-driven instructional decision making. The additional theme of *barriers to culturally responsive school leadership* emerged through analysis of the data. Although some themes were solely identified as either a belief or an action, the majority of the themes were interrelated and highly dependent on one another. All the identified themes contributed in some manner to addressing opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

Summary of the Findings

While each identified theme contributed to aspects of Lena's culturally responsive school leadership, the combination of the nine characteristics of a CRSL were involved in addressing opportunity gaps for Latinx students. These findings highlight the notion that effective culturally responsive school leadership is a continuously developing practice that changes with the needs of the students and community.

Findings Related to Culturally Responsive Beliefs of a School Leader

Educators' decision-making processes and a school's climate are foundationally dependent on the core beliefs of the school leader (Andrews, 2007; Auerbach, 2009; Hollowell, 209; Vergara, 2017). Lena understood the influence and impact that her ideals held in relation to her faculty, students, and school community. The themes categorized under Lena's beliefs were as follows: inclusivity and equity, critical self-reflection,

continuous learning, and importance of community voice and relationships.

The literature highlights beliefs centered on inclusivity and equity as vital components of prosperous culturally responsive school leadership (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2018, Khalifa, et al., 2016; McKenzie, et al., 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Riester et al, 2002; Theoharis, 2009). Lena's beliefs regarding the significance of inclusivity and equity were evident through conversations with the study participants of Ellis community. She emphasized the importance of learner-centered education focused on student and community needs. Several teachers acknowledged Lena's passionate views on creating a campus-wide inclusive environment in which everyone felt safe and represented. Lena stressed the importance of student voice in decision-making processes and of developing a curriculum that was accessible and representative of the students and the community. Additionally, Lena and other faculty members recognized that beliefs regarding inclusivity and equity should carry over into hiring practices to increase equitable representation among the Ellis staff.

Critical self-reflection is emphasized in the literature as a tool to develop critical consciousness and self-awareness (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Nelson & Guerra, 2007; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009). Data from the interviews with Lena and the Ellis faculty showed that the value of critical self-reflection was another belief related to Lena's leadership practices. For Lena, the practice of continuous self-examination helped her to develop an acute awareness of the community she served and how to appropriately address their needs. She understood that being purposefully intentional with the practice of self-reflection assisted her in growing as a CRSL. The faculty at Ellis were highly cognizant of Lena's self-reflective practices, and several

faculty members voiced how Lena's belief attributed to their own reflective practices and professional growth.

Another finding related to Lena's beliefs was her commitment to the process of continuous learning. The literature stresses continuous learning as an integral part of personal growth and development for school leaders (Galloway & Ihimaru, 2017; Jappinen & Ciussi, 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Lena's belief and commitment to continuous learning was documented by her staff as an integral part of Lena's willingness to expand her knowledge, change practices when necessary, and ultimately meet the needs of the students at Ellis. Lena discussed the idea that knowledge is a continuum within which people work to examine their own strengths and weaknesses, with the goal of continuous improvement. She believed that continuous learning encompassed being knowledgeable of current socio-political issues, keeping up with current literature, being open to change, and taking responsibility for her mistakes.

The final findings related to Lena's beliefs were the vital components of community voice and of building relationships. The literature validates the significance of community contributions and building relationships to development of culturally responsive school environments (Khalifa, et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Theoharis, 2009; Valenzuela, 1999). Lena stressed the view that parents' and students' voices are the foundation of the community and that, ultimately, it is our duty to meet their needs. She utilized parent surveys, community family nights, and principal "coffee chats" as forums for community members to express their points of view. Lena developed classes for parents based on parent feedback and their desired areas of learning. Her aspirations to build community extended to her faculty and staff. She

understood that recognizing teacher voices can impact community relationships. Her belief in empowering all voices was acknowledged by teachers as her ensuring that stakeholders are seen and heard. In addition to parent feedback through campus surveys, two out of the three parent participants indicated that Lena and the faculty at Ellis made them feel welcome and involved in their student's education. Even with the added challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and Lena's maternity leave, the Ellis faculty praised her efforts to strengthen community relationships. Lena expressed the necessity of keeping in constant communication with parents and assuring that everyone was informed throughout the transition to virtual instruction.

Findings Related to Culturally Responsive Actions of a School Leader

Lena demonstrated a clear understanding of how her actions were reflective of her core beliefs. The themes categorized under Lena's actions were the following: challenging the status quo, building capacity, leading by example, providing professional development focused on culturally responsive practices, and engaging in data-driven instructional decision making.

Several studies have pointed to the act of challenging the status quo as integral to advancing social justice and equity (DeMatthews et al., 2020; Kelley, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Newcomer & Cowin, 2018; Shields, 2004; Shields & Hesbol, 2020; Theoharis, 2007; Weems, 2013). Lena questioned the overall implementation of the dual-language program as a "one size fits all" model. She restructured the RtI process and challenged the exclusion model of STAAR testing implemented due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Several participating faculty members agreed that Lena was not a "status quo person" and that she pushed back and spoke up when she felt like something was not in the best

interest of the students. Her actions reflected the aim of putting student needs first and opposing systems and practices that were not beneficial.

Another theme related to the actions of a CRSL is building capacity. Lena valued educators' professional growth and supported collaborative practices among her staff. The literature focused on building capacity illustrates how guidance toward a collective goal through empowerment of the school community develops culturally responsive practices (DuFour et al., 2008; Hara & Schwen, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016). Lena felt it was important for professional learning to focus on foundational skills that were applicable across disciplines rather than expecting teachers to become experts of a myriad of competences. Her emphasis on building the capacity of her faculty and staff demonstrated how she trusted and respected them. Lena wanted the Ellis community to grow in their practices of shared leadership through reciprocal relationships guided by empowerment and support.

An additional finding was the action of leading by example. Previous studies established that school leaders are tasked with cultivating cultural competence among faculty and staff (Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa, 2011; Kiemele, 2009; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Reihl, 2000). Faculty members expressed that Lena was consistently visible on campus and explicit about her expectations for the campus community. Sarah, the instructional coach, valued Lena's guidance in the process of leading PLCs. Lena expressed the importance of modeling and coaching toward building teacher efficacy. Data from observations showed instances when Lena modeled inclusive language, articulated high expectations, and reframed exclusionary language. Lena's practice of leading by example helped to guide the vision for the Ellis community.

Another finding categorized under actions of a CRSL was providing professional development focused on culturally responsive practices. Studies have shown that professional development is a substantial component of culturally responsive school leadership (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Bishop, 2016; Bustamante et al., 2009; Hollowell, 2019; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Kelley, 2012, Khalifa, 2018, Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2003; Vergara, 2017). Lena and the faculty at Ellis took part in *Project Success,* which focused on language and literacy development through a multi-tiered instructional model for English learners. The partnership promoted culturally responsive and equitable educational systems through teachers' reflective practices. The faculty at Ellis participated in professional development focused on understanding cultural differences, utilizing culturally responsive texts in the classroom, and implementing evidenced-based instructional routines for language and literacy development. Additionally, professional development opportunities emphasized building language-rich classrooms utilizing sentence stems, word walls, and other scaffolds to aid in student success. Lena ensured her plans for professional development consistently aligned with her vision of inclusivity and equity on campus.

The final finding related to actions of a CRSL was engaging in data-driven instructional decision-making. Student data meetings were conducted after major district assessments, at least once a month. Research has shown that meaningful data disaggregation is a powerful tool for developing educational programming to appropriately meet the needs of all students (Hollowell, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2016; Peterson, 2014; Salend & Duhaney, 2005). Under Lena's leadership, data meetings centered on student growth. As observed in this study, she guided teachers to identify

student strengths and build on those strengths to help students master other skills. Data disaggregation assisted Lena and Ellis faculty in examining instructional practices, creating action plans based on individualized student needs, and making data-informed instructional changes.

Findings related to CRSL barriers. In addition to Khalifa et al.'s CRSL framework (2016) this study drew from Theoharis' (2007; 2009) research centered around leadership for social justice and equity in identifying barriers to CRSL. Like the barriers the social justice principals in Theoharis' (2009) study faced, this study's findings indicated that Lena also encountered barriers to implementation of culturally responsive leadership practices. However, as evidenced in this study's findings, these barriers did not always prevent Lena from taking action and making needed changes for student success.

Barriers were organized into three subcategories: (a) school-level barriers; (b) district-level barriers, (c) and state-level barriers. At the school level, teachers' negative beliefs about students' knowledge and abilities presented obstacles to educational development and student growth (Gay, 2013; Nelson & Guerra, 2014; Peterson, 2014). During this study, there were instances in which participants emphasized other educators' opposition to culturally responsive practices, which presented challenges to achieving an inclusive school environment. The research emphasizes that educators from diverse backgrounds who demonstrate values of inclusivity and equity are instrumental to student success (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Kelly, 2012; Khalifa et al., 2016; Milner, 2010; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2009). Lena recognized deficit beliefs among her faculty, such as generalization of students' academic abilities. She also noted pushback during

discussions related to equitable hiring practices and building a staff more reflective of the

student body at Ellis.

The two most salient district-level barriers involved district-wide mandates

indicative of "one-size fits all" academic programs and a lack of communication between

district-level personnel and the school community. District personnel required a specific

method of implementation for the dual-language program and neglected to deliver

information sessions for parents. Regarding the implementation of the dual-language

program at Ellis, Lena encountered obstructive practices that were not tailored to meet

student and community needs.

Overall, state-level barriers were characteristic of an educational system bound by

state- and federally-mandated assessment and accountability processes (Furman &

Gruenewald, 2004; Khalifa, 2018; Theoharis, 2009). Lena indicated that the pressure of

state assessments gave the perception that she and her students were being evaluated

based solely on data from STAAR testing. There was a constant internal battle between

the focus on state testing and an advocacy for early literacy and effective dual-language

programming. As STAAR testing drew closer, teachers at Ellis indicated that literacy

development, culturally responsive practices, and inquiry-based skills were often

replaced with test practice and preparation.

Findings Related to Opportunity Gaps for Latinx Students

For this research, opportunity gaps were defined as gaps in academic achievement

and disproportionate representation in discipline referrals and special programs for Latinx

students. STAAR data was excluded from the study due to documented biases and

perpetuation of opportunity gaps relative to high-stakes testing for Latinx students (Bach,

2020; Hursh, 2005; Hursh, 2007; Knoester & Au, 2017). Additionally, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, STAAR testing was suspended for the 2019-2020 school year and was not administered to all students for 2020-2021 school year. As a substitute for STAAR data, archival records related to literacy screeners and TELPAS data were reviewed. Examination of archival record data, which included multiple literacy screeners, demonstrated an absence of consistent measures to identify students' academic growth. Although not included in the original plan of the research, TELPAS measures appeared to indicate progress in second language (L2/English) proficiency. However, overall findings related to Lena's beliefs, actions, and connections to academic achievement for Latinx students were generally inconclusive.

Historically, research has demonstrated a disproportionate representation of Latinx students in special programs (i.e., RtI, special education, gifted and talented) (Artiles et al., 2010; Borland, 1996; Fletcher & Navarette, 2003; Ford, 2014; Guiberson, 2009; Morgan et al., 2018; Sapon-Shevin, 1996; Sullivan, 2011; Theoharis, 2009; Valencia, 2015; Wright et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2014). Throughout the interviews with Lena and the faculty at Ellis, there was a continued emphasis on putting students first and ensuring their academic needs were met. The practice of purposeful data disaggregation and the creation of alternative methods for determining students' instructional needs, pointed to a focus on inclusivity and equity for students at Ellis. Lena utilized quantitative assessment data along with instructional observations to create a more descriptive and comprehensive picture of student needs. Examination of comparative data on special programs at Ellis between the years of 2015-2016 and 2020-2021 reflected a decrease in the number of Latinx students receiving special education services and an

increase in the number of Latinx students receiving GT services. Overall, findings related to enrollment in special programs at Ellis suggested movement toward a more balanced representation of enrolled Latinx students. However, due to hybrid instructional and educational practices, it is possible that data for special programs for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research has documented higher numbers of disciplinary actions for Latinx students in comparison to their White peers (Blake, et al, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). Findings of this study highlight changes from historically exclusionary practices to inclusionary and restorative systems at Ellis. Lena and the faculty participants discussed the importance of clear expectations, open communication, and student growth from a social-emotional lens. Through implementation of PBIS and a focus on SEL and restorative practices, the number of documented ISS placements for Latinx students decreased from the 2016-2017 school year to the 2018-2019 school year. Discipline data for the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years were not included in this study due to inconsistency caused by hybrid instruction and COVID-19 restrictions.

<u>Discussion</u>

Culturally responsive school leadership strives to determine how school leaders can successfully serve students who have been historically marginalized in schools and society (Khalifa, 2018). Identifying potential candidates for this study proved challenging, as their appeared to be a small population of school leaders in Texas who personify all aspects of a culturally responsive school leader. An initial public search was utilized to identify potential participants who graduated from a social-justice focused educational leadership program at a public university in Texas. Subsequently, the list was

then narrowed to participants who were currently serving as campus principals. Unfortunately, the search produced a limited list of graduates serving in leadership positions; further, for many who did serve leadership positions, they were employed at campuses with student populations that did not meet the criteria for the study. Therefore, utilizing the Delphi technique, Lena was nominated by experts in the field of cultural responsiveness and who had worked alongside her in a research capacity. Following her nomination and other participant selection, the COVID-19 pandemic altered the possibilities of research-related site visits, in-person instructional observations, and on-site examination of the campus environment. The lack of in-person interaction and campus visits prior to selecting the principal presented multiple barriers to fully capturing Lena's beliefs and actions as they relate to culturally responsive school leadership.

The Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (Khalifa et al., 2016) is categorized in four domains: (a) Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors; (b) Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers; (c) Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment; and (d) Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts. The framework is further delineated by more detailed research-based actions and beliefs of CRSLs organized under each domain (see Appendix G).

As outlined in the previous chapter, Lena embodied numerous facets of the framework, such as practicing critical self-reflection, engaging in continuous learning, and, at times, openly challenging the status quo. During the pandemic, Lena's beliefs regarding hybrid learning and STAAR testing were often challenged by district personnel. She felt the school district was placing more value on STAAR than students' access to in-person instruction. Lena admonished the highly test-focused "factory school"

model and made strides to turn the focus back to early literacy skills. She made curriculum changes to the dual-language program to ensure development of bilingualism and biliteracy. Overall, Lena demonstrated the courage to create educational opportunities for all students at the risk of creating complications for herself as a school leader (Nelson, Guerra, & Henry, 2011).

She contributed to the development of culturally responsive teachers through focused professional development, modeling culturally responsive practices, and leading by example. Lena's trust in her colleagues empowered faculty and set a precedent of leadership development within the Ellis community. She modeled the use of inclusive language and reframed exclusionary language to set expectations for student data discussions. Her recognition of teacher voice on community relationships manifested in change from an administration-driven, micromanaged culture to a more positive, community-centered campus.

Lena advanced the culture of inclusivity and equity on her campus through challenging exclusionary teaching practices, building relationships, and the purposefully utilizing data to track academic and disciplinary trends. Her focus on equity and inclusion highlighted her grasp of the importance of hiring diverse faculty (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Khalifa et al., 2016; Reeves, 2007; Theoharis, 2007; Theoharis, 2009). Lena was aware of the needs of the student population at Ellis and, although they had increased their hiring of Latinx faculty, she talked openly about the lack of African-American teachers and the importance of changing that dynamic.

Finally, she generated positive and meaningful relationships with the school community, connected directly with students, and developed positive understandings of

families in the Ellis community. Lena utilized principal "coffee chats" and parent surveys to garner an understanding of the Ellis community and how to address the needs of stakeholders. The high value she placed on community feedback was a key facet in guiding her decision-making process.

CRSL Framework Components Not Observed or with Minimal Evidence

Although Lena demonstrated multiple qualities of a CRSL (Khalifa et al., 2016), there were minimal findings related to some components, as well as no evidence of other components of the framework (see Appendix G). Khalifa et al. (2016) specified equity audits as a key element of CRSL within Domain I (*Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors).* Even though Lena discussed the importance of equity audits to critically examine data, it was not a regular practice within the district nor on her campus. Khalifa et al. (2016) noted that, under Domain II (*Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers)*, part of creating a culturally responsive environment is the development of a CRSL team tasked with discovering new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Although committees were developed for various purposes at Ellis, such as literacy, parent involvement, and the fall carnival, there was no evidence of a team designed to specifically address CRSL. Within the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016) under Domain II *(Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers)*, Hopson's (2001) and Kea, Campbell-Whatley, and Bratton's (2003) research emphasized the need for teachers to utilize culturally responsive assessment tools. Interviews and observations showed evidence only for utilizing standardized testing data and campus/district benchmarks to assess students. Additionally, within the analysis of student data, meetings tended to begin with dialogue targeted on overall student growth, but they ultimately gravitated

toward STAAR competencies and district/campus benchmarks.

Domain IV of the CRSL Framework (Khalifa, et al., 2016) (*Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts*) details how culturally responsive school leaders are charged with finding interrelated spaces between the school and community (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012). Even though Lena and the faculty at Ellis hosted literacy nights, delivered parent classes, and recruited parent volunteers for field trips and other school events, there was no evidence of multi-level parent/community involvement. Within the CRSL framework (Khalifa et al., 2016) both Domain II (*Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers)* and Domain III (*Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)* detail how culturally responsive school leadership requires systematic, purposeful data disaggregation to identify academic and disciplinary disparities and cultural gaps for students (Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2007). Although Lena provided evidence of purposeful data disaggregation toward creating more equitable systems, gathering overall data (special programs and discipline) for the study proved to be a challenge. The barrier to data collection raised the question of data accessibility and whether the data is utilized by leaders and educators at the school. Additionally, research has documented the importance of the school leader to serve as an advocate and social activist for community-based causes in the school and neighborhood (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2006). Lena's role as an advocate and social activist within the community was not observed nor was there evidence that this role was in place.

As previously noted, Lena modeled inclusive language during discussions around data and student achievement. However, there was no direct observation of Lena

explaining to teachers why she utilized the term "our students" as an example of inclusionary language nor her discussing the importance of utilizing inclusionary language. Within Domain III (*Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment*) and Domain IV (*Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts*), the CRSL framework (Khalifa, et al., 2016) maintains that direct conversations relative to the use of inclusive language furthers the development of inclusionary environments and positive beliefs about students (Davis, 2002; Flessa, 2009; Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Multiple teachers at Ellis acknowledged the importance of authentic, diverse literature for students. They noted that Lena advocated for student access to reading materials reflective of the student population. But due to COVID restrictions and the lack of in-person instructional observations, I was unable to determine whether Lena worked with teachers to integrate diverse texts into instruction or whether Lena considered this key component when observing classroom teachers. Rosa discussed expectations for professional development and how teachers would often observe implementation by teacher colleagues following training sessions. Again, COVID-19 restrictions presented obstacles to determining if ongoing coaching for mastery of new instructional methods was a consistent practice at Ellis.

Culturally Responsive School Leader in "Becoming"

Culturally responsive school leadership involves a complex system of beliefs and the implementation of equitable and inclusive actions. Lena's mission to create a community of acceptance and equity as evident in her beliefs and observations of her subsequent actions. However, as previously stated, there were various components of the CRSL Framework (Khalifa et al., 2016) that were either not observed or not supported by

substantial evidence of practice. Although Lena often displayed the courage to challenge the status quo and lead the charge for change on her campus, there were documented instances of her self-doubt in acting as an agent of change. Lena discussed the fear and anxiety surrounding state assessments and how standardized test scores were deemed the ultimate barometer of a principal's competency as a school leader. McGhee and Nelson's (2005) study described the experiences of Texas principals being removed from their positions in high-need schools solely based on standardized test scores. These critical cases exemplified the negative effects that "high-stakes accountability systems have on school leaders" (McGhee & Nelson, 2005, p. 370). Lena admitted to being apprehensive of taking risks and challenging a test-centered educational system for fear of losing her job.

Conversely, subsequent research indicates that fully-developed culturally responsive school leaders discover avenues to impart inclusive and equitable practices regardless of the involved risk (Theoharis, 2007; 2009). Their actions are tied to a moral imperative and based in deep-rooted principles that propel them to make decisions for equity as the only choice, even when personal risk was involved (Nelson et al., 2011). Lena's beliefs and actions showed both her focus on equity and inclusivity and her internal struggle in her words of "doing what's right and…doing what looks good on paper," and this conflict placed her at a developmental crossroads. It is possible that even more movement toward equity and changes in opportunity gaps for Latinx students could have occurred if not for the missing components of the CRSL framework (Khalifa, et al., 2016).

Researchers and early philosophers, such as Plato, Heraclitus, and Nietzche,

conceived the term "becoming" as the perpetual state of change, growth, and impermanence (Bolton, 1975). Kaag (2018) interpreted Nietzche's process of self-discovery or becoming as "an undoing of the self-knowledge you assume you already have," and "the ongoing process of losing yourself and finding yourself" (p. 221). Lena's practices of continuous learning and self-reflection afforded her a deeper understanding of herself and contributed to an ongoing process of "becoming" a culturally responsive school leader. Overall, documentation of Lena's journey to address inequities and opportunity gaps for Latinx students suggested Lena was evolving, or in the process of "becoming" a culturally responsive school leader and beginning to make a difference on her campus.

Recommendations

The findings of this study point to some recommendations for leadership preparation, leadership practice and policy, and future research. These recommendations are focused on the development of culturally responsive school leadership practices that lead to success for all students.

Recommendations for Leadership Preparation

Historically, leadership preparation programs are missing key components necessary to address the needs of diverse student populations (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Barakat et al., 2019; Lightfoot, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich; Rusch, 2004; Theoharis, 2009; Touré, 2008). As in this research study, leadership preparation programs with a social justice or equity lens lend themselves to school leaders' successful implementation of culturally responsive practices. Recommendations for effective leadership preparation programs include the following components: (a) diverse cohort and faculty members

(Barakat, et al., 2019; McKenzie & Schuerich, 2004; Touré, 2008); (b) a selective

admission processes that values self-aware candidates with a commitment to equity

(McKenzie et al., 2008);(c) equity-oriented components embedded in program courses

and specific attention to issues of social justice and CRSL (McKenzie et al., 2008; Touré,

2008); (d) explicit goals to increase administrator knowledge and skills related to

achievement for all students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004); (e) strategies to counteract

barriers that hinder student achievement (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Miller and

Martin, 2015); and (f) internships and rigorous field experiences (Barakat et al., 2019;

Black & Murtadha, 2008; Gordon et al., 2016).

Recommendations for Leadership Practice

Recommendations for leadership practice are based in Khalifa et al.'s (2016)

CRSL Framework. The four domains encompass practices such as cultivating equitable

and inclusive school environments, building cultural knowledge and awareness, and

fostering success for all students. Effective culturally responsive school leaders take part

in critical self-examination and reflection. Personal and professional growth of culturally

responsive school leaders is dependent on building an awareness of inner biases and

assumptions about the students they serve (Khalifa et al., 2016; Sensoy & DiAngelo,

2009). Critical self-reflection leads to an awareness of how leadership practices are

reflective of a belief system (Nelson & Guerra, 2007). Ultimately, school leaders who

consistently practice critical self-reflection are more apt to lead for change and advocate

for traditionally marginalized students (McKenzie et al., 2008).

According to several research studies, school and community relationships are a

key facet to student success (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Kelley, 2012;

Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Walker, 2001). Building relationships between the school and community contributes to a positive understanding of students, families, and the community being served (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). School leaders need to continuously examine their relationships with the school community and seek avenues for higher-level community involvement and community-school partnerships.

Leadership practices should include the development and delivery of professional development for educators aimed at culturally responsive practices. School leaders are charged with building the cultural competency of teachers through focused professional development aimed at addressing issues of equity and implementing instructional strategies designed for culturally and linguistically diverse students (Baker-Martinez, 2012; Bishop, 2016; Bustamante, et al., 2009; Karpinski & Lugg, 2006; Khalifa et al., 2016; Vergara, 2017). As with critical self- reflection, professional development and school curriculum need to be continuously adjusted to appropriately address student needs.

Finally, leadership practice should entail focused data disaggregation aimed at identifying and addressing disproportionate gaps in academic achievement and discipline practices. Data analysis is utilized to make data-informed educational decisions and to design curriculum to address specific needs of the student community (Hallowell, 2019; Peterson, 2014; Salend & Duhaney, 2005). Focused data disaggregation should also include conducting equity audits to ensure data-driven culturally responsive school leadership is being implemented (Skrla et al., 2004). If data gleaned from these processes is utilized effectively, it has the potential to affect school "equity, inclusivity, curriculum standards, and climate" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1297).

Recommendations for Policy

The glossary of education reform defines "assessment as a wide variety of methods or tools utilized for evaluation, measurement, and documentation of learning progress, academic readiness, skill acquisition, and educational needs of students" (The Glossary of Education Reform, n.d.). Although variation in assessment methods is encouraged, in reality, schools, principals, students are primarily evaluated solely based on high-stakes, standardized testing (McGhee & Nelson, 2005; Nelson, 2002; Weems, 2013). School ratings, principal job placement, and student advancement are often dependent upon scores from a test that utilizes a single myopic lens (Au, 2008; Bybee, 2020; Tomlinson, 2000). The inequities in this form of evaluation are well-documented in research, highlighting the obstructive nature of state assessment, STAAR, the perpetuation of academic gaps for RCELD students (Bach, 2020; Hursh, 2005; Hursh, 2005; Kornhaber, 2004; Oakes et al., 2004). Because such assessments are biased, standardized testing cannot be the only measure used to understand student achievement, and various forms of assessments and growth measures should be consulted to develop a comprehensive picture of student progress and achievement, as well as a principal's success. In addition, without the barrier of STAAR testing as the basis for determining a principal's success, principals may be more inclined to take risks and challenge the status quo without the fear of losing their jobs and their standing within their communities.

According to Khalifa et al.'s CRSL Framework (2016), equity audits are a vital facet to leading culturally responsive schools. Equity audits contribute to the knowledge of program impediments, opportunities, access for all students (Brown & Williams, 2019; Skrla, McKenzie, & Schuerich, 2009). Local school board policy should include

provisions for regular equity audits to occur on campuses. Subsequently, leaders need to use audit data to create paths toward equitable and inclusive school environments and practices.

Federal and economic policies have resulted in a "negative racial school climate and inadequate responsiveness to students' trauma," thus historically contributing to negative outcomes for students of color (Blitz, Yull, & Clauhs, 2020, p. 95). A multi-dimensional approach for assessment of student needs that is reflective of their unique ethnic histories allows for understanding through the "lens of resilience and emergence from oppression" (Blitz, Anderson, Saastamoinen, 2016, p. 539). The findings of this study findings warrant a recommendation for developing a policy on implementation of culturally responsive and trauma-informed educator and leadership training.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings of this study, further research is recommended in the following areas:

- A multiple case study based off this current research study, conducted with a larger sample size across different regions in the United States, analyzing CRSL practices through Khalifa et al.'s framework (2016).
- A comparative study in which multiple school leaders who have completed social justice/culturally responsive leadership programs explore their levels of preparedness (perceived and/or documented) to lead schools with diverse student populations.
- Studies identifying how culturally responsive school leadership practices are implemented with students at the secondary level.

- Narrative inquiry studies on school principals analyzing their levels of cultural responsiveness based on implementation of actions and behaviors within the domains of Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework.

- An exploration of student success comparing outcomes between schools/districts who regularly conduct equity audits and utilize the outcomes to support CRSL practices and schools/districts where equity audits are not a regular practice.

- A comparative quantitative study to identify numbers of culturally responsive school leaders across the United States.

- An extension of this current study (post COVID) to allow for in-person observations of campus meetings and instruction, along with the campus environment and climate. Additionally, further research should incorporate parent/community and student focus groups for a more comprehensive view of school and community relationships.

<u>Conclusion</u>

Research indicates that oppressive institutions are created by those in power (Esposito & Swain, 2009), and they are largely focused and measured through a standards-based testing lens that does not view multiple identities and cultural backgrounds as an asset. I was not aware of educational inequities until I began working in the public education system. As a White female, the school system operates as if I embody the student population; yet, I am not representative of the majority of students in Texas. My desire to examine how the oppressive nature of education impacts Latinx students, was historically based in my experiences as a teacher and school administrator in schools whose student population was largely Latinx. Added to my experience, I now

have a school-age child who is both Latinx and White, a child with multiple identities. I

recognize that he will be served in the same inequitable, biased education system. I pose

the question: *If the student population and their needs are changing, why does the*

education system seem to remain stagnant? Enrolling my son in a system that continues

to perpetuate oppression through inequitable social structures is something I not only

feared for him, but also for the continuously underserved Latinx community. In my

research, these inequities became evident throughout and documented in opportunity and

achievement gaps for Latinx students.

Culturally responsive school leadership is a defined set of behaviors and actions

that guide a principal in leading an equitable and inclusive campus (Khalifa, 2018;

Khalifa, et al., 2016). The findings of this study illustrate the complex web of beliefs,

actions, and barriers toward enacting culturally responsive practices. The additional

inequities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic brought many current inequities of

our education system to the surface, and this study was conducted in a time recently

termed the "dual pandemic," as both the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism were

realities for students (Jones, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified "racially

based structural inequalities," such as documented disproportionality of Latinx students

enrolled in special programs, discipline referrals, and academic achievement (Jones, 2021

p. 427). Research studies have attributed the COVID-19 pandemic to exposing how

political-economic forces influenced entrenched social, economic, and educational

inequities (Gravlee, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Finally, until we address systemic

inequities through continued research, develop effective leadership training, and make

policy changes for Latinx students in our education system, opportunity gaps will persist.

Throughout the study, Lena discussed the juxtaposition involved in decision-making based on cultural responsiveness versus the outside pressure to maintain the status quo. She raised issues reflective of an oppressive education system and her internal struggle to counter these oppressive structures through making equity-based, inclusive decisions. Lena not only faced challenges to the pre-existing barriers for implementation of culturally responsive leadership practices, but additional obstructions amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic. In light of these magnified inequalities, Lena managed to demonstrate numerous beliefs and actions reflective of a critically conscious, self-aware school leader who is intent on making changes in her community. Upon further reflection, Lena gives me hope that my son will be educated on campuses lead by principals with similar perspectives who have a desire to cultivate an inclusive, equitable school community and advocate for historically marginalized students.

APPENDIX SECTION

Appendix A: Interview Guide for the School Principal (1)

1. Biographical information:

    Tell me about yourself:

    a) Personal history

    b) Educational background

    c) Experience as a teacher

    d) Experience as a leader

2. Describe the community this school serves.

3. Do you speak Spanish?

4. How do you define cultural responsiveness?

5. What is your philosophy or belief system surrounding cultural responsiveness?

6. What led you on your journey to becoming a culturally responsive school leader?

7. How did your master's program develop you as a leader for social justice? As a culturally responsive leader?

8. How does your vision for the school incorporate your philosophy and definition of cultural responsiveness?

9. Talk about the barriers you have faced in attempting to lead from a stance of cultural responsiveness?

10. Tell me about the factors that have promoted your vision of culturally responsive school leadership?

11. Describe your personal meaning of student success.

Appendix B: Interview Guide for the School Principal (2)

1. As a CRSL, what is your process for engaging in critical self-reflection?

2. In what ways do the curriculum, instructional and behavioral practices on your campus promote inclusivity and cultural responsiveness for Latinx students?

3. How do you navigate the area of student discipline through a lens of cultural responsiveness? (with teachers, students, campus discipline procedures, district leaders)

4. With strict regimented processes for student referrals to special programs, how do you address the disproportionate representations of Latinx students in special education and gifted and talented?

5. What opportunities have you made available to teachers to further their development toward becoming culturally responsive in the classroom?

6. How are teachers trained to specifically address second language acquisition?

7. How do you develop meaningful, positive relationships with your Latinx members of your school community?

8. Talk to me about how your personal beliefs and motivations related to CRSL complement your educational preparation and result in actions?

9. Is there anything I did not ask that you feel would be pertinent to this research and my understanding of your role as a CR school leader?

Appendix C: Interview Guide for Assistant Principals

1. Biographical information:

   Tell me about yourself:

   a) Personal history

   b) Educational background

   c) Experience as a teacher

   d) Experience as a leader

   e) Experience working with your current principal

2. How do you define cultural responsiveness?

3. Do you speak Spanish?

4. What role does self-reflection play in your position as a school leader? Where did you learn this process?

5. How would you describe your principal's relationship with you, the teachers, students, and the Latinx community? Please provide examples.

6. In what ways does your principal's vision for the school reflect the needs of your Latinx population and the surrounding community? Please explain.

7. What opportunities has the principal made available for you to develop your capacity for cultural responsiveness in relation to Latinx students?

8. Describe an instance where your principal challenged the status quo based on the needs of the students and community. (You may give more than one example)

9. In what ways do the curriculum, instructional and behavioral practices on your campus promote inclusivity and cultural responsiveness? How is second language acquisition specifically addressed for Latinx students?

10. Talk to me about your meaning of student success.

11. Is there anything I did not ask that you feel would be pertinent to this research?

Appendix D: Interview Guide for Teachers

1. Biographical information:

   Tell me about yourself:

        a. Personal history

        b. Experience as a teacher

        c. Experience with the leader for this study

2. What is your definition of cultural responsiveness?

3. Do you speak Spanish?

4. In what ways does your principal model cultural responsiveness and demonstrate the value of diversity?

5. Describe the systems in place that specifically address promotion of culturally responsive classrooms?

6. What opportunities has the principal made available to you to further your knowledge and development of culturally responsive practices?

7. How are teachers trained to specifically address second language acquisition for Latinx students?

8. How do you define student success?

9. Talk to me about how the principal's vision of cultural responsiveness for the school matches your vision?

10. Tell me how the school curriculum and instructional practices reflect the Latinx students and families in the community you serve? Give me a few examples.

11. Is there anything I did not ask that you feel would be pertinent to this research and my understanding of your principal's role as a culturally responsive school leader?

Appendix E: Interview Guide for Parents

1. Biographical information: Tell me about yourself.

    a. Personal history with the school

    b. Child/children who attend or have attended this school

2. Tell me about a positive experience you or your child has had with the school principal.

3. Tell me about a negative experience you or your child has had with the school principal.

4. Describe the relationship the campus leader has with the surrounding Latinx community. Please give examples.

5. Describe the relationship the principal has with your child/children. Please give examples.

6. What are your expectations for your child's educational experience at this school? How do you define success for your child? How does the school faculty specifically address second language acquisition for your child?

7. What can you tell me about the leader's role in promoting Latinx community involvement in the school? Please give examples.

8. What opportunities do you have as a parent and community member to promote and/or build a relationship between your community and the school?

9. Talk to me about the ways in which the principal makes you feel welcome and included at the school and in your child's/children's education.
Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the principal, the school, or your child's educational experience?

Appendix F: Observation/Artifact Protocol

Participant Pseudonym_____ Date: _____

Time: _____ Site Pseudonym_____

Meeting Observed or Artifact Analyzed: _____

Coding: Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors (CS-R); Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers (DCRT); Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment (CRSE); Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts (ESP) (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Observation/Artifact	Reflection

Appendix G: Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (2016)

Muhammad Khalifa, University of Minnesota; Mark Anthony Gooden, University of Texas; James Earl Davis, Temple University

Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors (CS-R)	Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers (DCRT)
• **Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts** (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • **Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection** (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006) • **Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL** (Skrla et al., 2004) • **Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools** (Ishimaru, 2013; Smyth, 2006) • **Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school** (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) • **Using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice** (Skrla et al., 2004) • **Leading with courage** (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham et al.,1998) • **Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion?** (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010)	• **Developing teacher capacities for cultural responsive pedagogy** (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003) • **Collaborative walkthroughs** (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • **Creating culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers** (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003) • **Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services** (Skrla et al., 2004) • **Creating a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive** (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • **Engaging/reforming the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive** (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) • **Modeling culturally responsive teaching** (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • **Using culturally responsive assessment tools for students** (Hopson, 2001; Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Bratton, 2003)

Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment (CRSE)	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts (ESP)
• **Accepting indigenized, local identities** (Khalifa, 2010) • **Building relationships; reducing anxiety among students** (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • **Modeling CRSL for staff in building interactions** (Khalifa, 2011; Tillman, 2005) • **Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices** (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Webb- Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007) • **If need be, challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors** (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • **Acknowledges, values, and uses Indigenous cultural and social capital of students** (Khalifa, 2010; 2012) • **Uses student voice** (Antrop-González, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • **Using school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends** (Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2007)	• **Developing meaningful, positive relationships with community** (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001) • **Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and other roles** (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006) • **Finding overlapping spaces for school and community** (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012) • **Serving as advocate and social activist for community- based causes in both the school and neighborhood community** (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012) • **Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families** (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • **Resists deficit images of students and families** (Davis, 2003; Flessa, 2009) • **Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information** (Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • **Connecting directly with students** (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)

Appendix H: Recruitment Email

To:
From: Joyce Chapa
BCC:
Subject: Research Participation Invitation: Culturally Responsive School Leadership

This email message is an approved request for participation in research that has been approved or declared exempt by the Texas State Institutional Review Board (IRB). This doctoral dissertation research study seeks to examine Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) and connections to opportunity gaps for Latinx students. My initial criteria is a principal who has been in a leadership position for at least 3 years, at a Title I school, with a minimum of 50% of the student population identifying as Latinx, and someone who has earned their leadership credentials through Texas State University, as it is deemed to be a program focused on social justice.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, there would be two interviews with you of about 45 minutes to an hour each. I would also interview your assistant principals, three teachers, and three parents one time for 30 to 45 minutes each. Interviews will be conducted electronically via, Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, or Zoom. All interviews and data collected will be confidential and secure. Your identity will be protected, and a pseudonym (codename) will be provided. This codename will be used throughout the study. Your real name will not appear on any research document. The identity of participants will be known only to the researcher.

Additionally, I would examine data and need provision of artifacts (AIMS data, discipline data, SPED, Tier I and Tier II, GT indicators, calendars of events, newsletters etc.).

If you are interested in finding out more about research participation, please email me. Thank you for your time.

This project 7465 was approved by the Texas State IRB on December 8, 2020.Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert (512-245-8351 - dgobert@txstate.edu) and to Sean Rubino, Research Integrity & Compliance (512-245-2314 - srubino@txstate.edu).

Questions about this research should be addressed to Joyce Chapa, (210) 355-7838, jab202@txstate.edu

Appendix I: Verbal Consent

Study Title: Walking the "Talk"?: The Connections Between Culturally

Responsive School Leader's Beliefs and Actions and Opportunity Gaps for Latinx

Students

Principal Investigator: Joyce Chapa   Co-Investigator/Faculty Advisor: Dr.

Patricia Guerra

Sponsor: N/A

My name is Joyce Chapa and I am a graduate student at Texas State University. I am

doing this study because I would like to discover if a culturally responsive school leader's

beliefs and actions influence opportunity gaps for Latinx students. I am asking you to

take part because you are part of community for a school with an identified culturally

responsive school leader. I'm going to tell you a little bit about the study so you can

decide if you want to be in it or not.

If you want to take part in this study, I will interview you regarding your beliefs and

understanding about cultural responsiveness and how it applies to your school

community and school leader. The interview will be audio or video recorded through

ZOOM and transcribed for further analysis. You do not have to answer any questions you

don't want to and your participation is voluntary and may be withdrawn at any time.

If you don't want to be in the study or you can start and then if you want to stop being in

the study at some point, that's okay. You are free to change your mind about participation

at any time during this process.

Do you have any questions for me?

Do you understand what was said to you?

Do you want to be in the study?

Appendix J: Participant Consent Form to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research project seeking to discover connections between the practices of CRSLs (culturally responsive school leaders) and the potential decrease in opportunity gaps for Latinx students.

All interviews will be scheduled and take place at a designated time and location. The interviews will be conducted in person at the participant's place of employment. However, due to current health and safety precautions in relation to COVID-19, in-person interviews may be replaced with Skype, Facetime, or Zoom, and will need to be conducted in a place that is free from noise and interruption with a strong internet connection.

All interviews will be audio/video-recorded with your permission. If you elect to not be video or audio recorded during the interview process, you will be ineligible for participation. All data collected through interviews, observations, artifacts, and numerical data is confidential. You will be assigned a pseudonym to protect your identity. Election to participate in this study is voluntary and can be revoked at any time.

The research is being conducted by Joyce Chapa a doctoral student at Texas State University jab202@txstate.edu (210) 355-7838.

RISKS: There is minimal risk of participation in this study. If at any time you are uncomfortable with any of the questions that are asked you can choose not to answer that specific question and still be part of the study. There are not any known or anticipated psychological or physiological risks associated with participation in this study.

BENEFITS: There are not any direct benefits of this study.

COMPENSATION: There is not any compensation that is provided for your participation.

CONFIDENTIALITY/PRIVACY: Your identity will be protected through the use of a pseudonym throughout the study. Your real name will not appear on any research document. All written materials including notes and consent forms will be stored in a locked file cabinet or a password-protected computer in the researcher's home. Your response(s) will only appear with your pseudonym when presented in the final presentation of the research. All materials will be kept for five years and then destroyed.

RIGHT TO WITHDRAW/STOP PARTICIPATION IN STUDY: Your participation is voluntary; you may want withdrawal participation at any time without penalty.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS: A summary of the research findings will be provided at the conclusion of the study if requested. You can ask for a summary of the research findings by Joyce Chapa at jab202@txstate.edu

VOLUNTARY CONSENT: By signing this consent form you acknowledge you have read it. You also understand that participation in this study is voluntary and participation can be stopped at any time.

This project 7465 was approved by the Texas State IRB on December 8, 2020. Pertinent questions or concerns about the research, research participants' rights, and research-related injuries to participants should be directed to the IRB chair, IRB chair, Dr. Denise Gobert (512-245-8351 - dgobert@txstate.edu) and to Sean Rubino, Research Integrity & Compliance (512-245-2314 - srubino@txstate.edu).

Questions about this research should be addressed to Joyce Chapa, (210) 355-7838,

jab202@txstate.edu

_____   _____

Participant's Signature   Date

_____   _____

Researcher's Signature   Date

Appendix K: TELPAS Composite Scores by Year

TELPAS 2016	
Ellis Elementary	
Total Students	350
No Rating	0.57%
Beginning	17.43%
Intermediate	26.29%
Advanced	36.29%
Advanced High	19.43%

TELPAS 2017	
Ellis Elementary	
Total Students	317
No Rating	1.58%
Beginning	16.72%
Intermediate	26.18%
Advanced	38.17%
Advanced High	17.35%

TELPAS 2018	
Ellis Elementary	
Total Students	302
No Rating	0.33%
Beginning	3.97%
Intermediate	31.13%
Advanced	39.07%
Advanced High	25.50%

TELPAS 2019	
Ellis Elementary	
Total Students	302
No Rating	0.33%
Beginning	9.60%
Intermediate	41.72%
Advanced	33.11%
Advanced High	15.23%

TELPAS 2020	
Ellis Elementary	
Total Students	302
No Rating	0.33%
Beginning	9.60%
Intermediate	41.72%
Advanced	33.11%
Advanced High	15.23%

Appendix L: TELPAS Scores by Grade

Kinder						
2016	**Total Students**	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
		No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
	52	1.92%	73.08%	5.77%	17.31%	1.92%
2017	**Total Students**	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
		No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
	50	4%	56%	16%	14%	10%
2018	**Total Students**	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
		No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
	39	0%	17.95%	33.33%	28.21%	20.51%
2019	**Total Students**	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
		No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
	41	0%	17.07%	41.46%	14.63%	26.83%
2020	**Total Students**	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
		No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
	229	1.31%	44.54%	25.76%	15.72%	12.66%

First Grade					
Total Students	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
63	0%	19.05%	46.03%	26.98%	7.94%
Total Students	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
47	4.26%	31.91%	38.30%	17.02%	8.51%
Total Students	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
50	0%	6%	42%	32%	20%
Total Students	**TELPAS Composite Rating**				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
49	0%	18.37%	38.78%	22.45%	20.41%

Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
48	0%	6.25%	43.75%	35.42%	14.58%
Second Grade					
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
58	1.72%	13.79%	36.21%	27.59%	20.69%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
62	0%	9.68%	32.26%	41.94%	16.13%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
47	2.13%	2.13%	51.06%	34.04%	10.64%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
54	0%	9.26%	59.26%	25.93%	5.56%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
49	2.04%	4.08%	55.10%	32.65%	6.12%

Third Grade					
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
65	0%	1.54%	30.77%	52.31%	15.38%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
55	0%	5.45%	29.09%	32.73%	32.73%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
61	0%	0%	24.59%	50.82%	24.59%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High

	39	0%	5.13%	35.90%	46.15%	12.82%

Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
59	0%	6.78%	45.76%	37.29%	10.17%

Fourth Grade					
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
51	0%	3.92%	21.57%	49.02%	25.49%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
63	0%	1.59%	19.05%	69.84%	9.52%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
46	0%	2.17%	26.09%	52.17%	19.57%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
63	0%	6.35%	42.86%	42.86%	7.94%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
35	0%	2.86%	22.86%	62.86%	11.43%

Fifth Grade					
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
61	0%	0%	13.11%	42.62%	44.26%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
40	2.50%	0%	22.50%	45%	30%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
59	0%	0%	15.25%	33.90%	50.85%

Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
56	1.79%	3.57%	30.36%	42.86%	21.43%
Total Students	TELPAS Composite Rating				
	No Rating	Beginning	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced High
57	1.75%	3.51%	35.09%	42.11%	17.54%

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