A HEURISTIC MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT
PRACTICES OF
SIX URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

A DISSERTATION
IN
EDUCATION

Presented to the Faculty of the University of Missouri-Kansas City in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

by

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2019
A HEURISTIC MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY OF CULTURALLY RELEVANT PRACTICES OF SIX URBAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this heuristic multiple-case study was to explore the practices of six urban elementary school principals regarding the use of culturally relevant practices in their schools. The central question was: How do urban elementary principals perceive their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction? Data sources included a qualitative questionnaire, in-depth semi-structured interviews, observations, and documents. Within case and cross analysis were incorporated with coding the data for patterns and meaning. The most prevent theme was Leadership for Curriculum and Instruction that consisted of monitoring student data and supporting standards. Findings suggested that most of the co-researchers were unprepared to assist teachers with culturally relevant practices. None of them considered equity leadership as a way to provide equity and justice within districts and schools. What they valued about elements of culturally relevant practices, especially the richness of students’ backgrounds and celebratory multicultural education as starting points for implementation, was compromised by preparation coupled with Midway School District’s (pseudonym) reform agenda of assessment, standards and monitoring data that derailed support for culturally relevant practices.
The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the College of Education, have examined a dissertation titled, “A Heuristic Multiple-Case Study of Culturally Relevant Practices of Six Urban Elementary School Principals” presented by Angela G. Wright, candidate for the Doctor of Education, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am blessed and appreciative for being surrounded by great family and friends who believed in me and encouraged me while working towards my goals. I acknowledge my family, the Clarks, Wrights and Brockmans, for supporting my educational endeavors through words of encouragement or just by reiterating that I can do all things with the help and support of God. I acknowledge my husband Leo Wright Jr. for holding our family together and being there when I could not be. For pushing me on and not letting me off the hook when I felt like giving up on this process. I acknowledge my best friend Wanda McNeal, who has been in my life for over 30 years and my greatest cheerleader in whatever goals I pursue.

I acknowledge my chair, Dr. Loyce Caruthers, for supporting me, understanding me as a person, and working with me making sure I reach my goals. Words cannot say how much I appreciate her and the dedication that she has for students. I am grateful for the support of Doctors Smith and Mitchell who gave me great insight and advice regarding this research. Thank you, Dr. Jacob for demonstrating what effective school leaders must do to support the success of all children.

I also acknowledge my education community, my Ed. D cohort, colleagues, teachers, support staff, and students who always had my back while being on this journey. I could not have done this without any of you. I am forever blessed!
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved Mother Zorita Marie Clark, who planted the seed very early in my life of the importance of education and how it will lead me to a better life. Raising eleven children by herself, she would not allow or accept deficit thinking or mediocrity. Putting God first before anything else, she modeled high expectation, the love of learning, and the importance of family. Resting well in heaven, I know mom is proud to see so many of her children and grandchildren live out her dream, graduating from college and graduate school. This legacy will pass on to other generations.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my children and grandchildren, who often observed me working hard as a school leader and a student during this process. I say to you all, keep God first and live out your dreams. Remember education is the key to a better life, and you deserve to have the life that God promised you. Learn all that you can, develop a plan, and execute it.
PREFACE

MY PERSONAL BELIEF AND EXPERIENCES

From my perspective, education is the key to a better life. That is what I was told and taught while being raised by a single parent of eleven children. My mother grounded this philosophy in my mind and often spoke of the importance of being educated. She did not want her children to be marginalized by deficit perspectives or thinking of others in the schools we attended nor in the communities where we lived. She planted the seed early by keeping her children in the library and exposing them to experiences that were different from what was taking place in my neighborhood. The value I place on education stems from these beliefs that were taught to me at an early age. I was encouraged to do well in school, graduate, go to college, and be the best that I can be, which led me to the completion of my master’s degree and now the doctorate. The strong values that my mother taught her children contributed to the reasons why I became a teacher and a school leader (principal).

Throughout this dissertation, I used the terms school leader and principal interchangeably.

Qualitative inquiry offers opportunities to learn about the experiences of others, and at the same time examines the experiences that one has and helps shape what is discovered (Patton, 2015). As a qualitative researcher, I acknowledge the freedom to share who I am by sharing my truths. My personal experiences as a student, teacher, and principal led me to the choice to conduct my research on how principals’ preparation and daily practices of cultural responsiveness help increase teacher effectiveness and student achievement.

“Another Clark” is what I was called during my schooling in elementary, middle, and high school. Being the youngest of eleven children, my brothers and sisters ahead of me
set the tone with strong academics and positive behaviors. They did exactly what my mother expected. She rejected complacency and refused to accept mediocrity from her children.

People often said that the Clark children were known to be smart and great to have in classrooms. At the start of the school year, I would hear teachers say how happy they were to have me because they knew I was smart like the other Clark children; however, I could also hear the negative conversations they had about other students. Their perceptions and expectations of me were high based on assumptions they had of my siblings. I was never viewed as an individual learner, but was viewed as another Clark. During that time, I found their beliefs and assumptions to be favorable, but I could not tell what instructional strategies my teachers used to support my needs or the needs of other students who looked like me. Shelton (2009) confirmed that teachers and principals are the two most significant school-based factors in improving student achievement; therefore their practices matter more than anything.

Growing up in urban schools, I always had male principals in elementary, middle, and high school. I would often see them in the cafeteria, hallways during transition, and frequently in their offices. During that time students only engaged with the school leader when they were sent to the office, usually for something negative; however, my middle school principal was different. He would visit classrooms and get involved with the conversations that took place. He would ask students to share what they were thinking and learning. This principal would push his teachers to build relationships with students and often made students feel accepted, supported, and appreciated. The experience I had with my middle school principal led me to believe that all principals functioned that way.
This same middle school principal gave me my first teaching position. After he hired me as a teacher, I pledged to treat my students like they were my own and help them be the best that they could be. Guided by my personal values, I later became a school leader who aimed to make a difference with students and staff. As a school principal, I enjoy visiting classrooms to see what teachers are doing and how I can better support them. I find value in engaging with students about what they are learning and discussing with them the goals they have set for themselves. When teachers struggle, I rely on research-based resources to help support the development of teachers. Many of the things I learned came from the principals during my early years of teaching.

The lack of effective practices in my personal experiences as a student and teacher compelled me to this journey of finding out what make school leaders effective in urban schools. What culturally responsive practices do they use in their day-to-day interactions with teachers and students? What strategies do principals use to discuss student work with teachers? How do their leadership qualities help them identify the need to support instruction in their schools? These questions, centered around the focus of my research, are outlined in Chapter 1 of this study. I aimed to find out what culturally relevant practices school leaders use to support their level of effectiveness in urban schools. How can I use what I learn to add to the literature, to my own professional growth, and to the growth of other urban principals?
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership matters more than anything when it comes to the job of a school leader (principal) and requires a layering of leadership approaches and practices that school leaders use in their day-to-day interactions with students and staff. My desire to become a school leader was influenced by an effective leader who placed an emphasis on effective instruction, teaching and learning, and culture responsiveness. According to Gay (2002),

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It’s based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

Cultural responsiveness was part of daily work of my mentor, my second principal, as she worked with students, staff, parents, and community members. She was adamant about knowing the diverse background of all students. While teaching in her building, every teacher had to conduct home visits with students and parents before students arrived on the first day of school. Home visits allowed me to know beforehand my students’ strengths, needs, who they were, and how I could better support them based on their cultural and family backgrounds. Parents often displayed a sense of joy and appreciation for my awareness of their familial and community needs. As a teacher, I felt better prepared and more connected with my students.

This achievement demonstrated the connectedness my principal desired the staff to have as she developed a community of learners. Her leadership abilities help rid our minds of deficit thinking and approaches that often marginalize students of color. She was
passionate about knowledge and learning. She taught the importance of bringing students’
cultures into the classroom by connecting their real-life experiences to the curriculum in
hopes of making learning more engaging and meaningful. Doing this allowed me to be more
reflective and purposeful in planning for my students. Implementing these practices helped
my students feel more appreciated and accepted, which increased student interest and
engagement as well as student achievement. My principal’s beliefs that all students are
capable of academic success was apparent. Her leadership practices connected with the
2000, 2001, 2009, 2014a) have often written about in their publications.

Ladson-Billings (1995) developed the term culturally relevant pedagogy after
working with teachers who were identified as effective teachers based on parents’ and
principal’s perceptions of them and how they taught their children. In this work Ladson-
Billings (1995) interviewed, observed, and videotaped eight teachers and analyzed the data
she collected from them. Culturally relevant pedagogy was confirmed by the practices that
teachers implemented, their level of care about the implications of their work, and how their
work impacted students’ lives. Teachers in this study believed in doing what was right for
all students. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), the teachers’ practices aligned with their
personal beliefs and values. Because I witnessed some of these practices used by my school
leader, it motivated me to explore leadership effectiveness through the lens of cultural
responsiveness. A further discussion of this topic is explored in the literature review, which
supports the need for school leaders to focus on being culturally responsive as they lead
urban schools today.
School leaders have a significant impact on the performance of students (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013; Hess & Kelly, 2007; Shelton, 2009). A growing body of evidence from research confirms that teachers and principals are the two most significant factors in improving student achievement in schools (Marzano, Walters, & McNulty, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Levine, 2005; Shelton, 2009). Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) asserted school principals can have a profoundly deep impact on instruction and student learning. Hess and Kelly (2007) believed that “school principals have a huge responsibility and are known as the front-line managers, the small business executives, the team leaders charged with leading their faculty to new levels of effectiveness” (p. 2). Additionally, they reported, “School leaders are the key to school improvement and are expected to demonstrate bottom-line results; therefore, it is believed that principals’ knowledge and skills matter more than ever” (p. 4). Leithwood et.al concurred that accountability measures have become the focus of school reform.

Accountability measures guided by state and federal mandates have helped shift the role of school leaders. As far back as the 1990s, there has been an increased focus on effective leadership; during that time the U.S. Department of Education made improving educator effectiveness an important criterion. In order for states to receive grants and funds under the federal Race to the Top program, they had to re-examine their leadership and teaching practices (Shelton, 2009). Currently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016) requires states to submit accountability plans to the U.S. Department of Education outlining goals that set expectations for closing gaps in achievement and graduation rates for all groups of students (Glatthorn, Jailall, & Jailall, 2016). The Wallace Foundation (2013) revealed that ten years ago, school leadership was
not present in most major school reform agendas. Leadership was viewed as important for turning around failing schools, but much doubt existed about how to proceed. Orphanos and Orr (2013) pointed out that in recent years many new U.S. federal policies have often been aimed at improving low-performing schools, but the attention focused more on the quality and effectiveness of leadership preparation. Moreover, it is believed that “more than ever, states need to develop comprehensive strategies to ensure today’s leaders have the skills, knowledge, and support required to guide the transformation of schools and raise achievement of all students” (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 4). Lankford, Loeb, and Wychoff (2002) wrote:

Achievement gaps continue to be a concern in urban schools; additionally, at the federal level in every state. Policy makers are struggling to address the low academic achievement of many K-12 students and the gaps in achievement among income and racial-ethnic groups of students. (p. 37)

Using data from the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) (2015) identified how African American, Latinx, and other minoritized students performed in comparison to White students. Students are not born into minoritized status; they become minoritized in particular situations and environments where there are over-representations of Whiteness (Harper & Davis, 2012). Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) further contended that minoritized youth have been marginalized “legally and discursively” (p. 1275), often due to categories of race, ethnicity, religion, language, or citizenship. The data disclosed that White students in fourth grade scored 51% proficient in math; Latinx students scored 26%; and Black students scored 19% (NCES). In Reading, White students scored 46% proficient, Latinx students scored 21%, and Black students 18% (NCES). Although the achievement gap is a major concern, Evans
(2005) pointed to other factors that may contribute to students’ learning needs. He contended that a substantial number of Black and Latinx students begin kindergarten well behind other students in academic readiness, and because they start behind, the gap worsens as children move through the grades. Irvine (2003) and Lee (2004) believed that factors such as culture mismatch contributes to the achievement gap.

Gregory, Skiba, and Noguera (2010) attributed exclusion from the classroom as a primary disciplinary factor that impacts student learning. When students are pulled out of class for disciplinary concerns, they miss instructional time and engagement in academic learning; this situation has an effect on the performance of African American, and Latinx students. Evans (2005) asserted that “high minority, low performing schools hire fewer top-quality teachers than others and have greater turnover because they can’t attract and retain better candidates” (p. 583). Lankford et al. (2002) concurred and indicated that many urban students find themselves in classes with less skilled teachers than their more privileged White peers. Even under the conditions and structures described here, Khalifa et al. (2016) acknowledged that these factors, including gender, income, sexuality, and other oppressive structures further marginalized students; and despite this marginalization, “all minoritized students also have rich histories of agency, appropriation, and resistance to oppression” (p. 1275). Haberman’s (2010) study of urban schools since 1958, identified a culture of poverty that seems to characterize urban schools that consist of a basic menu of the following acts:

- Giving information,
- Asking questions,
- Giving directions,
- Making assignments,
- Monitoring seatwork,
- Reviewing assignments,
- Giving tests,
• Reviewing tests,
• Assigning homework,
• Reviewing homework,
• Settling disputes,
• Punishing noncompliance,
• Marking papers, and
• Giving grades. (p. 82)

Further, noted Haberman, assumed to be good teaching by the parents, the community, and general public, these acts may be beneficial in some situations, but “taken together and performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts, they have become the pedagogical coin of the realm in urban schools. They constitute the pedagogy of poverty” (p. 82).

These factors highlight the significance of qualified teachers and principals and the important roles they play in the overall achievement of students in high poverty urban schools. Better prepared school leaders are critical to achieving improved instruction and increased student achievement (Shelton, 2009). Principals are key to selecting highly qualified teachers and supporting their teaching and learning through effective coaching and professional development once they are hired in urban schools.

According to Shelton (2009), preparation programs have been criticized for not adequately preparing principals for today’s complex urban school environments. School principals are asked to lead in environments marked by unprecedented responsibilities, challenges, and managerial opportunities. Hess and Kelly (2007) stated:

Many training programs be they university, state, or district-based, do not adequately prepare principals who can lead improvement in teaching and learning. Many programs often fail to respond to local needs, provide adequate follow-up support, and track graduates into the workplace to continually improve their program. (p. 5)
An array of scholars have asked whether traditional approaches to preparing and licensing principals are sufficient (Elmore, 2000; Fordham Foundation, 2003; Hess, 2003; Tucker, 2003). Young and Kochan (2004) emphasized the position of the leaders in the University Council for Education Administration regarding education preparation programs. The leaders stated:

In order to build programs that support leadership for learning, we must rethink and revise our practice in several areas: hiring practices, licensure and certification systems, and regulations such as requirements for previous teaching experience that make it impossible for interested applicants trained in other fields and disciplines to enter the profession. (p. 121)

To understand what was taught in principal preparation programs, a number of case studies that included 28 schools and state departments of education were conducted by Arthur Levine (2005), past president of Teachers College at Columbia University, which led to the development of a report related to the effectiveness of leadership preparation programs. The report “examined educational leadership programs and their capacity to educate principals and superintendents in the skills and knowledge necessary to lead today’s schools and school systems” (p. 12). A nine-point template was used to develop an open-ended survey to judge the quality of school leadership programs which consisted of purpose, curricular coherence, curricular balance, faculty composition, admissions, degrees, research, finances, and assessments. Levine surveyed schools of education deans, chairs, and directors; surveys were also conducted with faculty members, alumni, and principals who were graduates of the program. According to Levine, the results implied that “the majority of educational administration programs range from inadequate to appalling, and that school leadership programs were not successful on any of the nine criteria’s mentioned above” (p. 23). The results affirmed that the curricula were disconnected from the needs of leaders.
and their schools, admission standards to the program were low, professors were ill equipped to educate school leaders, and successful practitioners provided poor mentorship.

As I think about the courses that I took to complete the education administration program related to instructional leadership—school law, education psychology, curriculum development, research methods, historical and philosophical foundations of education, teaching and learning, child and adolescent development and school principalship—the basic nine courses that Levine (2005) mentioned, I found them useful, but did not find myself totally prepared in handling the many situations that took place with students and teachers and the everyday practices that took place in schools. Nine out of the ten respondents in the survey of principals found that schools of education programs fail to adequately prepare their graduates and teach them how to handle the realities that actually take place in schools (Levine, 2005). Results from the survey of alumni identified the gaps between what is taught in education schools and what school administrators need to do their jobs. Levine (2005) stated, “Fifty percent of the respondents said that their programs were fair to poor in preparing them to work in diverse school environments with students from multiethnic and multiracial populations” (p. 28). Hess and Kelly (2007), referencing the findings from Levine’s study, asserted, “The analysis of Levine’s study, and the increasing demands on school leaders, the question of what candidates are actually being taught in principal preparations has taken on heightened significance” (p. 3). Farkas, Johnson, and Duffett (2003), in an earlier analysis of principal preparation programs, noted, “67% of school principals reported that typical leadership programs in graduate schools of education are out of touch with the realities of what it takes to run today’s school districts” (p. 39). The results and analysis of Levine’s report and the current demands on principals, stimulated my
exploration of the question: Are school principals adequately prepared to lead effectively as culturally responsive leaders in urban schools?

**Problem Statement**

Urban elementary school principals may not be prepared to lead in ways that provide teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction for student learning and achievement in schools. Accountability has changed the ways education is viewed by the public. The epoch of high standards, a deep understanding of school and classroom practices, a sound knowledge of culturally relevant practices, and an urgency for improved student achievement requires a new breed of principals in today’s society. Such challenges require school leaders to know how to work with faculty and staff in planning and implementing effective practices that focus on the overall improvement of students learning. Bottoms and O’Neill (2001) pointed out that it requires knowing how to provide the necessary support to carry out sound school curriculum and instructional practices. Understanding that the role of principal has changed dramatically, Hale and Moorman (2003) stated, “it appears that neither organized professional development programs nor formal preparation programs based in higher education institutions have adequately prepared those holding these positions to meet the skills required for the 21st century” (p. 1).

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (Olson, 1999) estimated over two decades ago that more than 40% of principals will retire or leave the position. As it appears that schools will require new leaders, the need to prepare principals to work in urban and diverse settings is dire. Several studies have examined the effects that school principals have on student achievement (O’Neill & Bottoms, 2001; Wallace Foundation, 2008). Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2010) noted that principals indirectly affect
student achievement through the quality of teachers and staff members. They believed that leadership’s influence on student learning is second only to teacher quality among school-related factors.

The gaps in learning are clearly visible among all students in the Midway School District (pseudonym), an urban profile district with 86% of students described as economically disadvantaged (State Department of Education, 2017). The demographics of the district include 50% Latinx, 29% African American, 12% White, and 10% Other (State Department of Education, 2017). Figures 1 and 2 represent the achievement data of seventh grade students’ reading and math scores (State Department of Education, 2016). State-mandated testing requires that these students take standardized tests at the third grade; thus, seventh grade was their fifth experience with testing. The various achievement levels represent the following: Level one demonstrates limited ability, Level two basic ability, Level three effective ability, and Level four excellent ability. In math and reading, there are more White students than African American and Latinx students performing at levels three and four. However, the overall achievement levels of all seventh-grade students in both subject areas reflect less than 20% of the students performing at level three or above, which demonstrates the need for improved achievement for all students in this urban, diverse district.
Figure 1. Seventh grade Reading achievement data for Midway School District for the years 2016 and 2017.

Figure 2. Seventh grade math achievement data for Midway School District for the years 2016 and 2017.

The achievement data of Midway School District indicated the need to examine more closely effective leaderships practices through the lens of cultural responsiveness and how principals use these practices to support teacher effectiveness. Hale and Moorman (2003) stated, “Principals must serve as leaders for student learning, must know academic
content and pedagogical techniques, work with teachers to strengthen skills, collect, analyze, and use data in ways that fuel excellence” (p. 7).

In a five-year meta-analysis of leadership conducted by Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2005) involving 180 schools, 45 districts, and nine states, researchers concluded, “The total (direct and indirect) effects of leadership on student learning account for about a quarter of the total school effect” (p. 3). They also found that the impact of leadership tends to be greater in schools where the learning needs are most acute. In essence, the greater the challenge, the greater the impact of leaders’ actions on learning (Leithwood et al.). School leaders are capable of having significant positive effects on student learning and other important outcomes (Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009).

Brown, Benkovitz, Muttillo, and Urban (2011) conducted a mixed-methods study to examine how K-5 schools identified as “Schools of Excellence” during the 2004/2005 school year encouraged and sustained academic achievement and systemic equity for all students. These schools were considered distinguished because they maintained the reduction of the achievement gap between White students and students of color (less than 15%). Data were collected in two phases. Phase One used quantitative analysis to conduct an audit of students’ learning activities, examining patterns of equity and inequity. Phase Two ranked the 24 schools by percentage of achievement for students of color and divided the schools into two groups: small gaps and large gaps. Also during Phase Two, 80 semi-structured interviews were conducted at 16 sites with school leaders, teachers, and parents to identify best practices and effective strategies school leaders used to address and replace past practices grounded in racism and class discrimination (Brown et al., 2011). The findings suggested that equity needed to be honored and principals needed to support,
model, and monitor a teamwork approach with a strong sense of purpose and an assurance that all students are served well and are encouraged to perform at their highest level (Brown et al.). This study affirmed the need for culturally responsive leaders to use effective practices while addressing achievement gaps between students of color and White students.

I assert that many principals may not be adequately prepared to effectively provide leadership in high poverty and diverse urban school districts. The achievement data suggested that poor students and students of color are not performing at high levels of achievement when compared to their middle class and White counterparts in the Midway School District, the site for this study. Although gap data must be examined more closely to determine the reasons why groups of students are not performing (Evans, 2005), the reality is that these students are likely to be adversely affected by their low performance in terms of quality of life and future learning needs.

Ornstein (2010) explained how the achievement gaps have deteriorated over the last 40 years and that the achievement gaps between Asian and white students compared to Latinx and African American students remain alarmingly high. The impact of achievement gaps on students of color can contribute to many long-term unfavorable factors. These factors contribute to the risk factors that impact future academic outcomes. Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson (2007) suggested, “achievement scores at any level of schooling predict success at the next level. This holds for high school completion, college attendance, college completion and later success in the labor market” (p. 168). A lack of knowledge in literacy is another unfavorable factor. Being illiterate limits a person’s social benefits and their overall outcome in life (Robinson-Pant, 2005). People who are illiterate experience limited opportunities in comparison to those who are literate. The Condition of Education Report
(2017) revealed the employment rate was higher for people with higher levels of educational attainment than for those with lower levels of educational attainment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). The economic outcome shows young adults with college degrees had median earnings of $50,000 in comparison to those without a college degree, who had a median earning of $25,000 and less. According to Robinson-Pant (2005), “A better educated mother has fewer and better educated children. She is more productive at home and in the workplace. She raises a healthier family with improved hygiene and nutritional practices” (p. 2).

Another unfavorable factor is the dropout rate. The 2015 National Center for Education Statistics supported by the Digest of Education Statistics disclosed the dropout rate of high school students among the ages of 16 to 24-year-olds: 5% White youth, 7% Black youth, and 9% Latinx. These data confirm African American, Latinx, and Native Americans fail to graduate and leave school with less than two years to complete their high school education (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006).

Students who drop out and do not complete high school face economic and social challenges throughout their lifetimes. The impact on these students in comparison to their peers who graduate can include unfavorable factors that Bridgeland, Dilulio and Morison (2006) identified as unemployed, living in poverty, receiving public assistance, in prison, on death row, unhealthy, divorced, and single parents with children who drop out from high schools. Today, the percentage of jobs requiring a high school diploma is less than 36%, and of that percentage, those without a high school diploma will qualify for just 12% of U.S. jobs...jobs that may not likely provide a livable wage (State Department of Education, 2016).
Bridgeland, Diluilio, and Morison (2006) conducted focus group interviews and individual interviews to gain an understanding of why ethnically diverse students, ages 16 to 24, dropped out of high school, focusing on their lives and circumstances. In Philadelphia and Baltimore, four focus groups were conducted with 467 students followed by face-to-face interviews. Students came from areas that demonstrated a large dropout rate; 67% came from large cities, 14% suburban, and 17% rural areas. The ethnicity of the participants was 36% White, 35% Black, 27% Latinx, with 52% men and 48% women. Over half of the participants came from single-parent homes living below the poverty rate. Seventy-one percent of the participants stated that only one parent graduated from high school. Although the data from the interviews suggested many reasons students dropped out of school, 35% of the participants said that failing in school was a major factor, 45% stated that they started high school poorly prepared, and 32% were required to repeat a grade before dropping out because they were unable to meet the academic requirements. Participants perceived that low expectations, poor relationships with adults, lack of resources for struggling students, and poor leadership were other contributing factors (Bridgeland et al., 2006).

I have argued that most principals are not prepared to lead in the complex settings of diverse urban schools. Many principals may not know how to implement culturally responsive practices to help change the outcome of their schools in most diverse and urban school districts. “To make an impact on student learning, school leaders (principals) need to focus on the core business of schools: teaching and learning” (Bush & Glover, 2003, p. 378). Hale and Moorman (2003) stated, “Principals must serve as leaders for student learning, must know academic content and pedagogical techniques, work with teachers to strengthen skills, collect, analyze, and use data in ways that fuel excellence” (p. 7). Understanding data
means more than what Gutierrez (2008) described as “gap-gazing” (p. 357). She viewed gap-gazing as problematic; there is danger in maintaining an achievement-gap focus. Gutierrez (2008) emphasized:

These dangers include offering little more than a static picture of inequities, supporting deficit thinking, and negative narratives about students of color and working-class students, perpetuating the myth that the problem is a technical one, and promoting a narrow definition of learning and equity. (p. 358)

She further added that researchers have begun to question the usefulness of large-scale assessments of student achievement that identify disparities between middle-class White students and Black, Latinx, First Nations, English language learners, or working-class students. In essence, Gutierrez suggested that there is a need to stop paying a lot of attention to the achievement gap, which causes deficit thinking in teaching and learning environments for Blacks and other students of color.

Understanding what is needed for effective leadership and instruction in high-need schools is critical to teacher effectiveness, student learning, and achievement. A cross-case analysis was conducted by Klar and Brewer (2013) to examine the ways principals in three high-need public middle schools in the southeast United States achieved core leadership practices in the context of demands of mandated school reforms to support student learning. Regarding the level of poverty and other school factors, multiple linear regression was used to identify schools that were performing better than expected. The principals selected from the 226 schools had been at their schools for three or more years and demonstrated steady increases in academic achievement and school climate. Documents, observations, and interviews were collected from principals, staff, and parents in the three schools. The principals used the following practices as school-wide reform efforts and instruments for
leading change within their schools: setting directions, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program (Leithwood et al., 2010). The findings indicated that the leadership practices and beliefs that influenced student achievement in these schools were adapted to every area of the school (Klar & Brewer, 2013). This study affirmed that each principal built a shared vision, created high-performance expectations, and communicated the direction of the school.

With the high demands of accountability and student achievement, school principals are expected to do more than ever before. Schools of the 21st century require a new kind of principal who fulfills a variety of roles such as instructional leader, community leader, and visionary leader (Hale & Moorman, 2003). There is a need for all students to receive a quality education. Further, it is critical that all students, especially urban students in high poverty schools, be given the opportunity to perform at high levels of achievement with principals who know what it takes to lead effectively, be culturally responsive, and demonstrate how to help students become college and career ready. I explored the daily practices of urban elementary school principals and their lived experiences through the lens of cultural responsiveness, and how these leaders support teacher effectiveness for student learning and achievement.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this heuristic case study was to explore the lived experiences and practices of six urban elementary principals and how they include culturally responsive practices in their daily practices to support teacher effectiveness for student learning and achievement. In qualitative research, Patton (2015) described lived experiences as “a phenomenology that aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our
everyday experiences” (p. 115). He added that phenomenology has “a focus on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (p. 115). The units of analyses are lived leadership experiences and culturally responsive practices among urban elementary school principals. Throughout this study, I use the term culturally relevant practices when examining the extent to which principals are responsive to the needs of students. The desire is to examine their daily practices as they work with certified teachers. A case study is described by Yin (2009) as “an empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 18). A case study supported a close, in-depth understanding of urban school principals and the use of culturally relevant practices in their daily practices for supporting teacher effectiveness and student learning.

I was able to produce a unique and better understanding of their leadership practices while developing new learning about real-world behavior and its meaning. I engaged in conversations with principals about their opinions and insights regarding culturally responsive leadership practices, instruction and coaching strategies, and how they use them to support teacher development and student learning. The use of case study, as a method, addressed questions related to what happen and why as well as how the phenomena happened in natural settings (Yin, 2009).

According to Moustakas (1985), “Heuristic inquiry searches for the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experiences. The tradition requires a subjective process of reflecting, exploring, shifting, and elucidating the nature of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 40). As a research method, heuristic inquiry supports the exploration
and interpretation of experience, which uses the self of the researcher. Moustakas’ basic philosophy was that “in every learner, in every person, there are creative sources of energy and meaning that are often tacit, hidden, or denied” (p. xx). Heuristic inquiry allowed me to use my experience as an elementary school principal to relate to the practices and stories of co-researchers as I interviewed, observed, and studied related documents. In heuristic inquiry, participants are viewed as co-researchers; they transcend the idea of being subjects (Moustakas, 1994). Together with the researcher, as Patton (2015) explained, they are joint contributors and investigators in the research project. Hence, my experiences were used to explore and understand those of others through self-awareness and self-knowledge. The research questions were designed for co-researchers to share unique experiences of effective leadership practices they use daily in supporting teacher effectiveness for student achievement and learning.

**Research Questions**

According to Maxwell (2013), research questions in qualitative research are what you specifically want to learn and understand (p. 73). “They serve to help you to focus the study and give you guidance for how to conduct it” (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To understand the daily leadership practices of urban elementary school principals, this study aimed to address the following central question and sub-questions: How do urban elementary principals perceive their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction?

a. What culturally relevant instructional practices do they observe in their daily interactions with teachers?

b. What ways are professional development needs of teachers identified?
c. What professional development opportunities do teachers experience?

d. What support do urban elementary principals need to cultivate and sustain culturally relevant instruction within their schools?

I have provided a discussion of the problem, purpose, and research questions of the study. The theoretical framework begins to pull together all aspects of the aforementioned elements and lays the foundation knowledge for the study. “It is a visual or written product that explains either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied, key factors, concepts, or variables and the presumed relationships among them” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18). The discussion of the theoretical framework follows.

**Theoretical Framework**

According to Maxwell (2013), the theoretical framework (conceptual framework) is referred to as the actual ideas and beliefs the researcher holds about the phenomenon studied as well as prior and existing theory, pilot studies, and thought experiments. Given the meaning of Maxwell’s explanation of theoretical framework, my experiences and personal assumptions I bring to the study are just as important as the existing and prior theory and research. Thus, I begin the discussion of the theoretical framework by describing professional and personal experiences assumptions that shaped my inquiry. Many of these were implied in the preface of the proposal.

I knew that I wanted to become an educator at an early age. The experiences with my favorite elementary school teacher and my middle school principal (who offered me my first teaching job) made a lasting impression on my leadership practices. Their actions and behaviors emphasized high expectations, the use of culturally responsive practices, and effective teaching and learning, which led me to believe that all principals in schools
operated that way. My middle school principal would visit classrooms and get involved with
the conversations that took place. He was interested in students sharing what they were
learning and thinking. His daily practices created a positive culture that valued instruction
and learning. The assumptions I took from this experience led me to believe that all
principals modeled these positive leadership behaviors.

My experiences working in urban schools as a teacher, vice principal, and principal
demonstrated to me that all principals may not have the training and preparation that are
needed to lead in urban schools with a highly diverse population of students of color,
 extreme poverty rates, and low levels of academic achievement. I assume that principals
may not be aware of how their day-to-day practices and interactions with students and staff
about instruction, culturally relevant practices, coaching, and teacher development can be
contributing factors to the overall achievement of the school. I also believe that principals
need to be prepared and know how to lead in ways that expand the collective effectiveness
of the school so that all staff members work together to improve student learning.

Spencer (2009) stated:

Effective leaders are learners and know how to support and challenge the learning of
others. They understand learning and teaching and focus on the improvement of
student outcomes and the building of learning communities with high expectations
for students and teachers. They also facilitate opportunities for staff to learn from
one another and model continual learning by viewing all experiences as learning
experiences. (p. 23)

I believe that when principals’ day-to-day practices demonstrate a collective effectiveness,
these practices can help close the achievement gaps that exist among students of color. Some
of these gaps are explained by Milner (2012) as opportunity gaps in educational practice.
Milner (2012) stated, “Focusing on opportunity allows researchers to examine the causes of
disparities that exist between and among students in schools” (p. 693.) He identified “five interrelated tenets” to explain educational practices that relate to opportunity: color blindness, cultural conflicts, meritocracy, deficit mindsets, and low expectations, and context-neutral mindsets and practices. These opportunity gaps are significant factors to equality and social justice for all students and further explained in the literature review. I support the assumptions of Grogan and Andrews (2002), who state there is a need for principals to examine their daily practices with a strong focus on student achievement, school improvement, and accountability challenges.

In this section, I provide a brief discussion of the selected topics that comprise the theoretical framework of the study, which are also the focus of Chapter 2: The Literature Review. These topics connect with my leadership experiences as a teacher, vice principal, and elementary school principal. The first topic is instructional leadership. Through instructional leadership practices, effective urban principals collaborate with all stakeholders, taking an active role in student learning, involving staff in school decisions, with a high focus on improving teaching and learning. According to Elmore (2000) and Heck (1990), effective principals systematically monitor student progress and are highly visible in their supervisory roles. As democratic leaders, they understand and model ethical responsibility and standards that promote equitable experiences for both students and staff.

The second topic to be discussed is the emerging role of the 21st century principal. My leadership experiences provided 21st century leadership opportunities for me to observe and collaborate with principals who demonstrated certain qualities of effective leadership practices. Third, my experiences stressed the importance of helping teachers implement culturally responsive pedagogy that integrate the experiences students bring to school with
them. Culturally competent leaders embrace and promulgate diversity in their daily activities and advocate and promote social justice and equity for all students. Lastly, school leadership preparation programs are also explored as a topic of the theoretical framework. In order to prepare school principals, university programs must provide sufficient field experiences and opportunities that train prospective principals not just how to lead, but how to lead effectively in diverse urban settings.

**Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership has been viewed as the primary responsibility of principals (Reitzug, West & Angel, 2008). With emphasis on state testing and higher demands and accountability, school principals and districts aim to increase the overall performance of all students. National and state expectations require leaders to ensure that all students achieve mastery of curriculum objectives, and local schools focus on implementing those requirements to the best of their ability (Catano, Stronge, & Richard, 2008). Today’s principals are viewed as the front-line leaders in their schools (Spencer, 2009); they are also considered to be coaches and mentors (Hallinger, 2005) charged with leading as instructional leaders by facilitating the improvement of teaching and learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). “The principal’s role has shifted from a focus on the principal as an ‘inspector of teacher competence’ to the principal as a ‘facilitator of teacher growth’” (Marks & Printy, 2003, p. 374). According to Hale and Moorman (2003),

> Principals must know academic content, pedagogical techniques, collect and analyze data in ways that fuel excellence. They are challenged to be able to lead instruction, shape an organization that demands and supports excellent instruction and dedicated learning by students and staff and connect the outside world and its resources to the school and its work. (p. 8)
This new role of the school principal as an instructional leader requires that principals need to have specific skills to support their daily practices. Reitzug, West and Angel (2008) conducted a phenomenological qualitative study that used grounded theory methods to focus on how principals understand the relationship between their daily work and the improvement of instruction (instructional leadership) in their schools. They selected 20 principals for their study, including 17 females and three males. Thirteen were from elementary schools, two from middle schools, four from high schools, and one from a K-8 school. Data were collected using in-depth interviews that took up to two hours for each principal. An analysis of the principals’ practices, values, and goals was performed to conceptualize how the principals saw their daily work in relation to improved instruction and increased student learning. Data analysis revealed four dominant conceptions: Four principals were classified as being dominantly relational, five principals were classified as being linear, four as organic, and seven as prophetic.

Relational instructional leadership focused on the relationship with staff and students and how these relationships supported self-efficacy, self-concept, and motivation. Linear instructional leadership focused on the alignment of the standards, curriculum, learning objectives, and assessment. This work was frequently monitored with data often being used to drive instruction. Organic instructional leadership focused on the overall school improvement as a result of teachers’ ongoing learning. Lastly, prophetic instructional leadership focused on a set of beliefs of school practices based on what is valued and what is done.

This narrative of the study concluded that all principals who were in the study exercised instructional leadership. The findings affirmed that the following practices can
support teacher effectiveness and student learning: principals’ daily practices of effective relationships, alignment of standards and assessment, and monitoring of data. These findings can provide direction for next steps for instructional leadership. The next topic of the theoretical framework elaborates on the emerging role of the 21st century principal.

**The Emerging Role of the 21st Century Principal**

Due to the diversity changes in the larger society (Maxwell, 2014; Mordechay & Orfield, 2017), there is a dire need for 21st century school principals, who lead our nation’s schools to have the skills and knowledge required to successfully interact with highly diverse students and their parents. As a 21st century leader, Green (2010) believed that today’s principals must be instructional leaders that focus on teaching and learning in developing and supporting a collaborative school culture. Moreover, Green stated that 21st-century principals must have the abilities to identify and articulate the purpose, process, and desired outcomes for all school programs, projects, and activities. Articulating desired outcomes requires visionary actions and strategic goal setting with staff, students, parents and community members in mind.

A qualitative case study was conducted with middle school principals to explore visionary leadership in action by paying attention to the strategies they implemented before school-wide reform initiatives (Brown & Anfara, 2003). Ninety-eight middle school principals were surveyed, and 44 principals were interviewed to explain their understanding of visionary leadership in action. The findings indicated that visionary leadership was related to changes in support, commitment, and ownership among teachers. Furthermore, teachers needed the time for change, conversations, courage, and opportunities to openly
explore and discuss the planned changes. Democratic leadership also played a key role in becoming an effective 21st century principals.

Aiken and Gerstl-Pepin (2009) asserted that democratic actions are also required for 21st century leadership. They conducted a narrative inquiry using a criterion sampling to select eight school principals who worked in high-poverty rural settings to understand their values and professional orientations toward democratic and ethical leadership. The principals served a combined population of 8,018 children and were diverse in age, gender, experiences, and backgrounds. A standardized open-ended interview guide was used to conduct two-hour interviews about their professional backgrounds, communities, and relationships with teachers and students. After the analysis of the interviews through coding, three themes emerged that defined democratic leadership practices: understanding ethical sensitivities and personal narrative; actions in which principals engaged to support their democratic ethical beliefs; and balancing ethical democratic responsibility and standardized accountability. Aiken and Gerstl-Pepin concluded:

Principals who engage in skills of critical reflection about what it means to commit to democratic, ethical leadership are in a better position to “ferret” through the often-chaotic details or real situations and assemble in their own minds new structures of meaning and interpretations leading to more fair and equitable actions. They concluded that principal preparation programs need to include new content to gain a deeper understanding of democratic leadership in schools. (p. 431)

The 21st century leader must also understand their role as a multicultural leader. Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) conducted a cross-case analysis study that focused on the role of urban school principals as multicultural leaders. They examined multicultural leadership practices used by three female and three male urban school principals, purposefully selected based on the highly diverse student populations of their schools and at least three years of
leadership experience. Four were elementary and two were secondary. Although they were diverse in age, gender, experience, and socioeconomic backgrounds, all participants were White.

Observations and documents provided historical and cultural context of the school community with the goal of understanding how these principals conceptualized and engaged in their roles as multicultural leaders serving a diverse school community. In-depth interviews were conducted with principals and supplemental interviews with district-level leaders to get a better understanding of how principals were receiving support. Cross-case data were collected and analyzed in four stages with ongoing discussions. Case studies were written from the in-depth interviews conducted, observations of the principals’ practices, and documents that included each school’s website, self-report data, and brochures. The findings revealed that the principals all had limited preparation in their leadership programs that prepared them to lead in diverse schools. Three of the principals demonstrated practices and a commitment to becoming multiculturally proficient in their daily practices. They demonstrated high expectations for all students, displayed evidence of multiculturalism through the curriculum, and frequently worked with parents when necessary changes took place. On the other hand, the other principals demonstrated basic multicultural practices and agreed that they still had a lot to learn to lead in diverse schools.

Khalifa, Gooden and Davis (2016) maintained that culturally competent principals need to create environments that value students and their diverse backgrounds, integrate multicultural principles that support multicultural practices, and address issues of equity, excellence, and social justice. In my experience, this challenges the 21st century leader to be
knowledgeable of culturally relevant pedagogy, especially to assist teachers in advocating for social justice.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

Culturally relevant pedagogy uses “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning more relevant to and effective for students” (Gay, 2000, p. 106). Further, Howard (2010) emphasized that “culturally relevant pedagogy is the main goal used to increase academic achievement of culturally diverse students” (p. 196). Researchers such as Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009), Gay (2000, 2010), Howard (2010), and Shade, Kelly, and Oberg (1997) concurred that culturally relevant pedagogy is an effective way of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students.

Culturally relevant pedagogy is an effective teaching practice that can be used not only with African American students, but with other students of color, White students, and students of poverty that transverse all racial and ethnic groups. According to Ladson-Billings (1994), “culturally relevant pedagogy uses cultural referents to impact knowledge, skills, and attitudes while empowering students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically” (p. 578). She believed that teachers who implement culturally relevant pedagogy practices develop students academically by exhibiting certain characteristics. Howard (2002) conducted a qualitative case study in five elementary and secondary urban settings located in the northwest and Midwest areas of the United States. Howard examined 17 female and 13 male African American students’ perceptions of their teachers’ pedagogical practices, and to find out to what degree they believed their academic and social needs were influenced by the teachers’ pedagogy. The students’ grades ranged from second to eighth grades. During this
two-year study, data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classrooms observations that occurred two or three times a week. Findings revealed critical insights into the dynamics of learning for African American students. One characteristic that students were able to articulate was the importance of teachers grounding their pedagogy within a framework that was congruent with their culture orientations. The students’ responses validated the claims of literature on culturally responsive pedagogy that suggest students’ prospects for improved academic achievement are greatly enhanced when there is greater cultural continuity (Ladson-Billings, 1994).

Although this study did not measure student achievement, the research noted that students’ level of engagement, affect and willingness to learn increased based on their teachers’ ways of teaching. The study pointed out the importance of teachers and students having family, community, and home-like relationships, and teachers becoming culturally connected with their students. This study reiterated the importance of school leaders having knowledge and understanding of culturally relevant pedagogy practices in leading urban schools with students from culturally diverse backgrounds. The final topic of the theoretical framework elaborates on school leadership preparation programs and the need for effective leadership practices being implemented in schools.

**School Leadership Preparation Programs**

As stated before, the principal, only second to the teacher, influences student learning (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015; Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, & Hopkins, 2006; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). Twenty-five percent of a school’s impact on its students’ academic achievement is directly attributable to the principal’s actions (Perilla, 2014). With the pressure of high achievement of all students and an influx of policy initiatives,
researchers began to examine if principals’ preparation programs trained them to lead in ways that changed schools and improved instruction (Mitgang, 2012). A look at the administrative preparation programs and their curriculum was needed. State and districts made attempts to address the challenges by collaborating, creating partnerships with higher level institutions and agencies in addressing the challenges that many district and school leaders faced. A set of common standards were adopted.

In 1996, with funding from the Wallace Foundation, the Council of Chief State School Officers, National Governors Association, and other organizations worked with scholars and practitioners from across the United States to develop national policy standards for school leaders (Wallace Foundation, 2012). The Interstate School Leadership Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards were adopted by many states and used by universities as a tool for developing coherent curriculum (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). The ISLLC standards include: setting a widely shared vision for learning; developing a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff’s professional growth; ensuring effective management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment; collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources; acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner; and understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, legal, and cultural contexts (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). These standards can be used to help guide the everyday practices of principals. Shelton (2009) emphasized the need for colleges and universities to redesign their administrator preparation programs:
Statewide leadership standards incorporate effective leadership practices and real-world problems, emphasize instructional leadership, integrate theory and practice, provide authentic school-based experiences, evaluate students’ mastery of knowledge and skills, evaluate program effectiveness, and create partnerships between universities and school districts. (p. 5)

Other recommendations were made based on the research of the Wallace Foundation. Mitgang (2012), as an editor for the Wallace Foundations, works with schools and districts to help develop and test ways to improve preparation of principals. She identified five principal lessons that could help support districts move toward strong leadership in their schools:

- A more selective, probing process for choosing candidates for training is the essential first step in creating a more capable and diverse corps of future principals.
- Aspiring principals need pre-service training that prepares them to lead improved instruction and school change, not just manage buildings.
- Districts should do more to exercise their power to raise the quality of principal training, so that graduates better meet their needs.
- States could make better use of their power to influence the quality of leadership training through standard-setting, program accreditation, principal certification and financial support for highly qualified candidates.
- Develop a research-based, job-embedded principal program that blended university-based coursework with district-sponsored professional development for assistant principals and principals.

Data collection included semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and program documents. The findings of the study indicated that aspiring principals benefited from full-time learning experiences. Having direct exposure taught participants the preparation needed for principals to work in high-need schools. The apprenticeship introduced turnaround leadership skills such as data analysis, relationship building, short and long-term planning, and motivating changes in teacher practice. This study affirmed that school principals need to be trained and
prepared to lead in urban school districts. The on-site experiences along with the coursework may be what is needed as policy makers continue to revisit and adjust leadership preparation programs.

I have delineated the problem, purpose, research questions, and the theoretical framework. My voice is intentionally integrated throughout as the main instrument of the study. As Maxwell (2013) emphasized, my experiences are significant to the conceptual or theoretical framework. Each of the aforementioned elements are carefully aligned to communicate the intent of the study. The next section communicates an overview of the study’s design or methodology, which must be tightly woven with all elements of the dissertation. Chapter 3 of the study delivers a more in-depth discussion of the methodology.

**Overview of the Methodology**

According to Creswell (2013), “qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 44). Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In studying the phenomenon, various approaches can be used to collect data in a natural setting with the researcher’s awareness of the people and places under study. This heuristic multiple case study supported a deeper meaning and understanding of how urban elementary school principals use their daily practices as culturally responsive leaders in ways to support teacher effectiveness and student learning. Having experience as an urban elementary principal who currently works in an urban elementary school, aided an integration of personal insights, experiences, and reflections to help bring meaning to the
phenomenon. Using case study, I explored principals’ daily interactions in their schools through interviews, observations, and documents. Using a variety of data sources ensured that the phenomenon was explored in multiple-facet ways to help reveal and understand their practices. As the researcher, I asked descriptive questions of principals about their practices and roles as 21st century school leaders within their real-world context.

The case study was identified as an intrinsic multiple-case study. Stake (2006) suggested that intrinsic requires the researcher to have a genuine interest in the case and to use this approach when the intent is to better understand the case. The case itself is of interest to me as a school leader. I have a direct interest in the daily practices of elementary principals and what they do to demonstrate culturally relevant practices to support the learning and development of teachers and students. Additionally, I claim my inquiry as a multiple case study in that it depicts what Yin (2012) noted as a way to enable the researcher to explore similarities and differences within and between cases. Each of the six elementary school principals was viewed as an individual case and collectively as a multiple-case study.

My research was conducted at six elementary urban schools in the Midwestern region of the United States. Participants, as co-researchers, were selected by using criterion sampling. I administered an open-ended questionnaire with demographic information to sixteen of the highest achieving elementary schools in the Midwest. According to Patton (2015), “Criterion sampling involves selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 281). The criteria for selection included elementary schools with a diverse population and academic achievement and growth that exceeded the district’ benchmarks.. I also incorporated maximum variation sampling to include a diverse sampling of principals based on race and ethnicity, gender, and years as a principals.
I reviewed and carefully analyze documents such as staff development and Professional Learning Community (PLC) agendas, state and district achievement data, and in-depth interview transcriptions, and observations of PLC’s. The use of documents helped to identify practices school principals used when planning and implementing what is needed for students and staff at their schools. Interviews aided in gathering their experiences related to culturally relevant practices and observations allowed me to connect the description of their experiences with actions.

Multiple methods of analysis involved within-case and cross case analyses (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) to gain a holistic analysis of case studies through the identification of patterns that suggested themes (Grbich, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). According to Creswell (2013), “reducing data into meaningful segments, combining the codes into broader categories or themes, and displaying and making comparisons through the use of charts, graphs, and tables are the core elements of data analysis” (p. 181).

**Significance of the Study**

Principals are the leaders in their schools. Their level of effectiveness or lack of effectiveness can contribute or hinder teachers’ development and student learning, which can be a determining factor of the overall achievement of the school. With the rise of accountability, efforts in education, and a strong focus on improving student achievement, re-examining the principal’s role is necessary. “In a detailed 2010 survey conducted by the Wallace Foundation, school and district administrators, policymakers and others declared principal leadership among the most pressing matters on a list of issues in public school education” (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 5). Hence, the target audiences are elementary school district leaders as well as their university-level education leadership programs
involved in the preparation of principals. The findings of the study can contribute to the
development and knowledge level of effective leadership practices, especially relevant to
cultural relevant practices, teaching and learning, and student achievement.

Culturally competent leaders and districts must embrace diversity and provide
training on culturally relevant practices while leading diverse schools. School leaders are
responsible for promoting a school climate inclusive of all students they serve; therefore,
their leadership behaviors must model such practices. Riehl (2000) suggested that in order
for school leaders to model culturally competent leadership, they must understand what
diversity means, promote inclusive instructional practices within schools by supporting,
facilitating, or being a catalyst for change, and building connections between schools and
communities. Schools that promote culturally responsive and relevant environments create
positive communities of learning for all students. Students feel valued, appreciated, and
included. It is important for school leaders to create instructional climates for excellence.
Through their visions of continuous improvement, they know how to promote effective
teaching practices and ensure that the curriculum, assessment, and instructional strategies
align to the overall improvement of the school.

In short, Green (2010) defined the 21st-century school leader as:

The chief learning officer of the school, an individual with a vision for the future of
the school who can articulate that vision to all stakeholders. They collaborate with
other individuals and groups to create, manage, and implement an instructional
program that meets the needs of all students. (p. 3)

The school leader knows how to align priorities for school improvement with
descriptions of their ideal school. Finally, understanding that 25% of a school’s impact on its
students’ academic achievement is directly attributable to the principal’s actions (Perilla,
2014) means that the school leader has the required skills necessary to lead. The practices that principals model and how they behave have a lasting impact on students and staff. School leadership preparation programs must provide the necessary skills and training needed as they train those who aspire to be school leaders and develop those who are current principals. By exploring daily practices of elementary school principals as culturally responsive school leaders, this study aimed to provide an awareness of leadership practices that can be used to help increase teaching and learning and improve student achievement in urban elementary schools.

Chapter 2, the literature review, provides a deeper look into the theoretical framework that bounds the context of the study, followed by Chapter 3, the methodology. Following the approval of the three-chapter proposal, I took the CITI exam and completed the Institutional Review Board process for working with human subjects. Upon the approval of this process, I proceeded with the collection and analysis of data during the field study phase of the project. The findings are presented in Chapter 4 of the dissertation. Chapter 5 discusses the implications of findings, future research, and final reflections.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

As emphasized in Chapter 1, effective leadership is a key factor in managing urban American schools. With a high population of culturally diverse students who often come from low income backgrounds, school leaders must have the knowledge and skills needed to support teaching and learning for culturally and linguistic diverse students while providing guidance to teachers and other staff and collaborating with parents and community constituents within the broader community. School principals in their roles as instructional leaders require a new set of skills that focus on understanding culture and learning coupled with a sense of commitment and accountability to make a difference in the lives of children. Urban school leaders may not be prepared to lead in ways that support the diversity of their populations. In this chapter, research and theories related to practices of school leaders are examined by addressing instructional leadership, the role of the 21st century leader, culturally competent school leaders, and school leadership preparation programs. These topics are important because they highlight effective instructional practices that school principals use in leading their schools, including ensuring students are prepared for 21st century skills and competencies. They also support how school leaders increase student learning and development through an emphasis on eroding deficit thinking and promoting high expectations for student learning. Leaders also provide teachers with professional development for meeting the needs of all students by helping them understand culture and learning as well as supporting parents and community. Finally, school leaders must understand how they are prepared to lead in urban schools and continually hone their skills and practices for successfully mentoring and coaching teachers.
The review of literature was conducted through Google Alerts, Google Scholar, EBSCO, JSTORE and ERIC, as well as relevant books and reports. The following search terms—instructional leadership, transformational leadership, shared leadership, effective leadership, visionary leadership, school leadership preparation programs, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally competent leaders, culturally responsiveness, and 21st century leaders—led to an assortment of research studies to support theories related to the study; gaps in the literature were also noted. Culturally relevant practices are important factors for school leaders to embrace as they lead schools, especially schools with a high population of diverse students. Culturally relevant practices support the achievement of all students by providing effective teaching and learning in a “culturally supported, learner-centered environment where the strengths students bring to school are identified, nurtured, and utilized to promote student achievement” (Richard, Brown, & Forde, 2007, p. 64).

However, empirical literature, theories and concepts related to how urban leaders support culturally relevant practices are limited. For example, using the search engine of KEY TERMS “instructional leadership” and “culturally responsive leadership,” and/or “culturally relevant leadership,” only one study was found in Google Scholar that aimed to connect perspectives on organizational leadership and instructional transformational leadership related to leadership practices and culturally relevant teaching, The gap in the literature calls for further examination of culturally responsive leadership coupled with transformational and instructional leadership behaviors and how these practices can support students and the overall achievement of the school. This area is explored later in this chapter.
I begin a discussion of relevant literature review topics by first examining school leaders/principals as instructional leaders and how their practices support the overall growth of the school. Through instructional leadership practices, effective urban principals collaborate with all stakeholders, taking an active role in student learning, involving staff in school decisions, with a high focus on improving teaching and learning. Secondly, understanding the role of 21st century leadership will identify what is required in terms of knowledge, skills, and practices in today’s increasingly global and diverse society to support teachers in meeting the needs of students. This discussion is followed by how culturally competent leaders embrace and promulgate diversity in their daily activities, advocating and promoting social justice and equity for all students. I conclude with a focus on connections to school leadership preparation programs within university settings and what is needed to prepare school principals with sufficient field experiences and opportunities that prepare inspiring principals to lead effectively in diverse urban settings.

**Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership is known to be an important component for school leaders and has been identified as a contributing factor to increased student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Used as a school reform effort, instructional leadership holds school principals accountable for improving the overall achievement in their schools. With the multitude of roles principals are required to fulfill, facilitating effective teaching and learning through instructional leadership is considered a significant behavior that guides the school leader. Knowing what these instructional leadership behaviors are, how they are enacted day-to-day, and how the behaviors relate to improved
teaching and learning as well as increased student achievement continue to be examined by researchers and theorists (Mitchell & Castle, 2005).

Instructional leadership was the focus during the effective schools movement connected to the research of Ron Edmonds in 1979, who identified urban schools that were instructionally effective for poor and culturally diverse students. In the 1970s and 1980s, Edmonds and many of his colleagues viewed the principal as the primary source of educational expertise (Edmonds, 1979). They believed that schools could be changed and reformed to become effective for all students, especially in poor urban communities. With this belief, the principal had to lead with a clear and focused school mission, create a safe and orderly environment, have high expectations for students and staff, provide an opportunity to “learn and time on task,” frequently monitor students’ progress, maintain positive relationships between school and home, and demonstrate instructional leadership practices (Edmonds). Through the effective schools movement, Edmonds described the principal as the instructional leader that demonstrated these multiple responsibilities; however, in 2003, The National Center for Effective School Research and Development Foundation considered many of the effective schools’ elements as the mission of the school.

The role was defined as:

The principal acts as the instructional leader who effectively communicates the mission of the school to the staff, parents, and students, and who understand and applies the characteristics of instructional effectiveness in the management of the instructional program at the school. (p. 1)

These characteristics align with similar key components of various researchers (Bamburg & Andrews, 1990; Golring & Pasternack, 1994; Hallinger, 2000; Begley & Leithwood, 1990), who added the need to evaluate curriculum, instruction, and assessment
and promote a climate for learning. Murphy (1990) stated principals known as strong instructional leaders demonstrated these core characteristics both directly and indirectly, leading with a combination of expertise and charisma (Hallinger, 2003).

As an experienced school leader with 29 years working in urban schools, I strive to consistently view my role as an instructional leader as one who is knowledgeable and credible regarding instruction and leading teachers in ways that will improve their practice as well as the overall achievement of the school. Guided by collaboration and facilitation, my intent is to generate a shared leadership model to support my behavior and actions. My experience in this role allows me to use a hands-on approach in working with teachers, coaching and modeling effective practices with an emphasis on culturally responsive instruction. My personal experience connects with the research of DuFour (2002), Horng and Leob (2010), and King (2002). These researchers identified the importance of instructional leaders having a deep involvement of teaching and learning, a more sophisticated view of professional development, and an emphasis on the use of data to make school-wide decisions. Although these components are key, new thinking about instructional leadership today focuses more on a broader approach that includes personal practices and resource allocation practices as central to instructional improvement. Current views of instructional leaders are of strong organizational managers with an integration of transformational and instructional leadership styles.

Horng and Loeb (2010) examined school leadership in great depth with a clear focus on organizational management. In their understanding of principals as strong organizational managers, they believed that principals who spent time on organizational management activities had favorable outcomes. First, organizational managers who develop the
organizational structure for improved instruction are effective in hiring and supporting staff, understand how to allocate budgets, and maintain a positive work and learning environment (Horng & Loeb). Second, as an organizational manager, the principal does more than observe classrooms and give teachers actionable feedback about their instructional practices. “If the school principal only spends time in the classroom to help improve the instructional practices of teachers, minimal effect will take place” (Ing, 2008, p. 2). School leaders must promote actions beyond the classroom in order to ensure a school climate that is instructionally effective, work collaboratively with parents, and integrate community services that meet the social and emotional needs of students. Third, the principal as an organizational manager for instructional improvement understands how to staff a school with high-quality teachers and provide them the appropriate supports and resources to be successful in the classroom. Equally important, they know how to hire and retain effective teachers, how to create opportunities for teachers to learn and grow, and understand how to empower and delegate the work with teachers and staff in mind.

When Horng and Loeb (2010) compared principals who spend more time doing classroom observations with those who spend less time doing so, no evidence that the frequency or duration of principals’ classroom walkthroughs related to the instructional climate of the school or student achievement was observed. Additionally, the researchers added, “Strong organizational managers consequently are able to support classroom instruction without providing that support directly to individual teachers. Instead, they develop a working environment in which teachers have access to the support they need” (Horng & Loeb, p. 69). Few studies have identified a relationship between the principal’s
hands-on supervision of classroom instruction, teacher effectiveness, and student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2002).

Examining the associations between leadership behaviors and student achievement gains as well as investigating principals’ investment in instruction leadership behaviors in their schools, Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2013) conducted a three-year longitudinal study that included 100 urban school principals from a stratified random sample of 125 schools in Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Each principal was surveyed regarding their overall time spent on such instructional activities as coaching teachers, developing or evaluating the school’s educational program, evaluating teachers, informal walkthroughs to observe practices, and planning or participating in teachers’ professional development. Shadowing, one full day of observations, was conducted with each principal, recording detailed information of time allocated to instruction. The data concluded that 12.8% of a principal’s time is spent on instructional-related activities, and within this area, 5.4% on classroom walkthroughs, 1.8% evaluating teachers, 0.5% coaching teachers to improve their instruction, 2.1% developing the educational program and curriculum, 0.6% on planning or executing professional development, and 2.4% on other instructional practices (Grissom et al.). Findings also suggested that the amount of time principals spent on instructional-related activities was not significantly associated with any difference in student achievement or school improvement. The data pointed to feedback from effective coaching with teachers, evaluations, and walkthroughs can provide the principal information to support professional development. Grissom et al. stated, “While principals use walkthroughs as a primary source of information about teachers’ instructional practices, if they do not use these walkthroughs
to support professional development or other human resource practices, the information they gather may be less beneficial” (p. 442).

The researchers identified several limitations of the study (Grissom et al., 2013). First, there were concerns that they may not have appropriately considered important school contextual variables that influence leadership behaviors and students learning. Second, their measures of principal behaviors were single day snapshots of principal activities that may not be representative of practices on other days. Third, better-performing schools may allow principals the time to work with teachers, whereas in less effective schools, principals are more constrained to spend more time observing classrooms. These critical analyses provided new meaning of principals as instructional leaders and correlated to some of the behaviors identified in transformational leadership. As educational reforms continue to be the drive to help change the achievement of schools, transformational leadership is another component researchers believe propel principals as instructional leaders (Burns, 1978; Conley & Goldman, 1994; Green, 2010; Hallinger, 2003; Leithwood, 1994; Sergiovanni, 2007).

**Transformational Instructional Leaders**

Transformational leadership practices are known as important components of the school leader who is strongly invested in instruction. James Burns (1978) wrote that transformational leaders “look for potential motives in followers, seek to satisfy higher needs, and engage the full person of the follower” (p. 208). The heart of Burns’ (1978) work was an analysis of comparing and contrasting traditional transactional leadership with the more recent idea of transforming leadership. The leaders and followers develop relationships that entice followers to become leaders. Additionally, transformational leadership focuses on developing the organization’s capacity to innovate (Hallinger, 2003). Retrospectively, Green
believed transformational leaders are those who lead with knowledge of individuals inside and outside of the school. The school leader has a clear vision and knows the future direction of the school. They are good in communicating effectively and getting followers to understand the importance of reaching their goals. School leaders inspire others to commit and work together as a collaborative team fostering common beliefs and values. In short, the school leader models what Burns (1978) identified as transformational leadership. They are facilitators exhibiting behaviors that allow the staff to feel connected and empowered. Through this empowerment, the school staff adapts to change and works together solving problems to improve the overall achievement of the school.

Conley and Goldman (1994) and Leithwood (1994) believed “Transformational leadership provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making” (p. 371). The school leader recognizes teachers as equals and acknowledges who they are professionally. The school leader considers teachers’ knowledge and skills and capitalize on their skills to help enhance the instructional practices of others as well as the overall achievement of the school. Glickman (1989) introduced this model as shared instructional leadership.

Printy, Marks, and Bowers (2009) integrated shared instructional leadership with transformational practices; they “explored the ways in which teachers respond to transformational leadership by the principal with attention paid to the influence and conditions that activated independent relationships and enhance shared transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership” (p. 504). The school leader collaborates with teachers and staff about curriculum, instruction, professional development, and assessment. Through collaboration, various ideas are acknowledged with the teacher and principal’s
expertise used collectively to help create a culture of learning among staff. The staff then works together towards school improvement. Sergiovanni (2007) captured the moral aspect of transformational leadership. He pointed out that it has to do more with a set of values than processes—what he called doing the right thing for teachers and kids. Sergiovanni explained:

Schools are both tightly and loosely coupled places. They are for example, tightly coupled around cultural themes bureaucratic rules, management protocols, leadership trades and deals, and images of rationality and are more influenced by norms, group mores, patterns of beliefs, values, the socialization process, and socially-constructed reality. (p. 72)

To determine the effects of school leadership relations between principals and teachers, a mix methods study was conducted that examined active collaboration of teachers and principals related to instructional matters to enhance the quality of teaching and student performance (Marks & Printy, 2003). The study explored two conceptions of leadership: transformational and instructional. From a pool of 300 nationally nominated schools, 24 restructured schools were selected that included eight each of elementary, middle, and high schools. These schools were nominated based on making substantial progress toward reform efforts using NAEP achievement levels in reading and math. Initially, teachers responded to a survey questioning them about their instructional practices, professional activities, and perceptions of their schools and their overall organization. Interviews, observations, and documents were collected over the three-year study, with a team of three researchers at each site. At the conclusion of data collection, study teams collaborated to summarize findings of 24 cases regarding leadership practices and their relationship to school performance, pedagogical quality, and student achievement. Based on their analyses, transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership were identified as key practices of principals.
Leaders who demonstrated the integration of both behaviors had high achievement and performance in their schools.

Researchers used a scatterplot to represent the position of where the schools fell on a quadrant of transformational and shared instructional leadership, ranging from low to high. Nine of 24 schools with high percentages of poor, African American and Latinx students—three elementary, three middle, and three high schools—scored low on both forms of leadership. Six of the 24 schools—two elementary, two middle, and two high schools—scored high on transformational leadership and low on shared leadership. These schools had lower percentages of African Americans and Latinx students, 18% and 11% respectively. The leadership was identified as limited based on the tendency to focus more on change in other areas than instruction. The last cluster of the 24 schools included two elementary, two middle, and three high schools that scored high based on demonstrating both transformational and shared instructional leadership practices. The principals at these schools provided a strong instructional leadership and facilitated leadership among teachers, seeing them as partners in furthering high-quality teaching and learning. These schools had a lower percentage of diverse students and were smaller in enrollment in comparison to the other clusters of schools. Similarly, high scores were depicted in the areas of pedagogical quality and student achievement. The overall findings suggested that shared transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership, coupled together, provided evidence of high-quality teaching and learning, high achievement among students, and effective leadership practices of principals. The compelling outcome of these studies was the lack of leadership observed in diverse settings which support the need for principals to be prepared to lead in these settings.
Instructional leadership is known to be a critical skill that school principals and superintendents must have, but Lashway (2002) claimed that few have had the in-depth training necessary for this role. Marks and Printy (2003) emphasized the need for instructionally strong leaders who integrate practices of transformational leadership and shared leadership to support teaching and learning. Mitchell and Castle (2005) suggested that principals lacked understanding of instructional leadership practices and how it was carried out in their schools. To understand how school principals thought about and carried out instructional leadership, they examined elementary school principals’ understanding and enactments of instructional leadership among 12 effective elementary school principals in Southern Ontario. Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and two full-day school observations in each building. Instructional leadership was conceptualized through the lens of curriculum expertise, formal delivery of professional development, and informal culture building. Enactment of instructional leadership was influenced by the principal’s personal style, degree of coherence in agendas and initiatives, and availability of enabling structures. The findings of this study concluded that principals understood that instructional leadership was a key aspect of their role, but they struggled to define the characteristics of instructional leadership practices in their day-to-day work with teachers. The principals placed most of their emphasis on building an effective climate with a strong focus on relationships with and among teachers and felt that those relationships facilitated instructional leadership instead of having an emphasis on a strong cognitive climate of instruction, curriculum, assessment, and professional development. This study indicated that the role of instructional leadership needs to be
brought to the forefront of principals’ minds that allow them to reflect and think about their day-to-day practice as instructional leaders.

As noted earlier, current research fails to recognize the need for culturally relevant practices guided by the school leader integrated with transformational leadership and shared instructional leadership. As I explored several data bases, I found that few studies related to leadership and culturally relevant practices. Principals in diverse schools with high populations of African American, Latinx, and other students of color should not be afraid to address issues of race, poverty, and achievement gaps. Exploring what it means for children’s daily schooling experiences to be African American, Latinx, and Native American, many researchers extended the cultural difference paradigm to create classroom interventions to support the learning of students of color (Gay, 2010; Grant & Sleeter, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2009; Moll & González, 2004; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Nieto, 2010). Their work has provided policy makers, district and school leaders, and teachers the tools and strategies needed to promote the inclusion of students of color in ways of doing and knowing into the classroom. These practices, guided by the school leader, are promising for improving teaching and learning in diverse settings and are further discussed later in this review.

Another key factor of instructional leadership is the importance of understanding data for meeting the cognitive and affective needs of students. Learning not only involves the cognitive aspect, but entails the need for educators to also understand the socio-emotional aspects of learners, which include an emphasis on the cultural background and experiences students bring to school. If students’ cultural backgrounds and experiences are not nurtured in the schools, achievement gaps will continue to be a concern for poor students
as well as African American, Latinx, and Native American students. Using data to help make instructional decisions is important for instructional leadership. Data-driven leadership, as a reform movement, challenges districts and schools to use data to address the growth and development of students. In the following section, I discuss current studies related to the use of data followed by my personal experiences as a data-driven instructional leader.

**Data-driven Instructional Leadership**

The use of multiple data to make sound decisions about student learning outcomes have been demonstrated through federal, state, and local accountability systems. With a high focus on school effectiveness as it relates to student achievement, data-driven instructional leadership has been a mandated practice and process that encourages school leaders to make informed decisions about students and their abilities. Data-driven decision making is defined as a process involving the collection, analysis, and use of data to guide decisions (Bernhardt, 2009; Creighton, 2001b; Kowalski, Lasley & Mahoney, 2008; Picciano, 2006; Protheroe & Tucker, 2008). “It has been identified as the most effective way in meeting school reform demands” (Pulliam, 2005, p. 37). Using data as a reform movement requires a shift in practice for school leaders and their staff. Shen et al. (2010) posited that the collection of student data must simultaneously accompany instructional decision-making for identifying solutions to challenging achievement gaps. The use of data in schools must become a cyclical design rooted in focused inquiry (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2006) with conditions that Reeves (2004) believed must be in place in order to create a school environment that values data, responsibilities of leadership, school culture, and professional development, and school culture.
For long-term change with data use, the school leader must create a school culture in which individuals understand and value data and use ongoing professional development to provide teachers with guidance in data analysis (Bernhardt, 2009; DuFour, 2002). The school leader creates a school culture that exhibits a level of trust that is established and sustained in a way that the school leader empowers others to make decisions, maintains an attitude of continuous improvement, promotes collaboration drawing on strengths of others, and assumes responsibility to seek help and take risks (Zepeda, 2004). This work can be done through the use of leadership teams that the school leader creates, providing other members of the organization opportunities to contribute while engaging in the work of school improvement. Through the leadership team, a strong focus on data use and analysis must be established in the school’s overall goals. In addressing the school improvement plan, it is important that the school leader know what type of data the team will examine; what questions are addressed regarding student performance, teaching, and learning; how data will be stored; and how often it will be collected.

The planning of professional development with data in mind, coupled with the school’s improvement plan, must be aligned to address the needs of the school. Because school improvement is a complex task, Salpeter (2004) argued that student achievement data is just one indicator in planning for improvement. Celio and Harvey (2005) noted that schools should not be focused solely on achievement data. They must examine wider aspects of data, including elimination of the achievement gap, student engagement, teacher retention, and equity funding. Wahlstrom (2006) added demographic data, which provides descriptive background information on students, staff, and schools; process data, which define what schools are doing to obtain the results; and outcome data, which describe
students’ performance. Further, Wahlstrom argued that the interaction and relationship of demographic and process data will lead to student achievement.

To inquire what data principals use and how data informed the decision-making process in their schools, Shen et al. (2010) interviewed 16 urban principals who represented four urban school districts, with two elementary, one middle school and one high school principal from each district, over a three-year period regarding data-informed decision-making. The findings revealed five important factors. First, all 16 principals used student achievement data. Second, data were incorporated for accountability purposes. Third, some principals used data for improving teaching and learning, while others incorporated it for grouping and placement as well as identifying weakness and strengths of students. Fourth, there was a neglect of student and community background data and school process data, which indicated that principals rarely use multiple streams of data to inform decision-making. Finally, the use of data to make curriculum and instructional related decisions varied by school district. Although the study was based on a small sample of participants, the findings suggested that principals in this study had a limited use of data, and researchers recommended that multiple streams of data will support effective data-driven decisions. They also added the importance of using data to support teaching and learning and not for accountability purposes only. Shen et al. concluded:

School principals are on the front line of the work to effect change; yet, if the practices of the 16 participants in this study are similar to their counterparts in other schools, principals will need continued assistance in adopting data-informed decision-making practices especially with regard to drawing important implications for raising student achievement through the utilization of multiple data streams in such a way that they inform decisions made for learning as well as conclusions reached about learning. (2010, p. 450)
As an instructional leader, I use data in multiple ways to help make recommendations and decisions to support instruction, assessment, and professional development. The following section describes my personal role as a data-driven school leader.

Use of Data: A Heuristic Experience

A positive school culture with effective conditions in place are important factors that support the use of data in my school. As an elementary principal, I and my staff collect and use data as a normal practice while setting goals in the development of the school improvement plan. We make decisions in regard to instruction and assessment, as well as address the needs of students and staff. Researchers insist school leaders must initiate as they collaborate and interact with staff with the intent of raising student achievement (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Owens & Valesky, 2011; Sutherland, 2014; Wayman, Brewer & Stringfield (2009). “In order for schools to experience success with data-driven decision-making processes, educational leaders must be able to foster a culture of continuous inquiry that values and routinely utilizes data to inform decisions” (Sutherland, 2014, p. 4). Agreeing with Reeves (2004), I believe that effective data use in schools must incorporate three responsibilities: leadership, culture, and professional development. To describe the heuristic experiences common with co-researchers, I use these three conditions to identify how data are used in my building.

Beginning with leadership responsibility, multiple forms of data are collected and analyzed with the needs of multiple groups of students in mind, including African Americans, Latinx, European American, Asian, English as Language Learners, special education individuals, and free and reduced categories of students. These data include
district and school achievement data compared with state data. Monthly leadership meetings are held about the development of the school improvement plan use to consistently monitor and evaluate our work based on collective schools goals generated by the leadership team. The team, composed of teachers representing each grade and support staff, functions in a democratic way where decisions are shared with intent of meeting students’ academic, social, and cultural needs. A building data wall is displayed showing the percentage of students who are on grade level in reading and math on the following assessments: Fountas and Pinnell Reading Running Records, Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), and State Assessment Program (SAP) (pseudonym), as well as interim assessments given in the fall, winter, and spring. Other data such as samples of student work, social and emotional logs, discipline and suspension rates, and attendance records provide a holistic view of each child. Because the decisions were made to make our data public (displayed in the staff development room), building data are a constant reminder that we all need to focus daily on supporting the academic, emotional, social, and cultural needs of our students and it takes the efforts of the entire staff to help our students succeed.

Professional development meetings in my building are planned in ways that address instructional practices that teachers need to meet the academic, social and cultural needs of all students, designing efforts for comprehensive supports. Data collected from observations of teachers’ practices, samples of students’ work, assessment results, as well as understanding the curriculum help drive the planning and implementation of professional development. Much of this school process-driven data help ensure effective teaching and learning. Some of this work also happens during professional learning communities (PLC) meetings that are planned weekly with grade level teachers. During this time teachers can
plan instructional lessons, develop action plans, problem solve, and make decisions based on multiple streams of data.

Additionally, as a school culture responsibility, data walls are posted in each classroom identifying the school goals and classroom goals. After formal and informal assessments are implemented, teachers dive into quarterly full-day planning sessions to analyze the data and create action plans to support their findings. Actions plans are monitored with evidence of students making progress. Data cards are kept on every student showing trend data from one year to the next. Students meet with me during individual conferences three times a year to discuss their individual data and the goals they have set for themselves. During data meetings with students, they share their data notebooks identifying their goals, test scores, and any achievement data as well as areas where they need to improve. I expect teachers to meet with students frequently to discuss their progress and to monitor their data notebooks. The data notebooks follow students from one grade to the next. When students enter middle school, their data cards and data notebooks go with them. In sum, the work of an instructional leader involves data to help inform effective practices and decisions that impact the lives of students. The school leader cannot do this work alone; however, Bernhardt (2007) stated, “Data-decision making is one piece of an effective school and principals should ensure coherence among all systems in order for data use to have an optimal effect” (p. 9).

The optimal effect must consider the global changes within an increasingly international community that require teachers to prepare students with a different set of knowledge and skills. The school principal/leader must be prepared to be a 21st century
leader and empower teachers as collaborative leaders within a system of constant technological change.

**Twenty-First Century Leadership**

The world is forever changing, and with change, it is critical that our educational systems equip students with the skills they need to work, live, and survive in a globalized world. Friedman began this conversation (2000) with the book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree: Understanding Globalization*, in which he identified globalization as international systems that affect countries, companies, and communities directly or indirectly. He defined globalization as “the interweaving of markets, technology, information systems and telecommunications systems” (Bricklin, 2000, p.1). With the various systems in place, the world is able to integrate, communicate, and connect through the use of the internet. These systems have changed how people work and live, making what they do—and how they do it—more public. Jobs that once required assembly line labor and routine work using basic skills are limited or even non-existent, according to how we live today. Technology has replaced those types of jobs in favor of those who have higher level skills, are creative, and productive (Autor, Levy, & Murnane, 2003). Today, the economy seeks highly skilled, highly educated workers who are innovative and have the employability skills necessary to do the job. Further, Overtoom (2000) observed:

> Employability skills are transferable core skill groups that represent essential functional and enabling knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the 21st century workplace. They are necessary for career success at all levels of employment and for all levels of education. (p. 1)

Those who are lacking 21st century skills are having to adjust by reinventing themselves while learning (Kay, 2010). Hence, schools must give more attention to how students are
prepared to meet the challenges of the 21st century. As emphasized in Chapter 1, accountability measures guided by state and federal mandates have shifted the roles of school leaders, yet overall funding for education has decreased. School leaders are expected to do more with less.

The reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act through Every Student Succeeds Acts (ESSA) provided more flexibility for states and local education agencies to meet the needs of children and at the same time try to put in place protections for marginalized students, including students of poverty, with disabilities, and English language learners (Ferguson, 2016; Saultz, Fusarelli, & McEachin, 2017). “As a result of the 2007-09 recession, which sharply reduced state revenue, emergency fiscal aid from the federal government helped prevent even deeper cuts but ran out before the economy recovered” (p. 2), noted Leachman, Albares, Masterson, and Wallace (2016). The aid has not been restored to pre-recessions levels, which creates challenges for 21st century leaders as they struggle to meet the needs of all students. Districts that suffered the most were those that served low-income and students of color. Baker, Sciarra, and Farrie (2014), in their national report, explained the vestiges of poverty:

Student and school poverty correlates with, and is a proxy for, a multitude of factors that increase the costs of providing equal educational opportunity—most notably, gaps in educational achievement, school district racial composition, English language proficiency, and student mobility. (p. 5)

In my district, I am also being asked to do more for students with less money due to cuts of local, state, and federal dollars for education. I am constantly working with my staff to anticipate change, meeting the needs of marginalized groups, seeking additional funding to address curricular changes to prepare children for a more globalized technological world,
and helping teachers identify strategies for attending to trauma and mental health issues among children. As a school leader, I realize there are certain school conditions I must put in place to ensure that 21st century skills are being implemented in the curriculum.

Recognizing the importance of 21st century skills, and how they affect those in the work force, Zhao (2015) pointed out the huge unemployment rate of youth and the shortage of talented young people around the world. He claimed that the unemployment rate of youth and the shortage of their talents are major risk factors that will affect our country both economically and socially. He examined how unemployment leads to personal poverty and psychological trauma, as well as social unrest and inequality. Zhao also examined how the shortage of talent leads to the slowing down of economic growth, and in turn generates fewer employment opportunities, but at the same time, can increase the income level of highly talented workers, which produces gaps of income between the highly skilled and the less skilled workers. Although these risk factors are important, there is a need for educational systems to collectively invest and equip children with the skills and knowledge needed for the new 21st century economy (Krell, 2011).

**A More Diverse Population of Students**

Our nation’s schools are currently faced with an increased level of diverse students from various cultural backgrounds. This shift has caused ethnic and racial challenges in public schools and society in general. Some of the challenges that affect school staff are more students who live in poverty, who speak English as a second language, and who live in segregated neighborhoods. Mordechay and Orfield (2017) reported that since 1990, the Latinx school age population has more than doubled, increasing from 5.3 million to more than 12.8 million, making up a quarter of ages of 5–17 who are currently attending our
schools. Within our country’s five largest metropolitan areas, half of the students enrolled in the public schools are either Black or Latinx (Zhao (2015). “Nationwide, these students attend, on average, schools with a far larger majority of students of color, often with twice the proportion of classmates living in poverty, greatly limiting educational prospects for these groups” (Maxwell, 2014, p. 3). Although these trends may play a different role in different regions, they are major concerns for schools and districts as they try to meet the overall achievement levels of all students. Currently most schools struggle to find qualified teachers for urban schools as well as teachers who are bilingual and prepared to teach English language learners. These struggles contribute to the growing number of achievement gaps that African American and Latinx students experience compared to their White peers.

As noted in Chapter 1, a substantial number of Black and Latinx students begin kindergarten well behind other students in academic readiness, and because they start behind, the gap worsens as children move through the grades (Evans, 2005). The need for high-quality preschool programs, especially for young children whose first language is not English, is dire.

Drake (2014) asserted that the achievement gap of linguistic diverse students as they matriculate through school can also be attributed to community linguistic isolation. Linguistic isolation is defined as “households are those in which all adult (are 15 and older) residents speak a language other than English and none report ‘speaking English very well’…..percentage of linguistic isolation in a school code” (p. 328). Further, non-school-related factors such as household income, health, and parents’ educational backgrounds explain some of the variance in academic performance. Drake used data from the Educational Longitudinal Study (ELS) of 2002 and 2000 Census Data to follow a cohort of
10th grade students from high school to college to the world of work. Measures of student performance were operationalized in reading and math, with 90% of the questions as multiple choice and 10% open-ended. The primary interest was the amount of isolation as indicated by the percentage of co-variate in the zip code. Outcomes suggested the following:

Neighborhood linguistic context in which schools reside and their relationship to LM [language minority] student achievement, net the effect of these in-school factors. The results suggest that observationally equivalently LM students in environments of high linguistic isolations outperformed their LM peers. The discrete response models provide further evidence that the relationship is especially noticeable when comparing LM students in environments of high linguistic isolation to those in average or low environments. (p. 334)

Implications of findings suggest, in light of research regarding segregation and isolation of minoritized population, more attention should be given to community processes that impact student performance. The silence noted in the discussion of findings was the limited analysis of LM African students’ performance in linguistic isolated environments. Perhaps this may be due to the endemic nature of race in our society (Drake, 2014).

When I examine my school’s demographic changes in light of the changes in the larger society over the last five years, comparing 2014–2018 data, I see a demographic shift with an increase of White students from 8.8% to 11.1%, a decrease of African American students from 42.4% to 31.9%, and an increase of Latinx students from 35.2% to 41.2%. Students identified as “other” increased from 13.6% to 15.8%, which indicates a total of approximately 90% of the students identified as culturally diverse. With the various cultures, languages, and experiences of classrooms and what students will need to live, learn, and practice democratic citizenship in a global world will require a different set of competencies and skills than those of the 20th century. There is an urgent need for teachers and leaders to
practice these skills in their schools in order to educate a future population of prepared citizenry and leaders.

**Curricular Changes for 21st Century Learning**

The movement of the 21st century skills primary seeks to realign classroom learning experiences through student exposure to more authentic activities, such as collaborative interdisciplinary problem solving and less emphasis on teaching and testing skills in isolation (Huber & Breen, 2007). Kay (2009), president of The Partnership of 21st Century Skills, discussed their framework for helping educators identified new skills expected of students and why they matter once they leave school and enter college or the workforce. The 21st century skills were presented in four areas: (a) learning and innovative skills, (b) information, media, and technology skills, (c) life and career skills, and (d) 21st Century Education Support Systems. These skills areas are further depicted in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning and Innovation Skills</th>
<th>Information, Media, and Technology Skills</th>
<th>Life and Career Skills</th>
<th>Century Education Support Systems</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creativity &amp; Innovation</td>
<td>Information Literacy</td>
<td>Flexibility and Adaptability</td>
<td>21st Century Standards and Assessments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critical Thinking &amp; Problem Solving</td>
<td>Media Literacy</td>
<td>Initiative and Self Direction</td>
<td>21st Curriculum Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication &amp; Collaboration</td>
<td>Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Literacy</td>
<td>Social and Cross-Culture Skills Productivity and Accountability</td>
<td>21st Century Professional Development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leadership and Responsibility</td>
<td>21st Century Learning Environment</td>
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</tbody>
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*Figure 3. Four areas of 21st century skills (Kay, 2009)*
According to the framework, Kay (2009) posited that learning opportunities, and teaching of these skills will allow students to demonstrate knowledge, practice engagement, work together as a team, as they are solving analytical problems.

Brown (2018) designed a phenomenological study to identify practices of 21st skill development in two public elementary geographically located outside of California, schools that were designated as exemplary by 21st Century Learning (P21). She used a random sampling technique to identify teachers, staff, and parents for focus groups interviews; to triangulate the data, observations and artifacts were incorporated. Findings, reported Brown, indicated that learning experiences should deliberately integrate lesson design, its content, 21st century skills, support, and assessment; avoiding teaching and assessing skills separately from content. Secondly, students should be given opportunities to develop relationships through partnerships that nurture the school’s vision and are perpetuated through meaningful partnerships in which a clear vision for the school is mutually shared. Educators should place emphasis on authentic practices that engage student in community and global learning beyond the classroom so that students recognize the importance of becoming committed to global learning. Finally, school leaders should encourage innovation and experimentation that contributed to mindsets among teachers for creating a culture of change.

Similarly, Duncan and Barnett (2009) identified 21st century skills as creativity, perseverance, and problem-solving skills while working individually or with a team. Wagner (2008) described 21st century skills as seven survival skills after he interviewed business, non-profit organizations, and educational leaders. The survival skills are identified as critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration and leadership; agility and adaptability;
initiative and entrepreneurialism; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analyzing information; and curiosity and imagination. Although the 21st century skills are identified differently by those mentioned, they are relevant and support complex thinking and learning in comparison to rote skills and procedure knowledge that are often taught in classrooms today.

The attention thus far has been on the need to prepare students for 21st century skills, supporting their curiosity and imaginations through authentic learning experiences. When children experience trauma and stress-related events, their social, emotional, cognitive, and academic growth is compromised (Ganzel & Morris, 2011).

**Trauma and Mental Health Issues in Schools**

Greer et al. (2011) stated that, according to The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, traumatic events may involve an array of different experiences: experiencing the death of another person; witnessing domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse; and being subjected to a robbery, shooting, beating, or some other personal conflict. Youth often experience secondary violence in their neighborhood, and their reports of violence are often different than that of their parents. In a survey of over 8,000 adults and 6,000 children in several low-income neighborhoods in Chicago, Zimmerman (2014) discovered children were more likely to disclose seeing, hearing, participating in, or experiencing violent events than the adults. Zimmerman concluded this finding is likely to be related to the amount of time children spend in the home and exposure to neighborhood violence because they are more likely to be home when these events are occurring. They are also less likely to fear retaliation due to reporting violent behavior.
High poverty students of color appear to be adversely affected and exposed to traumatic experiences that affect their social, emotional, and cognitive growth (Ganzel & Morris, 2011; Lieberman & Osofsky 2009). Gonzalez, Monzon, Solis, Jaycox, and Langley (2016) suggested that experiencing trauma during childhood can have a significant impact on child growth and development. Early identification and intervention can reverse the child’s mental health and educational outcomes. The researchers described screening procedures for exposure to traumatic events and symptoms for 402 elementary school children, grades one to five, by gender and grades in four elementary schools. Gonzalez et al. found that 34% (N=138) of the children had experienced one or more traumatic events and were assessed for posttraumatic stress symptoms.

Blitz, Anderson, and Saastamoinen (2016), through a university and school partnership, investigated teachers’ and classroom aides’ (a) perceptions of student behaviors; (b) understanding of both TTS [trauma and toxic stress] and race; and (c) self-reported stress levels and teaching efficacy. They used three questionnaires: “the ‘Cultural Ecology’ questionnaire currently used by district, the ‘Perceptions of Student Behaviors’ and ‘Stress Level, Efficacy, and Confidence’ questionnaires were developed by the aforementioned work-group of school personnel along with the PI [principal investigator]” (p. 525); data were collected three times from 2013 to 2014. Unstructured interviews were conducted with 20 teachers, seven teacher aides, and two teacher service professionals. The school experienced a 200% increase in race diversity, and more than 25% of all children in the school lived below the poverty level; 50% of these children were students of color. Unemployment rates for the area were higher than state and national averages, and the school was located in a high crime rate area serving 425 students, 90% eligible for free and
reduced lunch. Findings revealed teachers felt they were distrusted by their students or family members of some ethnic groups compared to teachers’ aides. Additionally, multiple findings related to issues of race and learning were too difficult and complex to discuss within issues of trauma and mental health. However, what is relevant to this discussion is the extent to which teachers recognize lack of training to address historical and intergenerational trauma. They also experienced secondary trauma due to their lack of ability to support the needs of individuals with trauma. Researchers concluded:

> When knowledge about the legacy of historical and intergenerational trauma, the physiological and psychosocial impact of TTS, and enduring race and class bias are understood together, a vision for a culturally responsive trauma-informed whole-school approach emerges. In this view, the unique identity and ethnic history of each student is honored and understood through the lens of resilience and emergence from oppression. (Blitz et al., 2016, p. 539)

School leaders must help all within the school address the whole child, including the social, emotional, and mental health needs. In doing so, students are likely to be more responsive and engaged in cognitive instructional practices related to 21st century competencies.

**Leaders Supporting Teachers in Implementation of 21st Century Skills**

As stated in Chapter 1, high stake accountability has changed the way school leaders/principals lead their schools as they strive to meet mandated reform efforts and increase student achievement for all students. Because diversity is a reality and urban schools are filled with a larger population of minoritized students, it is even more important that school leaders become committed to ensuring that all students are provided effective learning opportunities embedded with 21st century skills. Schoen and Fusarelli (2008) indicated that “twenty-first century skills required a new type of leader who understands
systems thinking, can work collaboratively, is flexible, innovative, resourceful, and able to access and apply new information to solve complex problems” (p. 185).

Symonds, Schwartz, and Ferguson (2011) asserted that students in high school dropped out because they felt that the learning was not relevant nor did it provide a pathway to achieving their dreams. From the voices of the students, “classes were boring and not interesting” (p. 10). Saavedra and Opfer (2012) suggested nine lessons that principals can use to help teachers implement 21st century learning:

• Make it relevant. Effective teachers must make learning relevant by looking at the curriculum and creating lessons relevant to students lives. Perkins (2010) suggested beginning with generative topics across content. In doing so, students will be able to resonate with their learning, the learning of others, as well as with the teacher. The use of technology can help students reflect on their thinking and the thinking of others while collaborating and seeing the big picture of what they are learning (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012, p. 10).

• Teach through the discipline. Teachers must not teach skills and knowledge in isolation. Although students must learn the skills associated with the production of knowledge within the discipline, they must also be able to transfer those skills throughout all content areas (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

• Develop thinking skills. Teach students low-order and high-order thinking skills. Teachers must probe thought-provoking questions and explicitly develop high order things skills (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

• Encourage learning transfer. Teachers must help students apply what they have learned to other disciplines and to their lives. Transfer involves skills, concepts, knowledge, attitudes, and/or strategies. If explicit attention is given to this process students can cultivate it (Perkins, 2010).

• Teach students how to learn. Teachers need to teach students how to care about learning and help them become aware of how they learn. When students know themselves as learners, they are more willing to put forth a greater effort. Through metacognition students can examine their thinking as the teacher models for them what it looks and sound likes. Students can learn to talk through any misconceptions they may have and find ways to clear them up (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).
• Address misunderstandings directly. Teachers must teach students how to construct new understanding, especially when they hold on to misconceptions. “Modeling misunderstandings and explicitly addressing them helps improve and deepen students’ understanding (Grotzer & Basca, 2003).

• Treat teamwork like an outcome. Collaboration is an important skill. Teachers can design lessons in which students share their thinking in small groups, or solve problems using cooperative learning strategies. Teaching student how to debate, or work through a given issue is key (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

• Exploit technology to support learning. Teachers can have students use technology by providing them new ways to develop their thinking, problem solve, and communicate. Technology can allow students to research and find different perspectives on what they are learning. The tools of technology can be used to create learning experiences and to actively and meaningfully pull students into the content (Bassesdowski & Petrucka, 2013).

• Foster creativity. Teachers need to allow students to explain their new knowledge through the use of creativity as well as making it relevant to students’ lives. Creativity motivates students to learn and increase participation and engagement (Saavedra & Opfer, 2012).

Understanding these survival skills to support 21st century learning in the classroom is key, but Zhao (2015) pointed out the urgent need for improved practices by educators and offered recommendations that policy makers and educators need to act on that guarantee educational excellence. He suggested the need to stop teaching students a narrow set of content that focuses on curriculum, standards, and testing and begin personalizing it to support the development of students’ unique, creative, and entrepreneurial talents. Zhao stressed the need to empower students and give them ownership of their learning. Moreover, he contended that educators need to allow students the opportunity to engage in creative authentic projects and learn about their interests. In doing so, educators will be investing in the excellence of students’ future success.

To understand how school leaders can develop 21st century skills to better equip students, Basten, Evers, Geijsel and Vermeulen (2018) collaborated with two groups of
schools, “Oak Tree” and Pine Tree,” two board chairpersons, and 13 elementary school principals to investigate how learning networks of teachers could be supported with the use of 21st century leadership skills for classroom learning. A significant question was related to what competencies and repertories for actions were needed by principals to lead schools as learning organizations. Data collection involved two rounds of interviews about dilemmas related to management and coordination of networks and competencies regarding experiences connected to 21st century skills and practices. Findings of round two of the interviews revealed that four of the 13 principals made managerial statements about learning, and two framed learning as double looped or triple looped, which suggested that people learn from each other. Most of the principals wanted more support on how to communicate about learning with their teachers and to ask critical questions and use inquiry learning. The second round of interviews indicated several questions that needed to be addressed: (a) What language should be used for developing the capacity for a collective process and progress toward acquiring 21st century skills? (b) How might principals be more willing to collaborate toward developing in-depth learning to acquire 21st century education? Future implications of the project suggested that when researchers and practitioners collaborate, the practitioners—in this case the principals—must develop their own inner logic that they can use to enhance their practices. Both principals and teachers have to learn individually and collectively; simultaneously, they must also attend to becoming culturally competent school leaders for meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students.
Culturally Competent School Leaders

For many years, African American, Latinx, Asian, Native American, students of color, and Pacific Islander American students, have been marginalized in schools by inequalities based on their race, ethnicity, and language (Paris & Ball, 2009). These inequalities may be linked to deficit thinking and approaches that teachers have about their students that hinder their abilities to function in ways that honor their cultures and who they are as learners. The languages of home, community, and students’ cultural ways of being they bring to the classroom are often not considered in the curriculum and instructional practices of schools. Paris (2012), in the examination of these cultural elements, asserted, “The dominant language, literacy, and culture practices demanded by schools fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society” (p. 93). Practices void of the cultures and backgrounds of diverse students may be attributed to low expectations and perceptions teachers have about the students they teach, which impact teaching and learning. Figure 4 provides an example of how teachers’ expectations of their students’ learning as a result of their perceptions, either high or low, are contributing influences on students’ academic achievement.

As noted in Figure 4, teachers with high expectations for student learning demonstrate rigorous instruction through culturally responsive pedagogy and high engagement and participation with students; they motivate students by helping them set goals for themselves. They are not driven by deficit thinking, and their beliefs about the children they teach are derived from understanding the nature of culture and leaning (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2010). These high demanding teachers are not fearful of
sharing their personal experiences of family, home, and community, or talking with students about socio-political circumstances of their lives, including race (Delpit, 1995, Gay, 2010, Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Their behaviors are culturally congruent, they have positive relationships with students, and they motivate and involve them in learning through their interests, experiences, and cultural backgrounds, which leads to engaged and self-motivated learners (Gay, 2010; Muhammad, 2018; Nieto, 2010, Valencia, 2010).
Figure 4. Factors that may contribute to teachers’ expectations and perceptions of their students’ academic achievement.

Conversely, teachers with low expectations for student learning are often driven by deficit thinking regarding the children they teach, and they are more likely to use
mainstream Eurocentric curriculum and instruction that tends to alienate diverse students from learning (Howard, 2010; Sue, 2003). They are not interested in understanding students of color and poor students as learners or exploring their cultural backgrounds and interests. Teachers who operate with deficit paradigms, are more apt to use limited instructional approaches and feedback that engineer poor engagement and low participation because they contend that students must conform to current practices and programs or take the risk of failing (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

These factors are further outlined in the discussion of deficit thinking and approaches related to how school organizations and systems may function in working with students of poverty and students of color, African American, Latinx, and other diverse students (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Weiner, 2006). The following sections explore the topics of deficit thinking, teacher expectations, and culturally relevant pedagogy. These three areas are inter-related and are important to the success of students, especially minoritized students. Culturally competent leaders must help to illuminate deficit thinking about students and promote high academic expectations through culturally relevant pedagogy as they lead their schools.

**Deficit Thinking Theories**

Deficit thinking has a long history in educational research that examined how diverse students were labeled or identified based on assumptions and perceptions about their cultural backgrounds and their families (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Often educators become stuck and hinder reform efforts for systemic change because of their unwillingness to assume responsibility for effective teaching in learning, leading to students’ low achievement and performance. Valencia (2010) argued:
Deficit thinking posits that students who fail in school do so because of alleged internal deficiencies (such as cognitive and/or motivational limitations) or shortcomings socially linked to the student such as familial deficits and dysfunctions. Given the endogenous nature of deficit thinking, systemic factors (for example, school segregation; inequalities in school financing; curriculum differentiation) are held blameless in explaining why some students fail in school. (p. x)

Deficit thinking theories refer to the labeling of poor students of color and their families as disadvantaged, at risk, and uninvolved (Johnson, 1994; Walker, 2011). Several researchers have suggested that deficit thinking has implications for the teaching practices of public-school educators (Delpit, 1995; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 2010). First, educators who practice deficit thinking often use students’ backgrounds as excuses for failure. Secondly, many believe that students of color are less competent, intelligent, capable, and self-motivated. Third, deficit thinking, embedded in educational thought and practices, often results in culturally diverse students being placed in low-level classes, categorized as special education, and more severely punished in comparison to their White counterparts (Harry, Klingner, & Moore, 2000; Skrla, & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 1997). These practices affect students’ performance and place them at the lower percentile of any form of assessments including grade point averages, graduation rates, and college entry exams (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 2010). Weiner (2006) implied teacher assumptions and school practices that emerge from the deficit paradigm often hinder teachers’ abilities to teach the most marginalized students. She insisted that urban teachers must question unspoken assumptions about the sources of their students’ struggles. Doing so allows a disruption of the deficit paradigm. During the implementation of a professional development program, Weiner challenged teachers to focus on teaching and learning in urban schools. Through several exercises, she guided teachers in uncovering,
contextualizing, and challenging tacit assumptions and helped them to critically examine deficient explanations. For example, teachers used school data to determine if African American males were disproportionately placed in special education and received high disciplinary actions. Another teacher examined chronic behavior problems of students in her class. The teachers experienced a process that allowed them to only talk about the good things the students were able to do while refraining from negative views. In order to resist negative categorization, they used a reframing process that allowed them to see the strengths of students. The reframing process included the following steps: (a) Describe problem behaviors in neutral, observable terms; (b) Identify positive characteristics or contributions students demonstrate in classroom settings; and (c) Create new, positive perspectives—a frame that can be articulated to students in short sentences. Teachers were encouraged to communicate the new frame and act on it and to not refer back to previous frames. This process helped teachers realize that when they refrained from deficit thinking and identified the strengths in their students, they were likely to view their students in more positive ways.

Although a considerable amount of literature has been published related to teachers’ deficit thinking, there have been few empirical investigations of displacement of deficit thinking among school district leaders (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Skrla & Scheurich, 2004; Valencia, 2010). Skrla and Scheurich (2004) conducted a qualitative study to explore how school district leadership can displace/remove deficit thinking within their schools. Four Texas public school districts with a large student population—ranging from 8,000 to 50,000—served as the study sites. Each district had a high population of African American and Latinx students from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds. These districts were selected because of the performance of all student groups, including students from low
SES backgrounds, who performed 80% or higher in reading, math, and writing on the Texas state assessment. Prior data, before the study of the Texas accountability system, indicated that all children were not being educated equally and exposed the limited academic effects the superintendents had on districts that operated under a deficit paradigm.

The board members, central office staff, principals, teachers, parents, and community members participated in interviews regarding the four superintendents’ leadership and influence on the transformation of their districts (Skrla & Scheurich, 2004). Observations were conducted at the district office and school sites, and related documents were collected, such as student achievement data from the Texas accountability system. The results of the data identified five ways that district leadership operated to displace deficit thinking:

- Provide visible evidence that the districts are not serving all students equally.
- Confront racial and socio-economic class educational inequity and mandate improvement for all student groups.
- Force the superintendent to find exemplars of successful classrooms and schools with diverse students and students from low socio-economic homes and grow those teachers as instructional leaders.
- Reevaluate deficit views and develop anti-deficit district leadership.
- Drive and increase high expectations and goals for academic achievement for all groups. (Skrla & Scheurich, p. 257)

The superintendents all stated that the Texas high-stakes accountability system, with the mission that all kids can learn, played a major role in assisting district leaders to alter deficit norms in their school districts. The superintendents indicated that the Texas high-stakes accountability system helped them grow as instructional leaders. The system forced them to
look at data through a different lens and to confront inequitable achievement, target areas of
dysfunction, examine disaggregated group data, and change their deficit thinking/views
while moving the academic success and levels of all students. This study provided an
example of what district leaders can do to alter the practices of an entire district; however, it
is equally important to examine more closely the assumptions and beliefs of building-level
teachers that must change in order for school leaders to promote transformation of classroom
practices (Caruthers & Friend, 2016; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Thompson, 2004).

Students are aware when teachers have deficit thinking, negative perceptions, and
low expectations of them and their abilities. Caruthers and Friend (2016) pointed out several
deficit theories that researchers have used to explain the underachievement of poor and
culturally diverse students. These theories included the deficit-deprivation theory
(Thompson, 2004); theory of structural inequality (Thompson, 2004); theory of cultural
discontinuity (Sue, 2003); the fourth-grade failure theory (Kunjufu, 1985; Thompson, 2004);
acting white theory (Bergin & Cooks, 2002; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004); and
parents are at fault theory (Auerbach, 2007; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Finnan & Swanson,
2000; Thompson, 2004).

The deficit-deprivation theory, according to Bernstein’s (1973) seminal research,
proposed that children from the working class in comparison to the middle and upper class
have limited competencies as a result of their social and economic background. This theory
claims that there is a hierarchy of intelligence based on class (Thompson, 2004). Through
the lens of cultural deprivation, persistent explanations of social and economic inequities are
given in terms of genetic differences (Valencia 1986). Ladson-Billings (1999), in her earlier
work, pointed out that teachers often blamed disproportionate academic problems among
low status students as largely due to pathologies or deficits in their sociocultural backgrounds. Poor socio-economic status of African American and Latinx families are often viewed in negative ways, depicting the family unit as the reason for low achievement of children. Fathers are perceived as inadequate and mothers as poor teachers for their children, unable to communicate the value and importance of education (Valencia, 1997). Isreal and Dorcas (2013) asserted,

the middle class excels in school not because of a high IQ but because his [their] language code coincides with the one used at school and that of the working class his [their] language code is not adequate in educational discourse. (p. 285)

As systems allow deficit thinking to play out in schools, White and Asian students will continue to be categorized as being affluent in comparing them with African American and Latinx students. Teachers’ approaches to learning can make or break diverse students; they can undermine reform efforts with their deficit beliefs about what African American and Latinx students are able to do and learn (Finnan & Swanson, 2000). In contrast, reflective teachers who examine and alter their beliefs and practices may be more capable of providing multiple learning opportunities that require engagement and critical thinking for all students.

The second theory of underachievement is the theory of structural inequality, defined as the condition in which certain people are seen as “less than” in terms of other people, and inequality is perpetuated by commonly accepted notions of inequality inherent in society (Thompson, 2004). Structural inequality in schools perpetuates and reinforces unequal practices, decisions, and rights that limit learning opportunities and achievement for African American, Latinx, Native American, and other culturally diverse students. This theory, practiced in schools, supports deficit views and the belief that the solution for improvement
are beyond the school districts’ and teachers’ control and influence (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Weiner, 2006).

The third theory of underachievement is the theory of cultural discontinuity that Sue (2003) affirmed as “the individual, institutional, and cultural expression of the superiority of one group’s cultural heritage (its values, language, customs and practices) over another combined with the possession of power to impose those standards broadly over the less powerful group” (p. 71). Defined as a school-based behavioral process, this theory implies curricula and instructional practices that diverse students are exposed to in schools reflect mainstream cultural values and are rooted in Western or European worldviews. The learning practices and preferences of diverse students from home or parental socialization activities are not valued at schools (Baker, 2005; Bohn, 2003; Boykin, 1986; Deyhel, 1995; Gay, 2000). Ramirez, Castaneda and Herold’s (1974) seminal research suggested that when this theory is practiced in schools, it strips students of their cultural identity. Mehan (1998) added that “low-income, ethnic and linguistic diverse students are forced under normal circumstances, to learn the tacit rules of the classroom culture” (p. 249).

Gay (2002) confirmed the need for culturally responsive teaching to be used and implemented in the classroom to support the learning needs of diverse youth. She defined culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). Gay added that this change is imperative in order to ameliorate underachievement. In order for teachers to be prepared for culturally responsive teaching, Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggested that “teacher educators must articulate a vision of teaching and learning in a diverse society and use that vision to
systematically guide the infusion of multi-cultural issues throughout a preservice curriculum” (p. 21). Based on Villegas and Lucas’s work with preservice teachers, their understanding of research and theories of culturally responsive practices, and observations of classroom teachers working with diverse students, they offered six characteristics/strands that they defined as culturally responsive teaching. These included sociocultural consciousness, an affirming attitude toward students from culturally diverse backgrounds, commitment and skills to act as agents of change, constructivist views of learning, knowing about the lives of students, and culturally responsive teaching practices. Their framework is grounded in the premises that a prominent role of schools is to uphold a more equitable and just society and that diversity is worthy of affirmation (Villegas & Lucas).

The fourth theory that Thompson (2004) identified is called the fourth-grade failure syndrome, which examines the downward spiral of fourth grade African American boys who start school with academic success, but once they enter the intermediate grades they encounter failure. Kunjufu (1995) indicated in his study of African American boys that they stop caring about school at the end of elementary school, and they recognize how teachers cease their efforts to nurture and promote their achievement as early as fourth grade. He contended that teachers encouraged apathy and disengagement in ways that fail to stimulate and promote learning for them (p. 104). At the intermediate level of elementary schooling, African American males become aware of their identity, physical differences, issues of race based on what is taught by teachers in the hidden curriculum, lesson plans, non-structured school activities, and soon become cognizant of differential treatment (Noguera, 2003).

Historically, deficit thinking of African American males places them as over-represented in classifications that link them to negative discipline behaviors and assumptions
as low achievers (Lee, 2000). They are disproportionately overrepresented in special education classes (Harry et al., 2000); these youth are labeled as behavior problems (Hilliard, 1991; Noguera, 2003); they are over-represented in low rates of high school completion (Lynn, Bacon, Toten, Bridges, & Jennings, 2010) as well as underprepared for the rigors of college level work (Bonner & Bailey, 2006; Palmer, Davis, & Hilton, 2009; Palmer & Young, 2009). When educators begin to understand how environmental and cultural forces interact and influence academic outcomes and how these factors shape the relationship between identity—particularly related to race and gender—and school performance, they will begin to see that African American males are not all at risk, and do have success in school and in life (Noguera, 2003).

Harper and Davis (2012) conducted a qualitative study to explore what compels Black male students to care so much about education, despite what is consistently reported in the literature regarding their gradual disinvestment in schooling. Out of the 304 applications and essays collected, ten Black males were selected to participate in the study. Seven of them attended predominantly White universities, and three attended Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The applicants applied to participate in the Grad Prep Academy at the University of Pennsylvania, aspiring to earn Ph.D.’s in the field of education. Through the analysis of the essays and interviews with the ten participants, viewpoints on pressing problems in American education were noted. The researchers were able to gain insights on how students shaped their philosophies of education, their investment in education systems that constantly criticized them, and how they reconciled career commitments to education alongside prior encounters with inequitable schooling (Harper & Davis). Through the lens of counter-narratives, three themes emerged: awareness
of educational inequities, belief in education as the great equalizer, and purposeful pursuits of the Ph.D. in education. The findings indicated that Black men do care about education despite how schools, institutions, and policies embody deficit thinking and practices about them, their families, and communities. While these young men experienced success in school, African American students who manage to become successful despite deficit thinking about their lives are often accused of acting White by their peers.

The fifth theory of underachievement is called the acting white theory, conceptualized by Fordham and Ogbu (1986) that suggested African American youth view doing well in school as acting white. Additionally, Edmin (2016) pointed out that teachers may perceive being Black as not wanting to do well in school. The acting white theory argues that African American students have to choose between their academic success or loss of their racial identity to keep from being banned by their peers. Bergin and Cooks (2002) interviewed 38 African American and Latinx students to investigate the fear of acting white. Twenty-eight participants from underrepresented families in higher education were in an EXCEL scholarship program that required a B average, and ten were in a comparison group, all of whom were high achievers. Of the 28 students, 21 were high school seniors and seven were high school juniors. The ten students in the comparison group were freshmen in college. The researchers asked: Did students report avoiding academic achievement in order to avoid appearing to act white? Did students perceive that they had given up ethnic identity in order to do well in school? The findings indicated that students did not report avoiding academic achievement in order to avoid accusations of acting white, and most of them did not feel any loss of ethnic identity. Although the students in this study felt resentment toward the accusations of acting white, they did not let the accusations intimidate them. If
anything, they were motivated and felt affiliated with groups of students of like mind.

Bergin and Cooks asserted:

> Students of color in predominantly white schools are less likely to be accused of acting white at school because there are so few students of color. On the other hand, students of color in predominantly black schools seem likely to be harassed about acting white if their behaviors go beyond high achievement and shows “proper speech;” or “white dress,” or preference for other “white things. Students in this study named acting white as acting stuck up, hanging around white students, and dressing preppy. (p.131)

In conclusion, they stated, “We did not hear a single comment from students admitting that they had altered their behaviors, reduced their effort, or earned poor grades in order to avoid accusations of acting white” (p.132). Noguera (2003) pointed out that Fordham and Ogbu’s acting white theory does not consider the culture dynamics that operate in schools, especially among Black males:

> Black males may engage in behaviors that contribute to their underachievement and marginality, but they are also more likely to be channeled into marginal roles and to be discouraged from challenging themselves by adults who are supposed to help them. Finally, and most important, Ogbu and Fordham fail to take into account the fact that some Black students, including males, find ways to overcome the pressures exerted on them and manage to avoid choosing between their racial and gender identity and academic success. Even if few in number, there are students who manage to maintain their identities and achieve academically without being ostracized by their peers. (pp. 444-445)

The African American and Latinx students in the Bergin and Cooks study were able to resist the notion of acting white in order to choose among success and ethnic identity.

The last theory of underachievement is called the parents are at fault theory (Auerbach, 2007; Thompson, 2004), which views parents of students of color as non-involved and non-caring of schooling and their children’s education. In actuality, that is not the case. Many parents of color are concerned about their children’s education; however, they may demonstrate their concerns in ways different than those expected by schools. To
understand Latinx parental involvement in education, Zarate (2007) examined Latinx parents’ perceptions of their participation in the education of their children and teachers’ expectations of parent involvement; programmatic initiatives addressing parental involvement in education; and Latinx students’ perceptions of the role of parental involvement in their education. Three sites—Miami, New York, and Los Angeles—with a significant amount of diverse Latinx representation, were selected for the study with three focus groups of eight to ten Latinx parents from each area. The focus groups were conducted in Spanish and in English. Fifty-three percent of the participants were females, and most had not graduated from high school; 85% of the parents were foreign born and had lived an average of 21 years in the U.S. Participants were primarily of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican origin. Additionally, open-ended 30-minute interviews were conducted with 15 recruited participants consisting of teachers, counselors, and administrators who represented three culturally diverse middle schools and two high schools from each area. Two focus groups of ten Latinx high school students, juniors and seniors who attended an outreach program to prepare them for college, were conducted from the Los Angeles site; their parents had not completed high school. Fourteen directors or coordinators of parental-involvement programs were also interviewed. In order to be selected to participate in the study, the organization had to have an active parental involvement component and serve at least one of three study sites (Zarate, 2007).

The data indicated that different stakeholders had distinct definitions and perceptions of Latinx’s parent involvement in education. The findings revealed that schools were not clear about goals and objectives related to how Latinx parents could best serve in schools. The study provided recommendations for teachers and administrators as well as
representatives of parent organizations. Latinx parents expressed distinct ways that they were involved in the education of their children in other than traditional ways, such as: attend parent teacher conferences, family math and reading nights, ask questions about homework, discuss future planning, an awareness of their child’s peer groups and interaction with peers’ parents, monitor school attendance, volunteer to observe, and visit school environment. Recommendations such as clear goals and objectives for parent involvement, schedule events during hours and days most convenient for parents, create spaces in the school for parents’ use, and provide incentives for parents when volunteering hours at the school were offered by Latinx parents.

These recommendations gave me insight as a building leader of how I can better support Latinx parent involvement in my school as well as help teachers implement effective practices when communicating and involving all parents in the school community. When schools are not clear about goals and objectives for parent involvement, the lack of clarity can impact teachers’ expectations and beliefs about their students and their parents. In some instances, when parents do not participate in the traditional ways schools expect of them, including attending parent activities, helping in classroom, parent teacher conferences, and volunteering to accompany teachers on field trips, they may not be viewed as interested in their children’s education. These teachers’ assumptions about the parents and their children often result in low teacher expectations about the academic and behavior expectations of students of color and students from high poverty backgrounds.

**Low Teacher Expectations**

Teachers expectations, either high or low, can guide teachers’ beliefs, actions, and behaviors regarding how they view their students and teach them. Seminal researchers
(Badad, 1993; Brophy, 1982; Cooper & Good, 1983; Good, 1987; Jussim, Smith, Madon, & Palumbo, 1998; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Weinstein, 2002) documented that expectations have positive or negative effects on student learning. Teacher expectations can be classified in two ways: sustaining expectations effects and self-fulfilling prophecies. Good and Brophy (2003) posited, “sustaining expectations effects occur when teachers expect students to continue to act or perform according to previously established patterns and may disregard contradictory evidence of change” (p. 430). Weinstein (2002) argued that, “self-fulfilling prophecy effects occur when an initially erroneous belief leads to its fulfillment” (p. 430). He contended that teacher expectations are based on a variety of student factors including gender, race and ethnicity, social class, diagnostic labels such behaviors and special education, age of the student, language, test scores, social skills, and parent background.

Tenenbaum and Ruck (2007) explored teachers’ expectations through the lens of race and ethnicity and found that teachers have lower academic expectations for Latinx and African American students than for White and Asian students. “In a meta-analysis of 24 studies, teachers’ beliefs about the abilities of African American children were generally lower than the abilities of White children. Fifty-four percent of the White students were expected to out-perform the average African American students” (Tenenbaum & Ruck, p. 254). Harry and Klingner (2014) investigated teacher expectations though the labeling of African American students and discovered that low expectations of them contributed to African American students being overrepresented in referrals for special education, while other researchers suggest they are underrepresented in gifted and talented programs (Ford,
Due to these factors of disproportionality, achievement gaps and opportunities to learn for African American and Latinx students will continue to be concerns. Nichols and Good (2004) found that achievement gap will decrease if diverse students are given opportunities to enhance their learning guided by their teachers. They added that teachers who demonstrate low expectations do so with African American and Latinx students who come from poor low SES backgrounds and attend low-performing schools. As noted in the previous section, the deficit thinking of teachers is related to low expectations and the ways it influences teachers’ support of student learning and behaviors in comparison to those for whom they hold high expectations.

In examining teacher expectations of 21 teachers (18 males and three males) through the lens of ethnicity, Rubie-Davies, Hattie, and Hamilton (2006) surveyed differences in teachers’ expectations and judgments of students’ reading performance at the beginning and end of the school year with a seven-point Likert scale for 88 Maori students, 97 Pacific Islanders, 94 Asian students, and 261 European students who attended 12 different schools in New Zealand. Nine of the teachers taught in low SES schools, and 12 taught in high SES schools. Maori and Pacific Island students were more frequently found in low SES schools, and New Zealand European and Asian students were found in high SES schools. Results of Reading running records were collected and revealed that teachers had significant differences in expectations and judgments of achievement in Reading based on students’ ethnicity using the survey measures. When comparing Maori students to New Zealand, European, Asian, and Pacific Island students, Maori students scored below all other ethnic
groups in reading. Comparisons of teachers’ expectations at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the year revealed a significant difference between Maori and European students and Maori and Asian students and between European and Pacific Island students in teachers’ expectations for achievement and actual achievement in reading. The end of the year data showed similar results; teachers’ expectations and judgment for Maori and Pacific Island students were low in comparison to European and Asian students. Essentially, data reflected that teachers had high expectations and judgments for ethnicity groups from higher socio-economic schools and low expectations of students of lower socio-economic status schools.

Observations and interviews with students in an urban middle school located in Texas disclosed ways teachers’ expectations for behavior are different for students of color and White European American students (Morris, 2005). The educational experiences of African American girls, Latinx boys, and White and Asian girls and boys were explored. Findings were:

School officials tend to interpret African American girls as not “ladylike” and Latino boys as oppositional and potentially dangerous, and disciplined these students regularly. White and Asian American students, by contrast, were seen as less problematic, even though they lived in the same low-income area, and these students often avoided discipline. (p. 29)

As Morris’s (2005) research implied, the expectations for student behaviors are likely to influence student engagement with learning. When students are engaged with learning, they are curious and excited about learning, teachers and students learn from each other, and there is less disruption in learning (Harcourt & Keen, 2012). Disengagement demonstrates negative discipline behaviors.
These studies support the hypothesis that when teachers have negative beliefs and assumptions about certain ethnicity groups, they may lower their academic and behavioral expectations, alter their teaching practices, and deny opportunities to learn for poor and culturally diverse students. There is a need for culturally competent leaders to encourage teachers to examine their beliefs and dismantle deficits perspectives about the students they teach in order to close the achievement gaps identified in schools. In 2001, Garcia and Guerra explored how to change deficit thinking through collaborative staff development projects with 69 teachers who worked in schools with high enrollments of students from diverse sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds. Through the work of effective intercultural communication training with elements of effective staff-development design drawn from multicultural and general education, five major assumptions were identified: (a) deficit thinking permeates society; schools and teachers mirror these beliefs; (b) professional development in diversity is not just for White educators; (c) intercultural communication permeates every aspect of schooling; (d) cultural sensitivity and awareness do not automatically result in equity practices; and (e) professional development activities must systematically and explicitly link equity knowledge to classroom practices (Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

During staff development, the participants used a variety of problem-based activities and exercises that helped them analyze a problematic situation and hypothesize about factors involved, devise alternative cultural explanations, and identify culturally responsive strategies to resolve the problem. The researchers also addressed with the participants’ deficit beliefs and assumptions that often target African American and Latinx students, such
as overgeneralizations about family backgrounds and writing students off before they come to school.

Three years later, in 2004, the researchers replicated the study with 29 teachers, 15 principals, and two central office administrators, conducting 33 hours of professional development. Although the staff development experience created discomfort with some participants, the findings revealed that those who engaged in the process increased their awareness of culture in educational settings, questioned and rejected previous negative views, and recognized their roles in student learning and success. The participants shifted their thinking and practices and began to understand how to better support students of color and poor students. This study validated the need for school leaders to have the skill set to address issues of race, equity, and deficit thinking in supporting student learning.

Culturally competent leaders must train and develop staff with culturally relevant practices to support more equitable learning environments. Culturally relevant pedagogical practices can lead to the engagement of students. When teachers view the culture and background of students as assets, they are less likely to view them through a deficit lens and have high expectations for academics and behavior. Asset orientations and thinking can erode negative beliefs and assumptions about students of color and students of poverty. Asset orientations must be included in the day-to-day work of teachers and school leaders. In the final section, I discuss culturally relevant pedagogy and how it can be used to support curriculum and instruction, leading to student learning and achievement.

**Culturally Relevant Pedagogy**

In understanding how children are exposed to culturally relevant pedagogy and the importance of bringing students’ cultures into the classroom, I use the terms culturally
relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive practices, interchangeably. When I make
reference to culturally relevant practices in school, I am speaking, in general, to both of
these. Culturally relevant pedagogy was developed by Ladson-Billings in 1992 when she
identified the instructional tool as a way to explain and uncover the ways in which the
teacher develops cultural knowledge to maximize student learning opportunities. When
implemented, it links principles of learning with deep understanding of and appreciation for
culture (Ladson-Billings, 2010). As stated in Chapter 1, Ladson-Billings (1992) found that
culturally relevant pedagogy in a classroom setting is significant to the education of African
American students. Through her work in *The Dreamkeepers*, she studied successful
practices of teachers who taught African American students. She posited that teachers
exhibited characteristics believing that all students can learn, portraying what achievement
means in the content and classroom, demonstrating how to teach the content, how to support
critical consciousness towards the curriculum as well as how to encourage academic
achievement. “Culturally relevant pedagogy teaches to and through strengths of these
students” (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 29).

Since the development of *The Dreamkeepers*, other seminal researchers
(Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) supported the belief that culturally relevant instruction is an
effective means of meeting the academic and social needs of culturally diverse students
(Gay, 2000; Howard, 2001; Shade et al., 1997). Gay’s earlier work dealt with multicultural
school curriculum in 1995 (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012), and in 2000 she began to focus
on culturally responsive teaching to express “the cultural knowledge, prior experiences,
frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning
more relevant and effective for students” (Gay, 2000, p. 106).
Milner (2010) saw culturally relevant pedagogy as “an approach that serves to empower students to the point that 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” (p. 68). Through culturally relevant pedagogy, teachers raise their level of consciousness about themselves, their practices, and their students by creating a learning environment that accepts, appreciates, and values students’ cultures and backgrounds while educating them.

Milner (2010) identified outcomes for students based on the experiences and the relationships of culturally relevant pedagogy. The outcomes that he described are categorized in three areas. The first outcome is empowerment. With empowerment, students are able to examine what they are learning, construct meaning, and engage within and outside of the classroom successfully (Milner). The second outcome is that students see their culture in the curriculum and instruction and understand how their culture contributes to society with an understanding of the importance of their culture. Third, students are challenged to understand society and how society works (Milner). These outcomes relate to the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy that Ladson-Billings (2006) described as academic achievement: “What is it that students are able to know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (p. 37); sociopolitical consciousness, which “help[s] students use the various skills they learn to better understand and critique their social position and context” (p. 37); and cultural competence, which is about students’ acquisition of culture knowledge regarding their own cultural ways and systems of knowing.

Based on the understanding of these tenets, Milner (2010) conducted a study for 19 months and focused on how teachers developed cultural knowledge and competence to teach
effectively in a Title I urban middle school comprised of 354 students, majority African Americans. The participant of the study was a white male science teacher who had three years of teaching experience and had been nominated and selected by his colleagues as teacher of the year. Observations, documents, and semi-structured interviews were conducted by the researcher as they spent a half day up to two days in the school each week. He focused on the teacher’s struggles, issues he experienced in the school and in the classroom with students including teaching and learning, classroom management, parent involvement, curriculum, and ways the teacher made decisions about learning opportunities for students.

Through narrative analysis, results indicated that the participant was able to demonstrate cultural knowledge and competence while teaching effectively in his school. The teacher’s mindset was a contributing factor to how he saw his students and what he expected from them. He demonstrated and sustained meaningful authentic relationships with his students, he understood students’ identities while confronting matters of race, and he created a culture of collaboration with his students and staff and viewing teaching as a communal affair (Milner, 2010). The researcher implied that the participant of this study demonstrated culturally relevant pedagogy practices by building cultural competence daily. His intentionality of how students engaged, conducted themselves, learned, and achieved in the classrooms provided what teachers can do to better support their students.

While Milner (2010) focused on a single participant and the use of culturally relevant pedagogy, Mayfield and Garrison-Wade (2015) sought to understand culturally responsive practices as a whole school reform. They identified specific culturally responsive practices pertaining to leadership, parent engagement, learning environment, pedagogy, student
management, and shared beliefs that a middle school used while successfully closing the achievement gap between White and African American students. The selection of the school was determined by demographic data (African American, Latinx, and White) of students’ growth rates, calculated and compared to students’ state assessment scores over five consecutive years in reading and math. Twenty-seven staff members participated in the study including the principal, two assistant principals, and three deans of student management. Observations, interviews, and focus groups were collected and analyzed.

The findings revealed that culturally responsive practices were confirmed in five areas: leadership, parent engagement, learning environment, pedagogy, and shared beliefs. Through leadership the principals communicated equitable educational practices as they interacted with parents, students, and staff; teachers were held accountable for integrating culturally relevant content, framed academic conversations, and created space for ongoing learning in culturally competency (Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2012). Parents were empowered as leaders to conduct professional development for teachers on how to work with students from diverse backgrounds, address and have conversations about race, as well as give teachers feedback after they observe them teach. The learning environment was filled with artifacts of all cultures, teachers communicated strong messages of high expectations for all students, and the integration of culture into the curriculum and instructional practices were noted. Monitoring of how kids were treated and called upon while engaging in instruction supported the overall achievement of diverse students. The staff collectively had a shared belief that all students can learn, will learn and deserved a quality education. Using professional development as a conduit to have ongoing
conversations about race with staff led to the promotion of culturally responsive practices used by all staff members in supporting the learning environment and success of all students.

In supporting the work of Ladson-Billing, Paris (2012) developed the language of culturally sustaining pedagogy and believed that it is a needed change in stance, terminology, and practice. Paris (2012) posited:

Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster to sustain linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of schooling for positive social transformation. It positions dynamic cultural dexterity as a necessary good, and sees the outcome of leaning as additive rather than subtractive, as remaining whole rather than framed as broken, as critically enriching strengths rather than replacing deficits. (p. 1)

He argued that educators need to go much deeper with the relevant and responsiveness of this practice while teaching and embracing cultural pluralism and cultural equality. Paris and Alim (2017) emphasize cultures need to be more than accommodated, they need to be maintain; “cultures are both fluid and complex, sometimes containing elements that need to be problematized (e.g., misogyny and homophobia … (Parkhouse, Lu, & Massaro, 2019, p. 420). In conclusion, in order for culturally relevant pedagogies to take place and to be sustained in school environments. he required the school leader to not be afraid to lead their staffs in professional development activities and practices that address race, inequalities, and deficit perspectives of culturally diverse students and poor students. They must use these practices to help change school environments as they increase student achievement.

In examining the real-world experiences of practicing principals and how they deal with the cultural issues facing their schools, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) conducted a qualitative case study that aimed to examine the role of urban school principals as multicultural competent leaders. The participants included six school principals (four elementary and two secondary) all White, three females and three males (Gardiner &
Enomoto). Observations of principals and their work in schools, interviews about how they conceptualized their roles as multicultural leaders and the problems and challenges they faced, as well as documents of the schools’ websites, missions, and visions, and self-reported data were collected and analyzed. Relying on a cross-case analysis, the findings revealed that the principals had limited preparation in the multicultural measures of leadership (Gardiner & Enomoto). All six stated that they did not focus on multicultural issues during their preparation of principal credentials. Three of the principals stated that diversity issues were not the focus and their conversations about multicultural issues and concerns were limited with staff, while the other three committed to becoming multiculturally proficient. Those who demonstrated multicultural leadership practices held high expectations for all students, changed the cultural deficit perspectives of staff, communicated with students and tried to understand who they were, sought to learn unfamiliar cultures and ethnicities of their new students, hired new staff members and dismissed those who were willing to hold on to deficient views of students, trained and supported multiculturally proficient instruction, provided early interventions and learning opportunities as well as involved parents and community in their schools.

This study validated the need for preparation programs to include multicultural, responsive practices while training those aspiring to be principals. Gorski (2016) cautious educators against any approach that does not have in mind an equity and social justice agenda – multicultural education is often trivialized and reduced to celebrating diversity instead of addressing equity. Gorski stated,

Despite never consciously having decided to do so, I largely stopped using the term multicultural education in my scholarship, teaching, and teacher workshops. Looking back now, I probably did so because I worried based on my experience working with
schools that despite my commitment to centering equity and justice, the cultural nomenclature offered people a way out of that commitment. They could choose to focus on cultural diversity—on multicultural arts and crafts or on simplistic assignments in which students are forced to stereotype entire nations of people into a single “culture.” (p. 225)

In short, it takes reform efforts of local and state mandates, as well as college and university preparation programs to prepare leaders for culturally relevant practices. In the concluding section, I address ways that colleges and universities can prepare future leaders that also have implications for preparing teachers for teaching in urban schools. In most instances, principals who become leaders often start with teaching careers.

**School Leadership Preparation Programs**

I have emphasized throughout the literature how important school leaders/principals are to the success of a school. Principals, next to teachers, are known to be the most influential factor in schools and can make a difference in what teachers do to support student achievement and learning (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Marzano et al., 2005; McKibben, 2013). The influences that they have enable them to operate in ways that guide schools’ culture and climate, attitudes and classroom practices of teachers, including organization of curriculum and instruction, and students’ opportunities to learn (Smith, Frey, Pumpian, & Fisher, 2017; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2013; Milner, 2012).

As a heuristic researcher, I have reflected on my own preparation as a leader in an urban setting. Heuristic means to discover and find; it is a process of internal search that allows me to put myself and my own experiences into the research by getting personally involved with the problem being explored (Moustakas, 1985). Self-experience is the most important guideline in heuristic research. As a school leader/principal, I worked with co-researchers, the six elementary school principals, observing their daily practices to discover
the truths of their leaderships practices in working with students and staff. My involvement, self-awareness, and self-knowledge increased my level of understanding while co-researching with elementary principals regarding the phenomena of daily practices of urban principals. I aimed to be passionate yet committed as I illuminated or discovered the nature of others’ experiences. Through examining my own preparation program, I was able to make visible what this experience was like for me. What were the strengths of my preparation program? What knowledge and skills were missed in my preparation? Do I feel comfortable leading in urban schools This discussion is followed by current challenges of preparation programs and transformations for preparing urban leaders based on the research discussed in this section.

**My Preparation for Leading in Urban Schools**

After teaching for many years and seeing myself as an effective teacher, I knew it was time for me to go back to school and become an elementary school principal. I had a keen desire to become a principal. Working full time during the day and taking classes in the evening, I found it to be challenging, but yet rewarding. The university that I attended required five years of professional experience and other related requirements such as a minimum GPA of 2.75 and either the Miller’s Analogy or the Graduate Records Exam (GRE), and letters of recommendation from peers and supervisors. Cohorts of students from three different connected cities were included in the preparation program; students were expected to take six hours of classes per semester, until the completion of 35 hours. Classes were set up at a local community college. Some courses included full time instructors in the classroom, while others involved the instructor rotating to the three different sites and the use of satellites.
The courses required were those generally included in most preparation programs (Levine, 2005): analysis of research and methods, curriculum development, teaching and learning, educational psychology, child and adolescent development, school law, the principalship, and historical and philosophical foundations of education. In addition to these core courses, I took practicum I and II each semester. I found the courses to be useful because the program focused a lot on school leaders being effective instructional leaders. Reform efforts and mandates led by policymakers generate pressure for a strong focus on instruction. Many of the courses consisted of ways school leaders could support instructional practices and the curriculum—these were the strengths of the program. Many conversations took place in classes in which instructors spoke of the development of teachers and their instructional practices. During that time, classrooms were changing, with more diverse students from various cultural backgrounds. Although the university that I attended had a high focus on instruction, there were very few conversations regarding leading and coaching teachers in culturally diverse classrooms.

When I started as a vice-principal in an urban school, I felt knowledgeable about instruction, but less comfortable about how to help teachers support students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For instance, many of the students in the school were refugees from countries that spoke Swahili, Korean, Spanish, and Somali. There were as many as seven different languages and dialects in the school. Teachers are often not prepared to address such diversity and may bring deficit thinking, explored earlier in this chapter, about the backgrounds and the cultures of the children they teach. Various scholars in the field of multicultural education have suggested that deficit thinking can cause teachers to lower curricular expectations for students of color and English language learners (Delpit,
Researchers have suggested the need for educator preparation programs to “integrate anti-racist pedagogy into their curriculum in order to improve the cultural competency of our future principals and teachers....Various programs have done so, while others are moving in that direction” (Spikes, 2018, p. 2).

Johnson, Carpenter, Richards, and Vincent (2019) used a mixed methods design to study how pre-service teachers’ field experiences in an educator preparation program, where they were exposed to culturally responsive experiences, influenced their knowledge, beliefs, perspectives, and abilities related to teaching. A pre- and post- Likert scale survey was used to determine their beliefs, their reflections were examined related to teaching, and observations were conducted of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) meetings. While pre-service teachers expressed more confidence in their ability to perform culturally responsive tasks by the end of their first field experience, they were uncertain about why these tasks were important (Johnson et al.). The results of this study supported the need for school leaders to be knowledgeable about culturally responsive practices in order to help teachers implement these skills in their classrooms.

Preparation programs for school leaders often lack support for the needed knowledge and skills that teachers require to help diverse youth learn (Howard, 2010; Khalifa et al., 2016; Taylor Backor & Gordon, 2015). Much of the failure to address the issue of diversity is due to a long tradition of ignoring the role race plays in learning (Gay, 2010; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Howard, 2010). This is just one of the many challenges of leadership that school principals and other leaders face in today’s schools.
Challenges of Leadership Preparation Programs

The challenges 21st century leaders face have been examined in this review. In this section, I examined a comprehensive review of the challenges of leadership preparation programs related to many of the elements described in my preparation program. I find it imperative for schools leaders to be culturally responsive, which was an element missing in my preparation to ensure the academic success of all children regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, social economic status, and ability (Brown, 2004; Frattura & Capper, 2007; Brooks, Jean-Marie, Normore, & Hodgins, 2007; Gooden, Davis, Spikes, Hall, & Lee, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Secondly, I emphasize the importance of leaders understanding data and knowing what type of data to use and analyze in supporting teachers’ learning and development, curriculum and assessment, and ability to monitor and manage the learning environment.

Culturally competent school leaders. In order for school leaders to lead, it is essential that they first understand the nature of culture, which is difficult to define and has various definitions. Kumar, Zusho, and Bondie (2018) pointed to its multiple variations among theorists, researchers, and multiculturalists; however, they view culture as a means for people to use all of the resources that surround their environments to become successful; they suggest that culture is also “learned, shared and regulated by political, legal, and social systems” (p. 79). Moreover, as a social construct, culture consists of behaviors that can be observed and inferred within the individual; through interactions with other people and beliefs about themselves and the world, identity is formed (Revathy et al.). Hollins (2008) explained that culture and learning are connected. “Culture is viewed as the guide for feeling, thinking, and behaving, culture is central to school learning” (p. 14). While the
connections between culture and learning seem simplistic, Gay (2010) found it inconceivable that educators can successfully nurture the individuality of students if they do not get to know them; hence, principals must be culturally responsive leaders.

School leaders are often unsure of culturally competent leadership practices. Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbell Jones (2005) echoed the importance of culturally competent leadership:

Equitable, inclusive, and socially just practices, as manifested in the behaviors of individuals and groups, are critical aspects of a culturally competent and proficient school environment, therefore, school leaders must put in place ways of responding to the needs of diverse students. (p. 814)

Bustamante, Nelson and Onwuegbuzie (2009) conducted a mixed method study using the tool, Schoolwide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist, to conduct school culture audits with the goal of revealing school leaders’ views about how to respond to the needs of diverse groups. An internet questionnaire of open-and closed-ended questions were used to collect data from 151 school leaders from rural, suburban, and pre-k–12 urban districts; including superintendents, directors, coordinator, department heads, principals, professional school counselors, and leaders categorized as other. Four themes, considered barriers, emerged in the data analysis process. First, confusion in school leaders’ responses reflected that they were not sure who was actually responsible for promoting schoolwide cultural competence in the school setting; instead of viewing it as a collaborative approach, they viewed it as an individual approach. Second, school leaders questioned time and effort used to examine the cultural competence of their schools. They complained about lack of time with so many other responsibilities that needed more attention. Third, school leaders in this study were not knowledgeable and familiar with culturally responsive instructional
background knowledge or training, and they lacked professional development opportunities relevant to this practice. Lastly, school leaders’ personal biases were apparent. Negative attitudes and unwillingness to seek culturally responsive solutions to the schooling of culturally diverse and poor students were revealed. The study disclosed the value of equity audits for understanding why certain groups of students achieve and others do not. Students are more than a test score; only through understanding the connections between culture and learning can schools meet the needs of all learners.

Over the course of three years, Howard (2010) engaged with school leaders and staffs that made progress toward closing the achievement gap in schools attended by predominantly African American and Latinx students in low income urban settings. Two of the schools were elementary, grades kindergarten to five, located in Los Angeles and Chicago. The middle school and high school were both in Los Angeles County. He spent 1,000 hours during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 academic school years, engaged in such activities as observing professional development for staff, observing in classrooms, interviewing more than 25 teachers and 12 administrators, observing staff meetings, attending after-school programs, participating in informal conversations with school staffs, and observing the day-to-day operations of the school (Howard). All of the schools exemplified visionary leadership through setting a cultural ethos and vision for high achievement and getting everyone to promote the student success of all learners. Their visions were continually conveyed to staff, parents, and students. In addition to a focus on effective instructional practices and intensive academic interventions, the schools’ leaders and staffs were comfortable discussing race and ethnicity as part of their professional
development. Additionally, parents were not viewed as enemies of teachers, but as equal partners with teachers—parents were valued as important stakeholders.

**The need for data-driven leadership.** School leaders are often looking at data to help inform their decisions and pursue what they view as the wisest courses of actions; however, in many cases the data they collect may not solve the concerns they are trying to address (Knapp, Copland, & Swinnerton, 2007). “Many school leaders make decisions about instructional leadership by using their intuition and shooting from the hip, rather than considering data collection and data analysis” (Creighton, 2001a). They may not know what type of data to collect, how to analyze it, and use it to make decisions to inform their actions for teacher learning and development, student achievement, and the overall improvement of the school (Knapp et al., 2007). School leadership preparation programs may provide the coursework needed as well as the training that school leaders require for effective instructional decision informed by data (Brown, 2006; Creighton, 2001b). Coupled with understanding the family backgrounds and culture of students and the impact of culture and learning, data-driven leadership can be a powerful conduit for instructional leadership. Brown (2006) argued that universities and colleges need to rethink required coursework which tends to be based on theory instead of the day-to-day work of school leaders. She posited:

> A leadership preparation program that reflects this shift would include coursework that provides ample opportunities for candidates to make instructional recommendations based on multiple sources of data. Similarly, field experiences should provide candidates with the opportunity to observe and participate in actual work environments. Requiring candidates to spend time on reflection and group discussion—tying practical experiences back to theory—should be a central component of field experiences. (p. 525)
Creighton (2001b) contended that one of the courses that preparation programs offer to support school data is statistics but also believed that statistical data in principal preparation programs in education lack four important components: (a) failed to emphasize the relevance of statistics in the day-to-day lives of principals and teachers; (b) did not fully integrate current technology into the teaching and learning of statistics; (c) was not designed for most students enrolled in education leadership or teacher education programs; and (d) taught in colleges of education and focused on inferential statistics as tools for conducting research projects and not on strategies that might help principals improve their skills in problem analysis, program and student evaluation, data-based decisions making, and report preparation.

Mandinach and Gummer (2013) outlined multiple directions for data literacy coming from more emphasis on data in federal policy, statewide longitudinal data systems, growth of local data systems, and standards and accreditations processes that involved data. They emphasized that data-driven decision making must be an intricate part of the preparation programs of educators. They must know how to use data beginning in their pre-service years and continuing throughout their professional lives as educators. Schools of education are important venues for making this happen and should integrate data-driven practices and principles in their training. They are the driving force for change, but faculty in schools of education may not be prepared to teach the courses educators need for data-driven leadership. Mandinach and Gummer raised the question of stand-alone courses or programs that integrate data throughout coursework; schools once characterized as loosely-coupled systems (Weick, 1982) with classrooms immune from government policies and outside interferences have become tightly-coupled systems (Milne & Aurini, 2017) influenced by
multiple directions for data literacy that require continuous integration of data for monitoring and assessing student success.

Data-driven decision making suggests that schools link key organizational functions together for collecting, reflecting, and acting on feedback data (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett & Thomas, 2007). The use of data requires schools to do the following: establish practices to collect, store, and communicate relevant data; reflect and set system-wide goals; develop interventions to achieve goals; and practice to learn from interventions and integrate significant findings. Halverson et al. (2007) traced whether and how leaders have made efforts to implement these data-driven organizational functions in their schools. Participants, representing various grades from kindergarten to eighth and rural, suburban, and urban schools, were selected based on having a strong record for improving student achievement scores and using data effectively. Multiple data that resembled case study design were collected and included 52 structured interviews with leaders, 53 observations of staff meetings, professional development, data retreats, and documents (school improvement plans, staffing charts, budgetary information, and parent and community handouts). The findings revealed that “each school collected and used data, aligned, redesigned, and analyzed its instructional program, and provided feedback” (Halverson et al., p. 166). The resulting data-driven instructional systems (DDIS) framework provided transparency regarding how leaders met accountability demands and adapted new policy, curriculum, and professional development to meet current instructional systems (Halverson et al., 2007). The researchers discovered six organizational functions: (a) collecting data led to opportunities for data acquisition (collecting and storing data); (b) data reflection (think about data); (c) program alignment (develop goals); (d) program design (interventions to guide
instruction); (e) formative feedback (learning from program design); and (f) test preparation (summative testing practices). Data-driven decision making built on current practices and altered existing capacity. Overall, the researchers found some evidence of marginalized disciplines influenced over-reliance on test preparation, but strong communities of practice among teachers grounded in student achievement were apparent. Halverson et al. was not able to find how the DDIS functions affected day-to-day teaching practices of teachers.

**Transformations for Preparing Urban Leaders**

The goal of instructional leadership is to facilitate the improvement of teaching and learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Hoy & Hoy, 2003) however, there is a large concern regarding principal preparation programs to prepare instructional leaders (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Harris, 2008; Hess & Kelly, 2005). According to Fink and Resnick (2001), “many preparation programs deemphasize teaching and learning, and put little time or attention to questions of learning, curriculum, and professional development” (p. 599). Additionally, as discussed in the previous section, many of the preparation courses failed to address how to use data to improve instructional practices as well as how to address skills needed (Brown, 2006; Halverson et al., 2007; Mandinach & Gummer, 2013)

Taylor Backor and Gordon (2015) examined the perceptions of principals, teacher leaders, and professors on how principal preparation programs that incorporate university and district collaboration should prepare aspiring principals to be effective instructional leaders. Participants—five professors, five principals, and five teacher leaders—were considered experts in their fields and consisted of those who had extensive experience in instructional leadership. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews. The findings
revealed what the participants believed should be present in preparation programs that are committed to preparing effective instructional leadership.

- Application Screening. Should discern individual’s passion about becoming a principal. The individual should possess leadership skills, think outside the box, have formal and informal leadership experience. Assessment might involve written exercises, responses about specific questions related to leadership, and small group leadership exercises.

- Functions of Instructional Leadership. Include how to develop professional development and learning opportunities for teachers according to their needs with an emphasis on professional development that is long-term and sustainable. Ability to conduct teacher evaluation for continuous growth versus short-term observations.

- Knowledge about Cultural Diversity. Emphasis on understanding one’s own culture in order to understand the cultures of others as well as knowledge about special education. Culture diversity integrated across the curriculum rather than in an isolated course.

- Effective Communication Skills. Able to communicate with diverse stakeholders about the mission and goals of the schools. Know how to communicate using a warm demander—absent of threat and power. Skills of observation and conferencing for promoting clinical supervision and learning how to teach assessment skills including using data-driven instruction.

- Disposition. Should be able to understand their own values and beliefs and be able to identify strengths and areas for growth. Cultivate dispositions toward
cultural responsiveness, value the family backgrounds and experiences of diverse students as well as diverse stakeholders within the school community.

- Teaching and Learning Strategies. Model effective leadership practices which will encourage others in the school community to replicate. Build collaborative learning as effective strategies among adults.

- Field Experiences. Practicum or internship experiences should include classroom observations and walkthroughs with the school leader for the purpose of integrating theory and practice. Have prospective leaders practice typical instructional leadership activities that will assist teachers with growth plans, conference with parents, plan professional development and engage in other day-to-day leadership activities.

- Induction Programs. The university and district should collaborate to provide support for new principals. Examples of support might be online journaling about experiences, chat rooms to discuss concerns in safe environment, and cohort support groups for bring new principals together to share ideas. New principals should also be assigned mentors—a person from the district administration, one from the university, and a colleague. (Taylor et al.)

Further, Khalifa et al. (2016) emphasized knowledge about cultural diversity through culturally responsive school leadership. The researchers asked: What are the unique characteristics of culturally responsive schools leaders (CRSL)? How can leaders respond to minoritized culturally unique school contexts in similar ways as teachers respond to diverse students? What behaviors do school leadership entail? How must the effectiveness of a culturally responsive school leader be characterized and measured? Believing that CRSL
have a moral responsibility to promote the learning needs of all children, including minoritized youth, they sought to identify relevant empirical literature conducting a search of such data bases as Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE, and ERIC, from 1989 to 2014, and identified 37 journal articles and eight books. They focused only on sources that included empirical evidence and content related to school leadership and the uniqueness of about school contexts (Khalifa et al.). Four strands were categorized in the literature:

- Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors through the use and practices of culture and learning; use student data, and parent and community voices to assess cultural responsiveness in schools.

- Develop culturally responsive teachers using culturally responsive pedagogy, collaborative walk-throughs, opportunities for teachers to learn, and uses school to identify gaps in achievement and discipline.

- Promote culturally responsive inclusive school environments by accepting and indigenized identity, building relationships, and reducing student anxiety, molding CRSL, and promote an inclusive environment.

- Engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts through developing meaningful and positive relationships with community, promoting servant leadership, finding overlapping spaces for school and community, serving as an advocate for school and community.

Khalifa et al. (2016) concluded that “CRSL has tremendous promise for children of color as well as other minoritized children” (p. 1296). Leaders must constantly and critically self-reflect and challenge and acknowledge oppressive understanding and behaviors that are
barriers to the learning of children. “Leaders must consistently contribute to culturally responsive teaching and curriculum” (p. 1296).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I began with a discussion of the importance of the leader/principal’s understanding the nature of instructional leadership which segues to the role of the 21st century leader in today’s schools. The global community has changed how school leaders practice their roles as instruction leaders with an increased knowledge of helping teachers develop students as 21st-century learners. They are required to be culturally competent and technologically savvy, and to be knowledge seekers. Culturally relevant pedagogy, which incorporates students’ backgrounds and experiences, will help them to become 21st century learners in a more diverse world. However, barriers to their identity and success as learners and critical thinkers are more likely to be thwarted by deficit thinking ideologies if leaders fail to address issues of deficit perspectives in schools and help teachers examine their beliefs about themselves and the children they teach. Finally, I addressed school leadership preparation programs through reflecting on my own preparation and discussed the challenges of preparation programs. I conclude with a discussion of a model for preparing aspiring principals that emphasizes knowledge and cultural diversity.

The next chapter includes the methodology, the design of the heuristic case study, followed by the findings of the data. Upon approval of the proposal by the committee, I gained Institutional Review Board approval, which allowed me to collect data and report on findings in Chapter 4. Answering the research questions, implications of findings and future research are the focus of Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Today, American schools consist of students from various cultural backgrounds, who are diverse by race, ethnicity, gender, language, and socioeconomic status. In the educational community, it has become urgent to find ways to meet the academic needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Nieto, 2010; Paris, 2012), particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized in schools (Johnson & Fuller, 2014). Such diversity requires the school principal to be knowledgeable of the need to integrate culturally responsive practices to connect and encourage success in leading in diverse urban school districts. The task requires an awareness of leadership approaches and practices that help promote diversity, equity, inclusion, and high expectations for all students. Further, it requires of the school leader a heightened awareness of the need to have difficult conversations that pertain to topics about race, diversity, culture, and equity while working with staff and students. With accountability at the forefront and a strong focus on student achievement, school leaders and university faculty of leadership preparation programs are challenged to help individuals lead in ways that address culturally relevant practices (Hess & Kelly, 2007; Khalifa et al., 2016; Levine, 2005).

Through my experiences, I have seen limited use of culturally relevant practices led by school principals while being under their leadership in diverse environments. The lack of preparation of school leaders may be a contributing factor to why diverse students perform more poorly than their peer counterparts (Bottoms & O’Neill, 2001; Leithwood et al., 2005; Wallace Foundation, 2008).
In hopes of promoting the pragmatic goal of school principals as culturally responsive leaders, this study aimed to investigate the preparation that principals may have to assist teachers with culturally responsive instruction. As a school principal, my hope is to explore what culturally relevant practices urban elementary school principals use in working with students and teachers and how these practices are sustained within their schools. For this reason, the intended purpose of this heuristic case study was to gain a deeper understanding of urban elementary principals and their knowledge and use of culturally relevant practices. Implementing such practices may improve the learning gaps between students of color and middle-class White students (Alexander et al., 2007; Evans, 2005; Ornstein, 2010).

Qualitative research was the most suitable approach for this study because of its characteristics which helped to illuminate elementary principals’ knowledge regarding the use of culturally relevant practices. I wanted to see what principals do daily in their interactions with teachers and students. One central question and four sub-questions were used to guide the methodology: How do urban elementary principals perceive their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction?

a. What culturally relevant instructional practices do they observe in their daily interactions with teachers?

b. What ways are professional development needs of teachers identified?

c. What professional development opportunities do teachers experience?

d. What support do urban elementary principals need to cultivate and sustain culturally relevant instruction within their schools?
The purpose of this chapter is to communicate the design elements of the study beginning with the rationale for qualitative research, including the theoretical perspectives of heuristic and case study that guided the methodology. I describe my role as the researcher followed by a description of the setting, sampling strategies and participants, data collection, and analysis procedures. Information about the data sources are explained with a description of how they are used, organized, and analyzed. In closing, I outline the limitations and issues of validity and reliability. I also delineate the ethical considerations obligated to maintain as a result of working with human subjects.

**Rationale for Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is holistic, empirical, interpretive, and empathetic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Maxwell, 2013; Stake, 1995); it entails concern with process and context, rather than simple outcomes. This research paradigm studies phenomena in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Qualitative research describes how the world works and why it works as it does (Gerbich, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012). One of the key characteristics of qualitative research is the attempt to understand meanings people have constructed about their experiences and world views. The approach strives for depth of understanding, and the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis. Patton (2015) maintained that the researcher acts as the human instrument with understanding being the primary goal which allows the researcher to immediately process information, while clarifying for accuracy of interpretation. At the
same time, the researcher as the human instrument has to be aware of biases and monitor them as they interpret data.

The process of inductivity allows the researcher to gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories (Patton, 2015). Based on the findings derived from the data, themes, categories and concepts emerge, leading to “thick description” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin, 1989; Yin, 2009). “Thick description” (p. 538) was first introduced, Ponterotto (2006) explained, when the term “thick” description became part of the participants’ activities of interest in ethnographic research. Data and findings of the study were described in quotes that represented words of the participants.

Qualitative research is also empathetic because it concentrates on the frames of references and values of those involved through a planned design that evolves during the course of research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009. This research method allowed me to learn about principals’ preparation programs prior to becoming school leaders and their knowledge and use of culturally relevant practices when interacting with teachers and students. Because meaning and process are crucial in understanding human behaviors, I observed their daily practices and at the same time dialogued with them about what they do to support culturally sustaining instruction among teachers in urban schools.

I wanted to construct meaning and go beyond the descriptive data of what I heard and observed by connecting to what participants have to say about their lived experiences in urban schools. Grbich (2013) posed a key question of interpretation: “Has a conceptual discussion of the results and linkage to existing theory/new theory models of practice been developed to explain the relevance of findings to a targeted audience or discipline?” (p. 11).
I also explored meaning using theoretical perspectives of heuristic case study which allowed me to incorporate procedures of the study through the lens of heuristic inquiry. Researchers’ experiences are significant for making meaning of co-researchers’ experiences, a core perspective of heuristic inquiry. My experiences were important during the process of bridging meaning between that of the co-researchers and readers (Moustakas, 1990). In the discussion of the design, it is important to re-cap the nature of the participants, who are co-researchers; they transcend the idea of being subjects or participants (Moustakas, 1994). As explained in the role of researcher section, I was careful not to let my voice override their voices. I explore the methodology by first presenting a discussion of case study, the fundamental design element of the study.

**Theoretical Tradition of Case Study**

I chose case study methodology as the major technique for this qualitative study. The roots of case studies stem from the early 20th century, when case studies began taking place in the discipline of sociology, psychology, and anthropology, according to MacDonald and Walker (1975). Case studies were used in these disciplines as an occasion for creating new theory. However, the case-study method was first introduced into the social sciences by Frederic Le Play in 1829 as a handmaiden to statistics in his studies of family budget (Suther & Singh, 2015). In order to find meaning of the phenomenon under study, while seeking the best method for this approach, I sought to make sure that using a qualitative case study can answer my research questions and ensure that its boundaries have been determined. Next, I examine the best type of case study design that could be used to support the overall purpose of my study.
Case study methodology is defined by Yin (2012) as “An empirical inquiry about a contemporary phenomenon (e.g. a ‘case’), set within its real-world context—especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 4). According to Yin (2009), a case study design should be considered when:

(a) the focus of the study is to answer “how and why” questions; (b) you cannot manipulate the behaviors of those involved in the study; (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study; and (d) boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context. (p. 545)

In case studies, the most applied tradition generally within qualitative research, the setting is the case, a social unit—a bounded complex system of information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study method is interpretive because it focuses on obtaining meaning and understanding and building concepts and theories. I was able to answer the central question of “how” of the bounded study and explain “why” with delineated sub-questions.

Yin (2012) categorized case studies as explanatory, exploratory, or descriptive in differentiating between single, holistic, and multiple-case studies. An explanatory case study would be used if one were seeking to answer a question to explain the presumed causal links in real life where the intervention has no clear, single set of outcomes; whereas, descriptive is used to portray an intervention or phenomenon within the real-life context in which it occurs (Yin, 2012). Stake (1995) identified case studies as intrinsic, instrumental, or collective, which suggests that the researcher has an interest in the case and uses this approach with the intent to better understand its contours. Instrumental is used to accomplish something other than understanding and provides insight into an issue or helps refine a theory (Stake, 1995). Collective case studies are similar in nature and description to multiple case studies (Yin, 2012).
I used an intrinsic multiple-case study. Because I am an elementary school principal, the case itself is of interest to me. Yin (2009) described multiple case study as a way to enable the research to explore differences within and between cases with the goal to replicate findings across cases. Multiple cases were the best fit for the six elementary school principals—whose schools have been identified as having a high percentage of diverse students and high levels of achievement—with each viewed as embedded single case within the multiple case. I administered an open-ended questionnaire that included demographic information to 16 of the highest achieving elementary schools in the Midway School District. Thus, I planned to investigate each embedded case. Through observations of principals’ day-to-day practices, I aimed to investigate how principals use culturally relevant instructional practices as they lead their elementary schools with students from diverse backgrounds. The conversations with principals during interviews and observing them as they went about their daily work with teachers and students brought to light what I saw and heard. Being in the field with principals, submerged in their environments, and listening to their stories aided meaning and understanding the inquiry. As specified in Chapter 1, the unit of analysis for this heuristic multiple case study, their lived leadership experiences and practices in urban elementary schools related to culturally related practices, was the focus of the methodology.

**Theoretical Tradition of Heuristic Inquiry**

In 1990, the primary developer of heuristic inquiry was Clark Moustakas, who was interested in the discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience. Heuristic comes from the Greek word “heuriskein,” meaning to discover or to find; a process of internal search where nature and meaning of experiences are discovered and
developed using methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis (Moustakas, 1990). Grounded in phenomenology, Smith (2009) asserted that heuristic inquiry finds meaning in the experiences of a person, or groups of people based on an event in their lives. “Phenomenology focuses on exploring how human beings make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning” (Patton, 2015, p. 115). Grbich (2013) concurred, stating, “Phenomenology is an approach that attempts to understand the hidden meanings and the essence of an experience together with how participants make sense of these” (p. 92).

Throughout the research process, the self of the researcher is present with an increased level of depth and knowledge of the phenomenon. Heuristics is concerned with meanings, essence, quality, and experience (Douglas & Moustakes, 1984, p. 42). The researcher becomes self-aware, and self-knowledge is based on experiences. Hence, heuristic begins with one’s own self-awareness that is explicated through a problem or question. The researcher must have a direct personal encounter or connection with the phenomenon being studied. Moustakas (1990) stated, “In heuristics, an unshakable connection exists between what is out there, in its appearance and reality, and what is with me in reflective thought, feeling, and awareness” (p. 12). Sela-Smith (2002) added that the goal of heuristic is to gain a deeper understanding of what the researcher has inside of the self to be understood. A human problem or experience is what is being understood. Self-awareness is then lifted and awakened, which helps produce self-transformation of the researcher based on the data. Presence, honesty and integrity of the researcher is key. Heuristic inquiry, as described by Moustakas (1990), involves “initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination
of the research in a creative synthesis” (p. 27). These stages of heuristic inquiry, as key elements of the data analysis process, are further explored in the design section of this chapter.

I chose to conduct heuristic inquiry because it allowed me to investigate human experiences about school leadership practices, which I share as a school principal with the co-researchers of the study. My personal experiences as a student, teacher, and school leader gave me the desire also to explore this phenomenon. My interest in heuristic inquiry came about with the connections I seek from other school leaders about their day-to-day practices as culturally responsive leaders. Being engaged in diverse settings my entire career enhanced the desire to explore what principals do to support culturally responsive and relevant practices in elementary schools with students from diverse backgrounds. Discoveries and new meanings, with an awareness of how these practices support teachers and the overall achievement of the school, can help transform my practices as a school leader through self-awareness and tacit knowledge. I now expand on the role of the researcher and discuss how heuristic elements were used.

**Role of the Researcher**

My role as a co-researcher was carefully considered with a focus of heuristic inquiry because of my personal connection and interest in the phenomenon under study. Researchers begin with a problem they seek to address followed by questions of importance to the inquiry. The questions were of significance to me as I aimed to awaken self-awareness and self-knowledge in the world in which I live. I wanted to “Engag[e] in a scientific search with methods and processes aimed at discovery; a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others aimed at finding the underlying meanings of important human experiences” (Moustakas,
I also desired to use my senses, perceptions, beliefs, and judgments to lift
knowledge and meaning. As the researcher, I was committed, disciplined, and
compassionate about sticking with the questions until the answers were illuminated. My role
as a heuristic researcher was to become self-directed and fully immersed in the active
experience of questioning by getting inside the questions and becoming one with them to
achieve understanding. My own experiences with the phenomena were important factors as I
dialogued with other principals as well as questioned my own experiences. This process
encouraged me to engage back and forth until multiple meanings were uncovered. Self-
dialogue is critical. One’s own self-discoveries, awareness, and understandings are the initial
steps of the process (Moustakas, 1990).

One of the most important elements that must be established in qualitative research is
trust between the researcher and participants. I established trust with each of the participants
in order for them to feel comfortable sharing their stories of knowledge and use of culturally
responsive practices in their daily interactions with students and staff. Establishing trust and
building rapport were my aims as I interacted with co-researchers. deMarrais (2004)
maintained that qualitative interviews rely on developing rapport with participants to discuss
in detail aspects of the particular phenomenon being studied. I wanted the principals to trust
me enough to reveal their secret stories related to how they came to understand culturally
responsive pedagogy and how they helped their teachers navigate this terrain.

These secret stories are similar to what Clandinin and Connelly (1996) shared in
their research related to describing teachers’ professional knowledge landscapes. A level of
trust was established when teachers felt safe sharing their professional knowledge within
landscapes such as classrooms free from scrutiny—these are secret stories of their practices.
The secret stories told by teachers were personal, practical, and professional frames of knowledge. When they are outside of the classroom, they are more likely to tell stories that make them look like experts—policy stories, improvement plans, professional knowledge—these are cover stories.

Additionally, in my role as “primary researcher [co-researcher] instrument for data collection” (Atieno, 2009, p. 14), I must pay attention to reflexivity during the field phase of the study. Patton (2015) stated, “Reflexivity is meant to direct us to a particular kind of reflection grounded in the in-depth, experiential, and interpersonal nature of qualitative inquiry” (p. 70). Being in the schools had an effect on my presence and the co-researchers being interviewed and observed. Reflexivity contributed to an awareness of the interpretations of others as well as my own interpretations. Through self-questioning and self-understanding, an ongoing evaluation of what I know as a leader and how I know it, guided the ongoing conversations that took place between me and the participants. Talking about the experiences while living in them with the participants helped me understand and balance their perspectives as well as my own. I anticipated that having in-depth dialogue about their daily leadership practices as culturally responsive leaders would cause interruptions of their daily schedule and how they conducted their day. As a co-researcher, I had to be careful about how my actions and behavior influenced the overall study as well as those under study. Self-awareness and self-knowledge was applied over the course of this study. Using reflexivity promoted trust in relationships and openness to challenges.

Reactivity was another important element of qualitative inquiry that I considered during the data collection phase of the study. Reactivity occurs when individuals alter their performances or behaviors due to the awareness that they are being observed (Patton, 2015).
The change may be positive or negative and depends on the situation. As the researcher, I was cognizant of the effects that I had on the participants during interviews and observations as well as the effects they had on me. Reactivity can become an issue because subjects know they are being studied. Consequently, it is a human tendency for individuals to change their behaviors when they are the center of attention. While working with the participants in the six schools, I focused on developing a level of trust so a true picture of what I saw and heard related to their lives in schools was revealed.

Additionally, naturalistic and theoretical sensitivity was included in my role as the researcher. While theoretical sensitivity often refers to grounded theory in qualitative research, I used the concept to maintain awareness of the data surrounding my research within the natural setting of participants, connected to relevant literature as cited in Chapter 2, and other emerging theories. Strauss and Corbin (1990) asserted:

Theoretical sensitivity indicates an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data. It refers to the attribute of having insight, the ability to give meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and capability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t. (p. 50)

Essentially, naturalistic and theoretical sensitivity involved incorporating a variety of sources such as my personal and professional experiences as well as research literature while studying this phenomenon. This approach required study of real-world situations principals encountered in their work with urban schools as they unfolded naturally in nonmanipulative and noncontrolling manners (Hoepfl, 1997). By observing in the natural setting of the elementary schools where they worked, I bumped into a keen view of the phenomenon of interest and its occurrences in their lived experiences. I wanted to see what practices principals used to support teachers in the use of culturally relevant pedagogy, the level of
preparation they bring to their daily interactions with teachers, and what may be missing as they support diverse students. At the same time, I sought to find ways to alter my own practices for working with teachers. In other words, as a co-researcher, I learned alongside other co-researchers in this study. The insights gleaned provided principal leadership practices to consider, implement, or change to better support all of our efforts as culturally competent leaders.

The previous sections delineated a rationale for the selection of qualitative research as the major approach for the case study as the major technique through the lens of heuristic inquiry. The characteristics of qualitative inquiry and the selected traditions guided my role as the co-researcher and were pertinent to the design of the study. The remaining sections of this chapter include methodological considerations that describe the setting, selection of participants, data sources, and analysis. Integrated throughout these sections are issues related to management of the study. I conclude with a discussion of limitations, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations.

**Design of the Study**

The selected site for the study was identified as an urban school district located in the Midwest of the United States. Midway School District (pseudonym) has a total of 21,937 students who come from various diverse backgrounds. In Midway, diversity is based on race, ethnicity, language, and social economic status. There are four preschools, 31 elementary schools, eight middle schools, and five high schools. Midway School District is located in a community where the median salary of a family ranges from $39,000 to $40,757, in comparison to the U.S. median salary of $53,482 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). The majority of the students in Midway School District are economically disadvantaged,
with 85.3% of students receiving free and/or reduced lunch. Based on the 2017-18 school year, 49.6% of students were identified as Latinx, 28.9% African Americans, 11.5% White, and 9.8%. Based on gender, 52% of Midway School District students were identified as males and 48.3% identified as females (State Department of Education, 2017). Because many students are from diverse backgrounds, 40.6% of students are identified as having English as their second language. A small population of 5.5% of the students are identified as being Migrant, which means that their parents relocated to the area seeking work and job opportunities. Midway School District advocates for students to be present in school. The attendance rate for the 2017 school year was 92.7%, with the graduation rate of 71% and a dropout of 1.7%. Teachers in this district are highly qualified, meaning they are fully licensed. At the elementary level, 97% are licensed and at the secondary level 98% (State Department of Education, 2018).

Based on the state achievement data for grades three to five, 49.4% of students performed at a level two and above in reading and 52% in math. The scale used to determine the meaning of the levels on the state performance assessment is listed in Table 1. Table 2 identifies Midway School District’s achievement data in reading and math of students in grades three through five. Table 3 identifies Midway School District’s disaggregated group achievement data in reading and math including categories of other, English Language Learners (ELL), and free and reduced lunch (FR).
Table 1

*Explanation of Levels Based on the State Department of Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Indicator</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>a limited ability ranging from a score of 220-268</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2*</td>
<td>a basic ability that ranging from a score of 269-299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>effective ability ranging from a score of 300-333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>excellent ability ranging from a score of 334-380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>290 and above</td>
<td>a passing of the assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *Midway School District indicates a level 2 plus ranging from a score of 290–299.* (State Department of Education, 2018)

Table 2

*Reading and Math Scores, Midway School District, Grades 3–5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>58.9%</td>
<td>55.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Department of Education, 2018
Table 3

*Midway School District Disaggregated Group Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
<td>39.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>50.9%</td>
<td>55.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>61.5%</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>48.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELL</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F/R</td>
<td>47.8%</td>
<td>49.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: State Department of Education, 2018

The data from Table 3 reveal more White and Asian students in both reading and math perform higher than their counterparts of Black, Latinx, and ELL students. The data of the students, grades three through five, in Midway School District increases the need for school leaders to be culturally prepared and competent in leading in diverse schools. The data challenge school leaders to be willing to work collaboratively with staff, parents, and community members while creating culturally responsive environments in which diversity in teaching and learning is relevant and meaningful to students from all cultures.

Six Midway principals and their experiences with culturally relevant practices are the units of analysis. Co-researchers were asked to select pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. I selected co-researchers who lead in diverse settings and volunteered to complete the questionnaire and to be interviewed. They have a high percentage of achievement in reading
and math based on state assessment scores. The rationale for selecting Midway School District fits the criteria for the study. I will now describe the sampling techniques used for this study.

**Selection of Participants**

The participants, as co-researchers, are elementary principals who work in Midway School District with a high population of diverse students in their schools and high levels of achievement on state assessments in reading and math. After getting the proper permission from the district for implementing the research and completing the appropriate consent documents required from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), 16 principals were invited to complete a short questionnaire with demographic and educational background information (see Appendix A). The participants were determined based on the achievement rankings of schools created by Midway School District. The 16 schools were purposefully sampled using criterion sampling, meaning they met specific criteria and of the seven participants that agreed to be interviewed, six were selected as case studies. Patton (2015) stated that purposeful sampling means “cases of study are selected because they are ‘information rich’ and illuminative, that is, they offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest; sampling then, is aimed at insight about the phenomenon” (p. 46). Further, he described criterion sampling as “to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance explicitly or implicitly comparing the criterion cases with those that do not manifest the criterion” (p. 281). The criteria sampling for the six schools in Midway School District selected for this study included the following: all achieved 50% (level 2 basic) or higher on the 2017–2018 State Assessment Performance (see Table 1); had a diverse school population of 50% or higher based on race, ethnicity, language, and social economic status;
and the principals all had three years or more of school leadership in an urban school district.

Ten participants completed the questionnaire and seven participants agreed to be interviewed. All completed three open-ended questions designed to share insights about supporting culturally responsive practices in their schools and how they were prepared to lead in urban school district. Once those purposefully selected agreed to be interviewed, they became co-researchers. Each principal served as an individual case study and were asked to select pseudonyms in place of their names. A master list of their pseudonyms with numbers was used for all communication and in the data collection process. Co-researchers collected all data in their buildings requested of them. I became intimately engaged in the process along with them and examined my own data as well. However, as the principal researcher, I was responsible for analyzing all of the data with my research advisor, Dr. Loyce Caruthers, as a critical friend, conducting an inquiry audit. The auditor confirms that the product is supported by data and “is internally coherent so that the ‘bottom line’ may be accepted” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 318).

**Data Sources**

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) asserted data can be in the form of words, that is, language in the form of extended text. Conrad and Serlin (2006) added that the data collected from qualitative research are based on words, stories, observations, and documents. These are identified as in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observations, and written communications. Conrad and Serlin described interviews as a primary source of case study information that uses two types of interviews: structured, in which respondents are asked a consistent set of questions such as a survey or semi-structured interviews, in which a
time schedule and set of questions may be followed. Data from observations consist of
detailed descriptions of people’s activities, behaviors, and human experiences. Data from
documents are written communications that are rich for data use. Four types of data sources
– questionnaires, documents, interviews, and observations -- were collected during the field
phase of the study and are described in the subsequent sub-topics.

**Open-ended Questionnaire.** Case studies are formed using multiple data that might consist of demographics, interviews, surveys, and questionnaires to give a descriptive and clear picture of the phenomena under investigation (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012). As described above, the questionnaire was used as a data source to collect information regarding the practices of the 16 highest achieving elementary schools and their principals and a purpose sampling technique for identifying co-researchers. Demographic information supported the collection of data regarding race and ethnicity, gender, and years of teaching and in the roles of instructional coach, vice principal, and principal. The three-opened questions were instrumental in not only providing information regarding the practices of the 10 principals but were also useful in forming data for the embedded cases. I was able to match the number assigned to the participant with those that consented to participate in the interview phase of the research. The demographic data and background information from the questionnaire were used to develop descriptive profiles regarding professional experiences of the six co-researchers. The questionnaire also prepared co-researchers for the interview, giving them an idea of its focus and content. Open-ended questions helped to generate trust to increase engagement of participants with the phenomenon in personal and authentic ways (Moustakas, 1990).
**Documents.** Documents used in qualitative research can prove to be valuable because of what can be learn directly from them, but also as a stimulus for paths of inquiry. Merriam (2009) purported documents are written materials relevant to the development of case studies. They can give an indication of what the organization is doing in action. The culture of the school/organization can leave an imprint on the material it produces. Documents such as memos, letters, meeting agendas and minutes, written reports, and evaluations constitute a particularly rich source of information about the school or organization. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated that documents are categorized as personal, official, and popular culture and can be used in connection with or in support of factual details, or as a source of rich descriptions related to how the people who produced them think of their worlds.

Documents collected of unobtrusive materials (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007) gave written evidence of principals’ practices and how they planned and implemented professional development meetings and other activities related to culturally relevant practices. They can reveal what principals do in action with students and staff if they are carefully and thoughtfully analyzed. Authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning, according to Conrad and Serlin (2006), are the criteria for assessing document sources. I collected staff development and Professional Learning Community agendas regarding culturally relevant practices and assessment data at the state, district, and building levels. Professional development and Professional Learning Community agendas helped draw meanings of how culturally relevant practices are planned and used to support students from diverse backgrounds as well as how principals are supported by the district. Requested from co-researchers were four professional development agendas, two that were district directed by
the Midway School district and two planned and implemented by the principals and leadership teams. I constructed memos about the documents which aided in their analysis to gain a deep understanding about how they are used to support students and staff regarding culturally relevant practices.

**Interviews.** The word interview means “to be in sight of” and refers to a meeting of people face to face. “Inter” (p. 6), meaning among and between, and “view” (p. 6), referring to seeing, looking, or inspection (Skinner, 2013, cited in Patton, 2015). Further, interviews are used as an important of sources of data while conducting qualitative research. Qualitative interviews are used when researchers want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences (Bernard & Ryan, 2010; deMarrais, 2004; Merriam, 2009). Patton (2015) maintained, “We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe and to understand what we’ve observed” (p. 426). Interviews give researchers opportunities to enter the world of others through their narratives and are intended to “explore in detail the experiences, motives, and opinions of others” (Rubin & Rubin, 2012, p. 3). Since qualitative interviewing assumes that the perspectives of others are meaningful and knowledgeable and can be made explicit, we interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind to gather their stories.

There are three types of qualitative interviewing: (1) informal, conversational interviews in which informal conversations take place with the use of open-ended questions; (2) semi-structured interviews, in which a time schedule and set of questions may be followed, with the interviewer probing as needed for additional information; and (3) standardized, open-ended interviews in which respondents are asked a consistent set
of questions as in a survey (Creswell, 2013; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

The first and last types of interviews mentioned, informal conversational and standardized, are useful for specific purposes. I realized a somewhat more structured format was needed to allow me to address the research questions of my inquiry. In between these two types is the semi-structured interview that consists of a mix of more and less-structured questions which permit the participant and the interviewer to expand and clarify the information shared (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

I incorporated the semi-structured type which supported open-ended questions that I asked all participants with my research questions as a guide. Other questions were posed as the interview evolved in the form of a conversation. Yin (2012) viewed open-ended interviews as a common source of evidence in case studies that reveal how participants construct reality and think about situations. The co-researchers’ construction of their realities provided important insights into the case. Open-ended interviews allowed me to probe for richer and more extensive material than other forms of data.

As I aimed to gain understanding and meaning of the research questions, one semi-structured, 45–60 minute, face-to-face interview was conducted with the six co-researchers and I followed up with telephone interviewing, as needed to clarify information gathered. Bernard and Ryan (2010) stated that there are advantages to face-to-face interviews, including:

- Questions and responses can be clarified as the interview proceeds, with opportunities to probe and ask follow-up questions.
• Participants are more likely to move quickly through telephone or self-administered questionnaires, and longer face-to-face interviews may ensure accurate information and expression of feelings and opinions.

• The responses the participants give are difficult to change without the presence of the interviewer.

• Using this approach avoids participants’ attempts to predict what questions might be asked by interviewer.

• The interviewer can always verify that responses given are indeed those of intended participants.

The face-to-face interviews enabled me to gather an understanding of the lived experiences of urban principals while listening to how they lead in urban schools. Following the Institutional Review Board approval process and participants’ signed consents to be interviewed, they were scheduled at the locations and times convenient for the principals, audio-taped, and transcribed. Through their daily interactions with teachers, I heard firsthand about how their practices encouraged teachers to make teaching and learning relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures. As the findings depicted, this was a challenge for most of the co-researchers. An interview guide was helpful for digging deeper into their stories and assisted me in capturing many of the aforementioned concerns and processes.

Patton (2015) described an interview guide as a list of questions or issues that are to be explored in the course of an interview. “An interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed” (p. 439). The interview guide was constructed with demographic information. Before each interview, I
asked each participant what pseudonym they would like to use, recorded gender, and inquired about their race/ethnicity. Upon collection of the pseudonyms for each participant, a master list of names was compiled with assigned numbers and kept on a password-protected computer.

Following the collection of demographic information, I proceeded with the interview, using the guide that contained the open-ended, semi-structured questions (see Appendix B for Interview Protocol). The interview guide consisted of questions related to their educational background, years teaching as well as experiences in current position. Examples of some of the questions included:

- What attributes do you think a culturally competent leader must have?
- How are elementary principals prepared for providing teachers with culturally relevant instruction?
- What culturally responsive practices are used in your daily interactions with teachers?

During this process, the interview guide was as a point of reference to help the conversations flow effectively. I maintained awareness of the guide when I needed to probe for information.

Once the interviews were transcribed and labeled with pseudonyms and numbers, audiotapes were erased. During the course of the interview, I always referred to the participants by their pseudonyms. Observations brought another layer of data to the study, ensuring the aim of the thick description needed to claim what Denzin (1989) viewed as significant aspects of detail, history, voice, emotionality, and history.
Observations. Observations are one of the most common methods used in qualitative research and viewed as an important source of information (Angrosino, 2005; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hoepfl, 1997; Maxwell, 2013; Tedlock, 2005). Patton (2015) posited, “scientific inquiry using observational methods requires discipline, training, systematic preparation, and readiness and declares that all scientific knowledge is rooted in observation” (p. 328). He continued with a description of the disciplinary skills required for observation: “Our knowledge of the modern world depends on trained, skilled, and dedicated observers paying attention to what’s going on, systematically documenting what they see, and reporting what they have learned” (p. 329).

The major purpose of observation is to see firsthand what is going on rather than simply assume we know. Observations can be used for the purpose of description of settings, activities, people, and the meaning of what is observed from the perspective of the participants (Hoepfl, 1997). They can lead to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and provide knowledge of the context in which it occurred. At times observations may allow the observer to see things that the participants themselves do not see, is not aware of, or is unwilling to discuss.

Observations gave me a different set of lenses (eyes and ears) as the observer, which required preparation of the mind and concentration. Putting on a different set of lenses contributed to the thick description (details) of what was going on in settings, the activities that principals and teachers were engaged in, and what was observed from the perspective of the participants.

Yin (2012) believed, “Direct observations in a field setting can focus on human actions, physical environments, or real-world events” (p. 11). The opportunity to make such
observations is one of the most distinctive features in doing case studies. Yin (2012) stated, “In the manner of collecting observational data it takes the form of using your own five senses, taking field notes, and ultimately creating a narrative based on what you might have seen, heard, or otherwise sensed” (p. 11). Direct observations can process what people say they do (as in interviews) and what they actually do (as in the observation of their behaviors).

Angrosino (2005) declared that observation has been characterized as “the fundamental base of all research methods” in the social and behavioral sciences and as the mainstay of the ethnographic enterprise” (p. 729). He believed that observational researchers attempt to see events through the eyes of the people being studied. He added that there are three main ways in which social scientists have conducted observation-based research: through participant observation, reactive observations, and unobtrusive (nonreactive) observation.

I had two-fold roles for observations: I was the participant observer by gaining access to the principals’ schools and participating with group members. I also entered the setting as the observer-as-participant, where the researcher observes and interacts closely enough with members to promote an insider’s identity but does not participate in the activities. Brayboy and Deyhle (2000) discussed how participant observation can be difficult, because one must work hard at striking a balance between participating and observing. As an outsider coming in with obligations, I found it difficult to observe and not participate with principals as I explored their practices. Important to this process was the establishment of relationships that would lead to trust without having doubts about how data were interpreted.
The rationale for observing elementary principals in their schools is they can provide rich descriptions of their perceptions, knowledge and use of culturally responsive practices as they interact with students and staff. Observations allowed me to see how these practices were used to support instruction. I saw firsthand what was going on by entering into the setting, observing how students were respected and valued, how the daily interactions of the school leaders supported diversity and culturally responsive instruction, how professional development was planned, and how the leader and the staff worked collaboratively while aiming to close the learning gaps that might exist among diverse groups of students.

Observations of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) were scheduled with each principal of the six schools who set the date and time of the observations. I observed principals’ interactions with Professional Learning Communities of teachers of various grade levels which lasted from 45 to 60 minutes, guided by an observational protocol (see Appendix C) to capture notes of what was seen and heard. The observation protocol helped me monitor verbal and non-verbal cues and was consistently used with all six participants. Data collected aided construction of meaning, awareness, and understanding of the phenomena related to the use of culturally relevant practices.

**Descriptive Field Notes**

Descriptive field notes facilitated the production of data for interpreting what I observed and heard from the views of the co-researchers. I maintained an awareness of the biases I brought to the study and did not allow them to cloud my senses. I used field notes to record school leaders’ behaviors and interactions, and other phenomena to qualify what I heard and noticed during observations and interviews. These were recorded through forms of memos and journaling my thoughts and reactions throughout every phase of the study.
The phases of the study mirrored those of heuristic inquiry: “initial engagement, immersion into the topic and question, incubation, illumination, explication, and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 27), described in the following data analysis section.

The field notes were descriptive and detailed enough to resemble the thick description Denzin (1989) expressed to bring readers into the context of the study. Field notes were literal and related in detail exactly what principals relayed in conversations and their actions. I used visual sketches of what I observed in schools to capture the sense of the environment, such as bulletin boards, content written in the classrooms, hallways, cafeteria, conference rooms, auditoriums, and other spaces where teachers and students gathered.

**Data Analysis**

The analyses of the questionnaire and interviews helped to draw meaning and understanding of the documents as well as provide information observed in Professional Learning Communities. All of the data provided the thick description that Denzin (1989) asserted “joins persons to one another” (p. 83). He depicted the concept in the following manner:

A thick description…does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (1989, p. 83)

The stages of heuristic inquiry were used throughout the data analysis process to make meaning of all the data sources for the inquiry; including the open-ended questionnaire, documents, observations, and interviews. Moustakas (1990) identified essential elements
and stages of heuristic inquiry. These are described below. Several of the stages began long before the design of this study.

- **Initial Engagement and Focus**: The focus of inquiry becomes a burning question. As described in the preface, I started thinking about the role of the principal when I was a teacher carrying out the duties assigned to me by my principal. I became engaged in these questions as a teacher and vice-principal long before I designed this study. During this stage, I became interested and intrigued with the research and the intent to explore the experiences of urban elementary principals and their culturally relevant practices.

- **Immersion**: I became immersed with the question: inquiry takes the question inside, dialogues with it through lived experiences. As the researcher, I immersed myself in the setting, the six elementary schools, and the lived experiences of co-researchers. I was able to gain insight about their perceptions of working with students from diverse backgrounds.

- **Incubation**: Openness to tacit knowledge with and beyond consciousness facilitates illumination at a deeper, subtler level of experiences and self-knowledge. Intuition comes to the fore, allowing seeing parts within a whole, integrating experiences and understanding. Having experiences as a principal and while connecting with other principals, I gained a deeper understanding and awareness as I learn from them and their experiences as well as from my own. Realizing that research is never entirely free from bias, I attempted to maintain an unbiased approach and remained open-minded about their experiences to capture actions that were valuable to this inquiry.
Illumination: Indwelling, self-dialogue, and deep introspection aided my awakening and enhanced awareness that replaced old ways to knowing. I captured new understanding. Through self-reflection and self-dialogue, I was motivated to learn new knowledge and practices from the co-researchers. I examined our shared experiences and enhanced my own understanding of the use of culturally relevant practices. Using within case analysis, I coded the data to identify patterns and themes leading to an unveiling of their stories.

Explication: A process of going inward, gazing with unwavering attention and concentration into the lived experience of the focus of the inquiry. As the researcher I became fully engaged, giving my full attention to the information collected from the data to help identify core themes. Through this process, the essence of their lived experiences were revealed.

Creative Synthesis: Out of deep reflection, solitude, meditation, illumination, and explication, the story of the data emerges. The common themes from all data sources created stories of each co-researcher’s practices. Next, I begin to pull the story together through cross-case analysis for a broader and fuller meaning of data to answer the research questions.

Validation: This involves moving back and forth between the data and insights generated during the inquiry, and the creative synthesis to check for meaning, accuracy, and validity. At times I returned to the co-researchers to clarify what I heard and observed. I consistently reviewed data sources and checked for accuracy and legitimacy in preparation to answer the research question.
Bogdan and Biklen (2007) defined qualitative data analysis as “working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, coding them, synthesizing them, and searching for patterns” (p. 159). In the illumination phase of heuristic inquiry, the process of data analysis begins and continues through validation. I use a computer software, Ethnograph (Seidel, 1984) to assist with this process. The software helped me to facilitate storage of data, coding, comparing and retrieving the interview data, and comparing and linking it to other patterns, in addition to memoing, but not the interpretation process, which was up to me. Bogdan and Biklen explained why: “Interpretation involves explaining and framing your ideas in relation to theory, other scholarship, and action, as well as showing why your findings are important and making them understandable” (p. 159). This is an inductive process of coding the data to make meaning. While the software was used with the interviews, I manually coded the documents and observation data.

**Making meaning of data: Coding.** My initial steps included multiple readings of the interview transcripts, observational notes, and documents. I also listened multiple time to the interview tapes to rewrite or capture what I might have missed to help reorganize my notes. A filing system was developed so various pieces of data could be deposited. A journal was incorporated throughout the research process to record daily research activities, including locations of data collection activities, reasons for obtaining the data, decisions about the data, themes, ideas, my reactions to the data, and problems encountered. I kept in mind my role as the researcher as I interpreted the data. These included my personal connections and interests in the phenomena under study, the importance of establishing trust with participants, reflexivity, and reactivity, and an awareness of collecting data in the natural setting of participants and theoretical sensitivity. As Corbin and Strauss (1990)
pointed out, I must be focused on the subtle meaning of the data, which in this study revolved around the central question: How do urban elementary principals perceive their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction? Through an awareness of the literature surrounding this question, theoretical sensitivity indicated “an awareness of the subtleties of meaning of data” (Corbin & Strauss, p. 50) and gave me the intuition and knowledge to understand what was occurring in these schools.

Enumerative (Miles et al., 2013) and thematic forms (Grbich, 2013) of analysis were the processes for analyzing and interpreting the data. Enumerative analysis consists of assigning codes to segments of the data, either line by line or sometimes paragraph by paragraph, which is generally first level coding (Miles et al.). Creswell (2013) described the coding process as “aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code” (p. 184). Codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (Miles et al., 2013). First, I coded all data using descriptive codes to make meaning of the concepts or ideas contained in them. Next, I clustered descriptive codes with similar meanings to form interpretive codes that led to higher levels of themes, second level coding (Miles et al., 2013). Grbich (2013) pointed out that “themes have variously been referred to as: groupings; outcomes of coding/conceptualizing; abstract constructs; and analytic patterns” (p. 261).

Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) explained that data analysis happens as three concurrent flows of activity: (1) data condensation, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawings/verification. Through data condensation, I determined which data chunks to code or pull out and examine and which category labels best summarized the chunks to help the
story of the data to evolve. Data displays supported the organization of information which ultimately supported conclusions. The displays explained what happened or allowed further actions to be taken. Through conclusion drawings/verifications, making notes of patterns, explanations, and causal flows, propositions were generated (Miles et al., 2013). While working with participants in the field, openness and skepticism were maintained so early conclusions could not be drawn, and I remained open to new data as well as discrepant data.

**Within-case and cross-case analysis.** There are two processes unique to case analysis: within-case and cross-case. Within case analysis supported the analysis of individual cases, searching for descriptive codes and interpretive codes for identifying themes related to how principals perceived their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction. This is similar to the aforementioned process in which I searched for unique attributes, codes, patterns, and themes that aided my understanding of each case. “Analysis of individual cases enables the researcher to understand those aspects of experience that occur not as individual ‘units of meaning’ but as part of the pattern formed by the confluence of meanings within individual accounts” (Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafl, 2003, p. 873). Further, Stake suggested that the researcher should seek to “understand both the commonality and differences across cases in the quintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 40).

Therefore, finding the similarities and differences across the individual cases through conducting cross-case analysis for this type of analysis yielded a fuller and deeper analysis of the phenomenon of inquiry. Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) clarified this approach: cross-case analysis enables case study researchers to delineate the combination of factors that may have contributed to the outcomes of the case, seek or construct an explanation as to why one case is different or the same as others, make sense of
puzzling or unique findings, or further articulate the concepts, hypotheses, or theories discovered or constructed from the original case. (p. 1)

Multiple case descriptions, formed and presented in my findings of the research, provide readers “a more holistic impression of what a certain experience is like in all its facets. A case description takes all the emerged themes into account and brings them together to provide an overview” (Boeije, 2010, p. 202).

**Summary**

The intrinsic multiple case study through the lens of heuristic inquiry consisted of six elementary principals of the urban Midway School District whose schools have diverse students that exemplify high levels of achievement on state assessments in reading and math. They were selected through a purposeful sampling of criterion sampling. I used multiple sources of questionnaires, documents, observations, and in-depth interviews, guided by the procedural steps of heuristic inquiry. As Boeije (2010) remarked, the following elements were helpful guidelines for reassembling the findings of the study:

- **Research question and purpose:** the most influential factors in determining how the data will be integrated and what the findings will look like.
- **Literature:** the results are contrasted with the relevant literature and demonstrate how the sensitizing concepts have functioned.
- **Data:** the outcomes are guided by what stands out in the data in terms of richness and the insight they have yielded.
- **Fascination:** the surprising, fascination and original parts should be included in the findings.
- **Actuality:** the results occasionally grow in value if they fit the actual context of societal and scientific debates or events. (p. 117)

In the final analysis, no study is without its limitations. At the same time, the researcher must not spend an inordinate amount of time focusing on limitations. The study must be examined for its possible weaknesses and asks the reader to judge the study with these in mind. The researcher must also pay attention to issues of validity, reliability, and
ethical considerations, especially protecting research with human subjects. The concluding section gives attention to these areas.

**Limitations, Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations**

Research requires certain steps that need to be included in the analysis and interpretation of what has been explored. Attention was given to identifying limitations or weaknesses of your study and applying strategies to address these. I also considered the validity and reliability of the study with consideration to how these areas are addressed in qualitative inquiry. Finally, I was careful to deliberate about guideline and procedures for working with human subjects through the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of UMKC and the Belmont Report (1979).

**Limitations**

In qualitative research it is important to keep in mind possible limitations that may cause threats and weaknesses within your study. I entered this study with the realization that my beliefs, values, and background may influence how I see things from others’ perspectives. As a researcher, I recognized and considered my bias as a result of personal factors that may drive and influence the study. Maxwell (2013) identified bias and reactivity as validity threats that could lead to invalid conclusions to a study. These threats have been identified by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013) as biases such as interpreting events as a pattern and more congruent than they really are, overweighing data from high status participants, underrepresenting data from less articulate status ones, and losing your perspective for bracketing. I addressed the interpretation of data by constantly reflecting on my reactions during data collection using memos and journaling. Having integrity is also important as data are interpreted. I held myself accountable for presenting the true
perspectives of the participants’ accounts of the phenomena to ensure that I captured what was seen and heard while observing and interviewing participants.

Reactivity can also be another threat to the study, the influence of the researcher on the setting or individuals studied (Maxwell, 2013). As an elementary school principal, I was aware that issues of power can come into play when as an outsider I sought to obtain knowledge related to student achievement. With the increased level of accountability in schools, people are sensitive and may view me as an evaluator, so it was critical for me to communicate my role as a co-researcher as described in the design section of the proposal. As a co-researcher, I learned and collaborated with the six co-researchers of the study. To reduce dynamics of power related to my role, I communicated the purpose of the study, ensured confidentially with the use of a signed consent form that informed participants that their participation was voluntary and they could choose not to participate in the study at any time. I used pseudonyms in place of their name which protected their identity and helped to reduce power dynamics. I was the only person to have access to their information and it was kept on a password protected computer in a locked office.

Another limitation, not under my control, was expecting people to respond truthfully. People do not always tell the truth when they are interviewed. They may be compelled to say what they think I want to hear. Gaining their trust was important. To establish trust, I established relationships and rapport with the co-researchers to entice them to tell me their secret stories, described in the Role of the Researcher section. I spent prolong engagement in the field to establish trust with my participants and to ensure them that as co-researchers, the data we collected together will help to improve our success with students. After transcribing the interviews, I also used member checking to allow participants to read their transcriptions
and make corrections. Lincoln and Guba (1985) noted that member checking is “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) of a study.

Validity

Validity in quantitative research helps determine if the data accurately measure what they purport to measure. In qualitative research validity is considered but viewed differently, it is important to rule out validity threats to help increase the credibility of the study. The following strategies were incorporated and plausible as I completed my study. Rich data and thick descriptions were gleaned from the data, the collection of information based on questionnaires, observations, interviews, and documents, to gain a full and revealing picture of what was going on in the six schools relevant to culturally responsive practices. Rich data, thick descriptions are known to produce detailed descriptive notes and can help identify concrete events observed. Member checks, also known as respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013), was another strategy for validity, allowing me to get feedback about the data. Co-researchers helped to validate, clarify, and make sense of what was observed and said. This important strategy of member checking ruled out misconceptions or misinterpretations.

Finally, intensive, long term involvement with participants supported obtaining data saturation about situations or events. While data saturation is a grounded theory term, it can be applied in other types of studies as well. Data saturation occurs when there is “an awareness that no new information is emerging” (Grbich, 2013, p. 82). As I collected data in the six schools, I did not rush the process. I wanted to be able to see the practices that principals use in their day-to-day activities. Because I am keenly aware of the role of the principal and how their daily activities change often, I want to be able to be there long
enough to see specific situations, significant to this study was events related to culturally relevant practices, while connecting with students and staff. Maxwell (2013) asserted “Repeated observations and interviews, as well as the sustained presence of the research in the setting can help rule out spurious associations and premature theories” (p. 126).

Summarily, I implemented the study to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of its findings based on the realities of the participants.

Multiple data sources of questionnaires, documents, observations, and interviews also contributed to the validity of the findings through crystallization. Richardson (1997) provided a deeper, complex, thorough understanding of the traditional notion of validity. “Triangulation assumes that there is a fixed point or object that can be triangulated but in post-modernist mixed genre text, crystallizations takes place not triangulation” (p. 934). Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. Patton (2015) purported crystallization provides us with a deepened, complex, thorough understanding of the topic.

To gain an awareness and deeper understanding and of the data, I obtained various viewpoints of the data from multiple forms of data and through within-case and cross-case analysis.

**Reliability**

In qualitative research, reliability is akin to dependability, which addresses issues of quality and integrity to ensure that the study is conducted with reasonable care (Miles et al., 2013), similar to an audit trial. As the researcher, I incorporated several steps to ensure reliability. Thomas and Magilvy (2011) stated that the nature of the audit trial is achieved by:
(a) describing the specific purpose of the study; (b) discussing how and why the participants were selected for the study; (c) describing how the data were collected and how long the data collection lasted; (d) explaining how the data were reduced or transformed for analysis; (e) discussing the interpretations and presentation of the research findings; (f) discussing the interpretation and presentation of the research findings; and (g) communicating the specific techniques used to determine the credibility of the data. (p. 153)

Lincoln and Guba (1985) determined, “Since there can be no validity without reliability (and thus no credibility without dependability), a demonstration of the former is sufficient to establish the latter” (p. 316).

However, to establish dependability my dissertation advisor served as a critical friend to provide checks and balances along the way regarding the research methods. I also had peers participate in the analysis process, checking and discussing patterns in the data. However, If validity is not in place, it will be difficult to construct and interpret reality. The techniques used for credibility can be used to ensure dependability, but excluding specific discussion of dependability is not sufficient to demonstrate its principle (Lincoln & Guba).

**Ethical Considerations**

In qualitative research, ethical considerations must take place throughout the entire process of the study (Maxwell, 2013). Rossman and Rallis (2003) described the following as theories of ethics: the ethic of consequences, the ethic of rights and responsibilities, the ethic of social justice, and the ethic of care. These theories of ethics are closely aligned to the Belmont Report (1979), which included three basic principles:

1. **Respect for persons** – As the researcher, I will receive informed consent from participants. Three elements of informed consent are information, comprehension, and voluntariness.

2. **Beneficence** – As the researcher, I must ensure that persons are treated in an ethical manner by respecting their decisions and protecting them from harm as well as making efforts to secure their well-being.
3. Justice – As the researcher, justice addresses the distribution of the burdens and benefits of research.

I ensured privacy and confidentiality throughout my research, protecting the privacy of participants’ identities, names, and their roles. I also obtained informed consent of the participants by following the guidelines of the IRB of the University of Missouri-Kansas City that outlined the ethical guidelines my research must follow. The three following guides are as follows:

- inform participants about the nature of the study and ensure that their participation is voluntary;
- ensure that the benefits of the research outweigh the risk; and.
- ensure the risks and benefits of research are evenly distributed, among the possible subject population. (2019, para. 15–17)

To obtain consent, I fully informed participants about the study’s purpose and audience, making sure they understood their agreements to participate. As they gave consent willingly, they were made aware that they may withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 75). I also completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which includes topics for helping me with the field research phase of the study: research with human subjects, federal guidelines, obtaining informed consent, privacy issues, ensuring confidentiality, and other areas.

Conclusion

Qualitative research is personal and intentional with the researcher being the instrument of inquiry (Patton, 2015). This research approach sparks controversy that allows the researcher to exclude personal and intentional biases while conducting the study. Reflection is significant to draw meaning, knowledge, and awareness. In Chapter 1, I provided the research problem, purpose of study, and questions that I explored along with
the theoretical framework to support topics of interest. In Chapter 2, the literature review gave relevant empirical studies particular to the phenomena with a critical evaluation of the work in relation to the research problem being investigated. Chapter 3 provided an outline of the methodology that included the setting, participants involved, sampling, and data sources, how they were coded and analyzed, while underscoring the limitations, validity, reliability, and ethical considerations surrounding the study. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study and answers the research questions. Chapter 5 sets forth the implications of the findings and future research. As a novice researcher, I hope to add to the literature as well as gain knowledge that I can use and implement as I seek understanding about what it means to be a culturally responsive leader in urban schools. In the age of accountability and standards that places less focus on the social elements of learning, it is important to address these dynamics.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this heuristic case study was to explore the lived experiences and practices of six urban elementary principals and the leadership they provide to assist teachers for implementing culturally relevant practices to support student learning and achievement. The units of analyses were the lived leadership experiences and practices of urban elementary school principals regarding culturally relevant practices. I wanted to examine their daily practices as they work with certified teachers. A case study approach, through the lens of heuristic inquiry, was used to support a close, in-depth understanding of the instruction leadership of six urban school principals towards this goal. I was able to engage in conversations about their opinions and insights and gain some knowledge about my own practices for supporting culturally relevant pedagogy. In general, their instruction and coaching strategies appear to focus more on monitoring data for enhancing student learning and less on ways to support teachers in the use of culturally responsive pedagogy.

One central question and four sub-questions were posed.

Central Question 1

How do urban elementary principals perceive their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction?

a. What culturally relevant instructional practices do they observe in their daily interactions with teachers?

b. What ways are professional development needs of teachers identified?

c. What professional development opportunities do teachers experience?

d. What support do urban elementary principals need to cultivate and sustain
culturally relevant instruction within their schools?

As a qualitative researcher, my research questions guided the inquiry. A series of steps took place before reaching the intellectual goal of gathering data for each individual case to find the meanings of actions and events (Maxwell, 2005). The following table represents the timeline of research activities that led to the findings of this study.

Table 4

*Timeline of Research Activities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Activities</th>
<th>Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permission to Collect Data in the Midway School District</td>
<td>May 8, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval of Proposal</td>
<td>May 15, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI)</td>
<td>July 6, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution Review Board (IRB application and approval)</td>
<td>August 22, 2019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire implementation</td>
<td>August 25 - September 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews, Observations, and Documents Data Collection and Analysis</td>
<td>September 7 - October 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)</td>
<td>September 9 - October 18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis and Development of Final Report</td>
<td>August 25 to November 25, 2019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, a deep exploration of the literature of culturally relevant pedagogy gave insight to actions and behaviors school leaders applied while supporting instruction and teachers’
development in their schools. Exploring the literature contributed to the completion of chapters 1, 2, and 3, the research proposal, which received approval May 2019. Second, completing the Institutional Review Board (IRB) application regarding policies and practices to follow while doing research with human participants was required to begin the research investigation. I created the open-ended questionnaire during the preparation of the dissertation proposal; and following the IRB approval, with the use of purposeful criterion sampling, the questionnaire was distributed to sixteen urban school principals. The only criterion was the schools had to rank among the top highest elementary schools in Midway School District, N=16 of 31 schools. These schools performed above the district norms in reading and math based on state assessment scores and most had high populations of African American and Latinx students. The completion rate of the questionnaire was 10 of 16 for a return of 62%.

As noted, I used a short qualitative questionnaire of demographic data, professional background, and three open-ended questions to inquire about meanings of participants’ knowledge and preparation for culturally relevant pedagogy toward implementation of these practices in their schools (see Appendix A). Following the questionnaire data, six of the participants volunteered to be co-researchers with me. To develop the case studies, each of the six principals was viewed as a single case or embedded case within a collective or multiple case study. Table 5 outlines the ranking of each case study (designated by the principal’s pseudonym), student demographics of each school, and achievement data in reading and math.
Table 5  
*Rankings of Case Study Schools: Demographics and Achievement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Schools</th>
<th>Latinx</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>European American</th>
<th>Others</th>
<th>*Reading</th>
<th>*Math</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#11 Nicole</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 2 Charles</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 6 Raquel</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># 1 Marie</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#16 Richard</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#14 Ruby</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *Midway 2018 school district reading and math data based on state assessments

During the 2017-18 school year, Midway school district indicated that Level 2 (basic ability) with a score of 220-268 determined to be the achievement goal for elementary students in grades three to five. The state recognized that a level 3 and above was on grade level and passing state assessments (see Table1, Chapter 1). Marie’s school ranked number one overall in achievement and Charles’s school ranked number two when compared with the achievement scores of 16 of 31 elementary schools. Richard’s school was the lowest with the ranking of 16 of 16 schools, but achievement was above the district average of 50% in
reading (basic ability) and 52\% in math. The three schools with the higher enrollments of Latinx students had the lowest rankings with the exception of Charles’s school.

Following the implementation of the questionnaire, its analysis, and selection of co-researchers, I originally planned to observe each co-researcher of the six schools three different times; during professional development with staff, professional learning community meetings with grade level teams, and during the leadership meetings with the school leadership team. Plans for collection of documents included the school improvement plan, minutes from leadership and site council meetings, agendas from Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) and district-led Professional Development (PD) sessions, achievement data, teacher lesson plans, and communication from central administration related to the support of principals regarding culturally responsive practices. These plans were modified to include agendas for district-directed staff development and PLC’s, and achievement data reports. Modifications of documents were made based on the decision to collect data close to the schools that would give me the thick description related to what co-researcher principals were actually implementing to support culturally relevant practices. Observations of Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) were conducted and together with the questionnaire data, achievement data reports, staff development and PLC agendas, and in-depth interviews formed the data for the Case Study Reports. Multiple data contributed to crystallization; a deepened, complex, and thorough understanding of the phenomena related to culturally relevant practices (Patton, 2015).

I coded the data and looked for patterns through thematic coding that consisted of identifying descriptive and interpretative codes for forming themes. Illustrated in Table 4, data analysis began at the point of the first data collected on August 25, 2019. I analyzed
data after each form was collected so that I would remember the what, when, how, and why of data analyzed. I did not want the data to grow cold which contributed to the reliability of the study. After the interview data were transcribed, transcriptions were sent to the six participants for member checking, also known as respondent validation (Maxwell, 2013), helped to validate, clarify, and make sense of what was said and recorded. This important strategy ruled out misconceptions or misinterpretations of the interview data.

As a co-researcher, heuristic inquiry was carefully considered because of my personal connections as a school leader (principal) and my interest in this study. The questions that guided this study are of significance to me because they enhance my self-awareness and self-knowledge in the world in which I live. My commitment, compassion, and disciplined analysis of the data supported answering the research questions. Adopting the research position of heuristic inquiry, supported effective dialogue with other co-researchers and helped me question my own experiences as a school leader. My self-discovery, awareness, and understanding are significant to heuristic inquiry (Moustakas, 1990). This process supported engaging back and forth with the data until multiple meanings were uncovered. However, trust must be established between the researcher and co-researchers for authenticity of the data.

I established trust with each of the co-researchers as we dialogued with each other while sharing our stories of culturally relevant practices. I knew all of them before the study began and had worked with many of them over the past 13 years. Knowing them ahead of time helped to establish trust, which was especially important to the interview process. deMarrais (2004) maintained that qualitative interviews rely on developing rapport with participants to discuss in detail aspects of the particular phenomenon being studied.
Principals in the study revealed personal stories related to their experiences and their knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of their understanding of culturally relevant practices in their schools. Several principals stated that they did not do enough regarding this topic and shared how participating in this study pushed them to become reflective learners and to find better ways to support students and staff.

Attention to reflexivity while being in the field was important. Patton (2015) stated, “Reflexivity is meant to direct us to a particular kind of reflection grounded in the in-depth, experiential, and interpersonal nature of qualitative inquiry” (p. 70). My presence in the co-researchers’ schools had an effect while observing and interviewing them. Reflexivity allowed me to be aware of the interpretations of others as well as my own interpretations. Talking about the experiences while living the phenomenon with them helped to balance their perspectives as well as my own. Ultimately, using reflexivity in qualitative research buttressed trust in relationships and openness to challenges.

**Questionnaire Findings**

**Open-ended Questionnaire**

The questionnaire was sent via-e-mail to the 16 participants who were identified based on the rankings of their schools. Ten participants responded by completing the questionnaire and seven of them volunteered for the subsequent field research activities; achievement data profiles, interviews, observations, and document analysis. Ultimately, I had six case studies, because the seventh participant did not respond to my contact efforts. The questionnaire took place three weeks before the interviews. The instrument included open-ended questions that allowed the participant leaders to define culturally relevant practices, their use in their daily leadership practices for meeting the needs of all students,
and preparation for working with culturally diverse students during pre-service teaching experiences and graduate education (see Appendix A). The following table describes the participants’ demographics.

Table 6

Questionnaire: Explanation of Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Vice Principal</th>
<th>Principal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#4</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#5</td>
<td>Latinx</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#6</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>18*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#7</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#8</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>7*</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#9</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>13*</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#10</td>
<td>European American</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. *Instructional Coach included in teaching for the Midway School District

The combined years of teaching for the 10 participants was over 100 years with participant seven having the least number of years teaching, three years, and participant five the most experience with 21 years. Participants six and nine had been instructional coaches, included
in their years of teaching. Eight participants had not been vice-principals and the remaining two had one to two years as vice principal. The absence of the role of vice-principal for many of the co-researchers is quite interesting, given that role is often viewed as the pipeline for the principalship. As noted, years as principal ranged from 3 - 20 years, the average for the group was eight years.

Four themes were identified in the analysis of the questionnaire with high frequencies of descriptive codes for forming interpretative codes and eventually themes. The table below describes each theme and the interpretative codes and their frequencies.

**Table 7**

*Themes of Qualitative Questionnaire*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interpretive Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Leadership</strong></td>
<td>Leadership practices to enhance student learning (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices (38)</td>
<td>Show students value and care (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation for Multicultural Education</strong> (27)</td>
<td>Learning from others (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multicultural preparation (9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited preparation for diversity (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Culturally Relevant Practices</strong> (24)</td>
<td>Definition of culturally responsive practice (16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Show students value and care (8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation for Equity</strong> (21)</td>
<td>No college preparation (11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy (10)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: The total frequencies for the themes and sub-themes are placed in parenthesis.*
As illustrated in table seven, the most frequent theme identified in the questionnaire was **Instructional Leadership Practices** that consisted of the interpretive codes of *leadership practices to enhance student learning* and *show students value and care*. Instructional leadership is considered to be an important component for school leaders and a contributing factor to increased student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 2002; Marzano & McNulty, 2003; Stronge, Richard, Catano, 2008).

Several participants identified the importance of using data while monitoring students’ engagement, language needs, and learning. Participant three, wrote “Accountable talk is taught and used to help scaffold language, language and vocabulary are taught and displayed on word walls for future reference” (p. 3). She expressed how students are asked “to elaborate about their talk with peers” (p. 3). Participant four recorded, “This year I’m really zeroing in on my disaggregated groups. In the past, I think we as a school just looked at surface level data” (p. 3). Participant seven identified how his leadership practices help their school utilize data to make sure they meet the needs of all student subgroups. He added, “Helping teachers become reflective practitioners about what and how they teach are important” (p. 3). Accordingly, these participants viewed their leadership practices as enhancing students’ learning through the lens of effectively monitoring data. Bernhardt (2009) stated, “The use of data to make sound decisions about student learning outcomes has been demonstrated through federal, state, and local accountability systems” (p. 36). With a high focus on school effectiveness as it relates to student achievement, data-driven instructional leadership has become a mandated practice and process that encourages school leaders to make informed decisions about students and their abilities (Pulliam, 2005). These participants expressed the value of data driven leadership.
As a heuristic co-researcher, using data is a common principal leadership practice that I use frequently to keep track of how students are performing in my building. Through weekly data check-ins teachers are able to tell me which students in their class are having success and those who are struggling based on standards taught and formal and informal assessments. Data meetings help to guide my staff in making sound decisions of next steps while creating action plans and the monitoring of the school improvement plan. This process eliminates surprises and gives my staff a jump start for interventions, re-teaching plans, and enrichment.

While eight principals did not include culturally relevant practices as significant to their Instructional Leadership, two of the principals connected to instructional leadership when defining culturally relevant practices. Participant four recorded, “I define culturally relevant practices as having a keen awareness of the backgrounds of the students in your room and identifying and executing ways to make your classroom/school more inclusive.” Participant nine had similar sentiments, “Culturally relevant practices recognize the importance of including students’ cultural backgrounds, interests, and lived experiences in all aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom and throughout the school.”

Another interpretive code recognized participants as caring leaders, depicted as show students value and care. Through their leadership practices, several principals described how they demonstrated love and acceptance, modeled respect for students, and showed them how they valued and cared about them. Important to participant eight was modeling acceptance, respect, and to do everything possible to show value and care. When asked: What ways did your preparation as a teacher/principal prepare you for meeting the needs of culturally diverse students within your school? Participant four noted, “It was based more
on treating students as I would treat my own kids. Still did not do enough.” Participant ten
scripted about how she tries to teach others what she has learned by demonstrating
acceptance, and respect toward her students. Blasé & Kirby (2000) noted that effective
principals who have respect for students, model it in their language and behavior with
students and staff, and tend to help their staff improve student discipline and achievement.
Recognizing and accepting individual differences is another important aspect of respect for
students. Blasé and Kirby (2000) added, “finding something good in each student is key” (p.
26). Participant three makes himself visible and advocates for his students by applying
Leadership Practices that he learned through his own life experiences. These practices
were also echoed in participant 10’s beliefs and actions.

The second most frequent theme was Preparation for Multicultural Education.
The interpretative codes for this theme were multicultural preparation, learning from others,
and limited preparation for diversity. Many of the participants struggled with defining
culturally responsive pedagogy and interchanged attempts to define their preparation with
elements of multicultural education more focused on diversity. Gorski (2016) perceived
multicultural education as often disintegrating into a focus on diversity issues such as
content integration and celebrations of culture and less on examining racism and
heterosexism. He stated, “I largely stopped using the term multicultural education in my
scholarship, teaching, and teacher workshops.” Gorski explained his view:

Looking back now, I probably did so because I worried based on my
experience working with schools that despite my commitment to centering equity
and justice, the cultural nomenclature offered people a way out of that commitment.
They could choose to focus on cultural diversity—on multicultural arts and crafts or
on simplistic assignments in which students are forced to stereotype entire nations of
people into a single “culture”. (p. 222)
Likewise, for many of these participants, *multicultural preparation* appeared to be focused on celebratory rituals and content. They described their practices as showing students love and acceptance and how they would buy books with covers that looked like their students, have yearly celebrations of different cultures, and put up monthly bulletin boards that acknowledge the various cultures in their schools. Ladson-Billings (1994) stated:

> If educators are sincerely committed to multicultural education they cannot be satisfied with superficial celebrations of heroes and holidays. This approach to content trivializes multicultural education and conveys the idea that diversity issues come into play only during celebratory moments with foods, fun, and festivals. (p. 2)


The interpretative code, *learning from others*, influenced most of their preparation. Several participants identified how they learned from others through conversations with colleagues, book studies, and dialogue with parents, students, and community members and viewed these activities as “best practices and experiences”. Others described how they *learn from others* through district professional development opportunities and coaching experiences. Participant four wrote about how she would bring people to her school as thought partners to get additional ideas for implementation. Participant ten stated “I’ve learned the most from a staff member that takes the time to teach me about cultures different from mine, from individual students that I’ve had in my classroom, as well as from parents that have taken the time to teach me how to teach their child” (p. 3).

Through my experience as a school leader, I find this practice most beneficial when connecting with other school leaders and experts. In my district, school leaders often partner
with a cluster of principals while participating in professional learning community meetings. Having learning opportunities with partner leaders allowed me to be reflective of my leadership moves and how I support the development of students and staff.

Those who expressed some experience related to Preparation for Multicultural Education and included responses of limited preparation for diversity due to fewer courses at the pre-service education or graduate levels to teach them the true meaning of multicultural education. One participant felt their (ESL) English as a Second Language course work was a source of preparation; while another participant identified increased knowledge base gained through contact with others in course work. Due to limited preparation, most participants felt that they did not do enough in this area; however, they tried to teach others what they have learned. Participant six did not perceive his pre-service experiences as helpful for meeting the needs of culturally diverse students. Like most, participant six did not have college courses that taught about the needs of culturally diverse students or culturally relevant practices, and did not feel proficient to deal with real world experiences that take place in schools. Participant nine wrote “I don’t feel my undergrad courses prepared me enough for diverse needs in the classroom” (p. 3). His preparation was related to having positive relationships with students and treating them as he would treat his own kids. Several expressed through their written responses that experiences were also limited at the district level.

As gleaned from the questionnaire, many participants did not experience coursework related to Preparation for Multicultural Education or found courses to be limiting; they felt on-the-job training and life experiences were their best preparation. With American schools becoming more diverse, especially in urban school districts, a need exists for
preparation programs to do a better job in supporting aspiring school leaders around this work. In order to prepare school principals, university programs must provide sufficient field experiences and opportunities that train prospective principals not just how to lead, but how to lead effectively in diverse urban settings. Preparation programs may need to revisit the required coursework for preparing future school leaders. Klotz (2006) examined how principals can put in place policies and practices that honor the diverse cultures alive in a school. He shares in doing so, schools must honor, respect, and value diversity in theory and in practice and make teaching and learning relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures.

The third most frequent theme was **Culturally Relevant Practices**. The interpretive codes that supported this theme were *definition of culturally responsive practice* and *show students value and care*. According to Gay (2002),

> Culturally responsive practice is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively. It’s based on the assumption that when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference of students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly. (p. 106)

Participants that completed the questionnaire gave various definitions of what they understood as the meaning of culturally relevant practices. Participant two defined culturally relevant practices as “valuing students’ culture, heritage, and experiences and making it evident in the classroom.” Participant one added the importance of being “mindful of the different backgrounds in their classrooms and find ways to connect to content of cultural influences while planning and teaching diverse students.” Participant nine recorded, “Culturally relevant practices recognize the importance of including students’ cultural
backgrounds, interest, and lived experiences in all aspects of teaching and learning in the classroom and throughout the school” (p. 3). These three participants were able to define essentials of culturally relevant practices, aligned more closely to the literature, but did not have the pre-service or graduate course work for a complete picture of the approach. The other seven participants were ambivalent about the meaning of culturally relevant practices, citing examples that were closely related to issues of diversity and elements of multicultural education.

Describing her meaning of culturally relevant practices as archaic and not knowing what it meant, participant 10 noted, “Truly embracing multi-cultural diversity in the classroom. Accepting and celebrating all cultures, ideas, religions, and ways of thinking.” Participant six gave a short response that also reflected her limited knowledge of culturally responsive practices. “Responsive teaching/skill at teaching diverse groups of students.” Participant five gave a similar response, “Using strategies that relates to one’s own culture.” When asked about how she was prepared to meet the needs of diverse students, she admitted that her preparation was inadequate at the pre-service and graduate levels. “Still did not do enough.”

As I reflect on my own practices and understanding of culturally relevant practices, I have worked with my staff reading articles and books that support this work, but we are currently at the developing level of understanding how to effectively implement these practices into daily lessons and work provided for students. The Midway district from time to times has given attention to diversity training, but does not provide training related to culturally relevant practices for teachers and school leaders. As many stated in the questionnaire, they are learning from experiences that takes place in their building.
The next interpretive code was to **show students value and care** which was also associated with respect. Five of the ten participants found demonstrating care for students to be an effective practice for all students, and was especially effective for culturally diverse students. They shared how letting students know that they cared for them was important. Others made themselves visible and available while advocating for their students. Participant two wrote, “I take time to learn about my students, families, and community. Make myself visible and advocate for them.” In the same way, participant eight recorded, “Model acceptance and respect and everything possible to show value and care.” Having positive relationships with students and high expectations are powerful; ways to show students that you value who they are and believe in them (Caruthers & Friend, 2016; Edmin, 2016; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Good & Brophy, 2003). When high expectations and positive relationships are sustaining, students will rise to the occasion.

The fourth most frequent theme was **Preparation for Equity** closely aligned to the energy signaled with **Preparation for Multicultural Education** but much more focused on implementation in schools and classrooms that would promote social justice and equality in schools. I labeled this area, **Preparation for Equity**, after analyzing the data which caused me to question and reflect on the meanings participants might ascribe to equity in education. Unterhalter (2009) explained, “The standard definition of equity is ‘the quality of being equal and fair’ and ‘that which is fair and right’… Equity might thus be thought of as equality turned into an action, a process of making equal and fair” (p. 416). Gorski (2016) suggested while culture is an important concern “teacher educator students bend and twist the term to mean, in essence, whatever they need it to mean” (Ladson-Billings, 2006).
Further, Gorski (2016) asserted that while some of these areas are grounded in justice and equity, such as culturally relevant teaching and culturally responsive teaching, terms such as cultural competence, cultural proficiency, multicultural education, intercultural education, and cross-cultural education have diminished issues of equity. Gorski contended that we need to reframe the conversations around equity instead of culture which helps educators to keep “issues like racism and heterosexism at the center of the conversation, making it more difficult for the institutions with which we work to tiptop away from that conversation and back to cultural diversity” (p. 225).

The interpretive codes for Preparation for Equity consisted of no college courses and limited knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy. Bustamante, Nelson and Onwuegbuzie’s (2009) school culture audits revealed that school leaders were not knowledgeable and familiar with culturally responsive instructional practices, and their lack of awareness was noted as a barrier. They also did not have the background knowledge or training, and they lacked professional development opportunities relevant to this practice. The need for more preparation in this area was also revealed in the remarks of most of the 10 participants and reflected an absence of knowledge and skills related to culturally diverse practices.

The first interpretive code for this theme was no college courses which indicated that many participants did not have college courses that supported this topic. Participant five wrote that college did not prepare him and participant eight noted, “Limited education classes on this topic.” The experience of working with a diverse population for 25 years was the way that participant seven perceived his preparation, but no mention of course work. “My preservice work did not prepare me to meet the needs of culturally diverse students,”
wrote participant six, Participant 10 noted. Participant 9 had similar perceptions about her experiences, “I don’t feel my undergraduate courses prepared me enough for diverse needs in the classroom. I feel like I learned most from teaching experiences in my career in ________ and application of these practices on the job.” The overwhelming sense of unpreparedness for most participants was apparent and connected to the inability of most to define culturally relevant practices, depicted in the interpretive code of limited knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy.

A couple of the principals felt they were prepared through coursework that focused on relevant literature and challenging discussions. Participant two recorded that she felt prepared, “I read some good books, listened to learn, and engaged in challenging dialogue.” When asked about her preparation in college, participant one shared how she learned from book studies, personal background, and historical studies. Participant three elaborated on how they had to create unit plans and projects during her undergraduate course work that included real world relevant experiences that focused more on students’ learning styles. She had this to say about her graduate preparation, “During administration studies, being aware and developing ways to reach all stakeholders was included in all classes.”

The limited knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy, the last interpretive code of Preparation for Equity, led me to realize that many of the participants had similar experiences as mine. Reflecting on my own college courses and experiences, I do not remember any college courses that supported me in this area. During that time, some discussion would be about multicultural education, but nothing taught me about how to be culturally responsive to youth. If school leaders are not given the training in their preparation coursework, or professional development within the school districts they serve,
achievement gaps may continue to be a concern while working in urban districts and schools with diverse students. Participants made it clear how they were learning from others and doing what they consider best practices; however, collectively many school leaders are working at the beginning and developing levels of this topic being unsure of culturally relevant leadership practices. Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbell Jones (2005) defined culturally relevant practices as equitable, inclusive, and socially just practices, manifested in the behaviors of individuals and groups in the school environment that put actions in place while responding to the needs of diverse students (p.814). Lindsey et al.’s (2005) analysis closely resembles Gorski’s (2016) argument for the need to reframe the conversations around equity instead of culture.

Summary

Overall, participants reported limited knowledge regarding Culturally Relevant Practices and often referred to multiculturalism and diversity when asked to define the approach. For the most part, they discussed efforts and strategies of Instructional Leadership Practices, especially influenced by Midway’s focus on accountability through intense focus on disaggregated student achievement to determine what groups of students were achieving by race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, and gender. In a district with a growing number of English Language Learning (ELL) students, English as a Second Language (ESL) was also an emphasis, but very few participants made connections between culturally relevant practices and their growth. Comments about celebratory activities, food, and books that represent the culture of ELL students were often referenced. Additionally, most had limited preparation at the pre-service and graduate levels for culturally relevant practices.
In the previous sections, I described an overview of the qualitative approach used, research questions, and timeline of research activities. The selection of case study co-researchers were clarified with a brief explanation of purposeful criterion sampling. I found it important to also report on my relationship with all of the participants, including those who completed the questionnaire. Issues of trust and reflexivity were discussed, followed by report on the findings of the open-ended questionnaire. In the next section, I discuss the findings of the case studies by first emphasizing all of the themes and interpretive codes identified in the collective cases, followed by the presentation of individual case reports for the six co-researchers, considered within case analysis.

**Findings of Case Studies: Within Case Analysis**

I used an intrinsic multiple-case study as a major design approach. Because I am an elementary school principal, the case itself was of interest to me; and as a heuristic researcher, I share the experiences of my co-researchers. Yin (2009) described multiple case studies as an informative way to explore differences within and between cases which helps to replicate findings. Each school was viewed as a single case, comprising six collective cases. Submerged in their environments, using achievement data reports, disseminating questionnaires, collecting documents, interviewing principals, and observing Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) helped to bring meaning and understanding to their use of culturally relevant practices.

Staff development plans in the Midway Schools were often dictated by the district; principals and teachers are required to follow the district agendas for professional development, two weeks monthly, which likely influenced staff development at the school sites and PLC meetings. Four professional development agendas, two district-directed and
two school-directed, were collected from the co-researchers and one agenda from the school site PLC meetings. As I described in Chapter three, documents in qualitative research are significant to a study because they can serve as a stimulus for the path of the inquiry and valuable information can be gleaned.

These documents, four professional development agendas and one PLC agenda from each school, were analyzed and reported in the case studies with the other forms of data; open-ended questionnaire, interviews, and observations of PLC.s. With academic outcomes related to the tenets of culturally relevant pedagogy that Ladson-Billings (2006) described, I sought to understand in their data the following tenets of culturally relevant practices: “What is it that students are able to know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers” (p. 70); sociopolitical consciousness, which “help[s] students use the various skills they learn to better understand and critique their social position and context” (p. 71); and cultural competence, which is about students’ acquisition of culture knowledge regarding their own cultural ways and systems of knowing.

Each of the six case studies, with pseudonyms identified by the co-researchers, are discussed as within-case analysis, followed by cross-case analysis to identify common themes in the data. The collective themes, interpretive codes, and descriptive for all of the cases are reported in Table 8.

Table 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Interpretive codes</th>
<th>Descriptive codes</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
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<th>Interpretive Code 1</th>
<th>Monitoring Practices (65)</th>
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<td>Student engagement</td>
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<td>Engage students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretive Code 3</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communicate love</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Value Students &amp; Care</td>
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<td>Leadership Practices (111)</td>
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<td>Community Involvement</td>
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<td>Leadership Actions</td>
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<td>Managing Culture</td>
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<td>Preparation for Equity (97)</td>
<td>Interpretive Code 1</td>
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<td>College preparation</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Interpretive Code 1</td>
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Four themes were derived from the interpretive codes that were formed from labelling or describing concepts, ideas, and actions identified in questionnaires, interviews, documents, and observations. The most frequent theme was Leadership Practices:

Curriculum and Instruction and the least frequent themes, Preparation for Equity and Culturally Relevant Practice, in the interview data that paralleled the themes of Culturally Relevant Practices and Preparation for Equity identified in the questionnaire (see Table 7). The interviews were inundated with concerns related to being prepared for promoting equity with district support, the majority of the co-researchers perceived they learned about equity from others and experienced limited leadership from the district. In the open-ended questionnaire, the ten participants raised concerns about Instructional Leadership Practices through engaging students and showing them love and care. Most were keenly aware of being unprepared for Culturally Relevant Practices during their undergraduate and graduate programs and had limited knowledge of the practices. For the six co-researchers, there were multiple connections to culturally relevant practices from a couple of participants. They talked about the importance of including the background experiences of students in discussions of culture but did not raise actions or implementation strategies to
make these practices an integrated part of the teachers’ planning for culturally relevant instruction.

Through within-case analysis, I discuss each of the cases related to how the themes played out in the stories of each of the co-researchers regarding culturally relevant practices. I used my voice and lived experiences to interact with the participants’ experiences, remaining aware that their voices were more important than mine. Cross-cases analysis identified themes and interpretive codes common across the six cases for constructing meanings of the multiple case study and answering the research questions, the focus of Chapter 5. The cases of co-researchers Richard, Nicole, Raquel, Marie, Charles, and Ruby are presented in the following sections. I start each case with information relative to their professional backgrounds, preparation, and demographics of their schools.

Case Study 1: Richard

Richard is an European American, male elementary school principal in Midway school district. He is in his early 40s and holds a degree in Education, a master’s in Educational Administration, and Doctorate in Urban Education Leadership. Richard was a classroom teacher for eleven years, teaching middle school and high school students. He also served as a vice principal at the middle school before accepting a position as an elementary school principal and has been in this role for three years. Richard expressed that he wanted more experience at the elementary level and has worked in Midway school district most of his career. The demographics of Richard’s school include students from diverse backgrounds with the majority of his student population as Latinx 77%, African American 2%, European American 16%, and 6% identified as other. Based on the ranking of
Richard’s school, he completed the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the second phase of the study.

During his doctoral program, Richard was part of a pilot program that collaborated with two other urban leadership programs with thirty other people. Richard was able to vaguely define culturally relevant practices linked to the theme of Culturally Relevant Practices identified in the questionnaire and the need to make it evident in classrooms. He said, “to value students’ culture, heritage, and experiences, then make it evident in the classroom.” His explanation captured some of the elements of the literature related to culturally relevant practices. Ladson-Billings’ (2006) definition suggested students should be exposed to a) pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers, b)sociopolitical consciousness for a critical understanding of context surrounding social positions, and c) cultural competence for knowing about their own cultures and ways of knowing. I contend that culturally relevant practices can lead to the engagement of students. Teachers that view the culture and background of students as assets are less likely to see them through a deficit lens and tend to have high expectations for academics and behavior.

I had the pleasure of working with Richard because our schools shared the same instructional coaches in Midway school district. We often took turns meeting at each other’s schools to conduct professional development for teachers. While training teachers in both buildings, we read articles about culturally responsive pedagogy and began having great discussions in our meetings. We both enjoyed hearing how first year teachers knew more about culturally relevant pedagogy than more experienced teachers and how they were ready to implement practices into their classroom. Coming straight out of college, they seemed more prepared than others. Although Richard and I was excited to continue learning as
partner schools, the district made changes in the assignments of instructional coaches which separated our partnership. I am not sure if that work continued in Richard’s school.

During the interview, Richard seemed eager to share his thinking about this topic. His understanding was noted while Richard explained the activities his school did to recognize students’ cultures and backgrounds. Likewise, the theme that occurred the most was **Culturally Relevant Practices** with the interpretive codes of *defined culturally relevant practices and knowledge of culturally relevant practices*. Richard has a high Latinx and ELL population in his school. During Hispanic heritage month his school celebrates cultures and countries that are represented in the Latinx community. While recognizing diverse students in Richard’s school, he described various events that took place, such as festivals, sampling of foods, and wearing clothing that represents the Latinx culture which tended to support a definition of multicultural education with a focus on celebrations than culturally relevant practices. Richard explained:

> We have a parent organization, it is not just parents, but it is called Supporter of Students, and it is parents, teachers, and community people. And what we do is just try to provide food that is very popular in the Latino[x] culture and we'll all wear something that represents Latino[x] culture, and we'll have music, dance, art, and obviously games that are popular with the Latino[x] culture. So, it's just an opportunity to celebrate for about two hours after school. Yeah, and it becomes a community event because my school is nestled in a community, you know, we're actually just blocked in by a small community. People just walk to it who don't even attend the school. This would be my third year that I've been a part of it and I know that a big thing that they had was the dancing and we had a presenter talk about the outfits that the dancers would wear. And then we had a DJ who did a lot of entertainment and he would introduce music that was popular to the Latino[x] culture. And it was not just, some of it was old music, but some of it was very modern music. So, those are opportunities, I would say.

Although the events described seemed great; however, these depict what Ladson-Billings described as celebratory moments. Ladson-Billings (1994) stated:
If educators are sincerely committed to multicultural education they cannot be satisfied with superficial celebrations of heroes and holidays. This approach to content trivializes multicultural education and conveys the idea that diversity issues come into play only during celebratory moments with foods, fun, and festivals. (p.2)

Multicultural education is not a separate, isolated once-a-year activity. Instead, the regular curriculum includes a range of cultural perspectives (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Ladson-Billing (2006) and Gay (2010) expanded on going deeper than celebrations while implementing culturally responsive practices. Richard shared how there is more to do while trying to get another perspective of what it is like to be a new person to the country, but acknowledged what his staff has done thus far. Richard said:

I try to do a lot of… engage in a lot of conversations. I try to have teachers engaged in those conversations, and be reflective as well. We do article studies, have conversations with the leadership team of specific scenarios and how they would respond. Guest speakers come in and provide their stories for how they made it into the United States as an undocumented citizen.

I found it apparent that Richard and his staff cared about the students and their families.

When I asked Richard during the interview to describe what culturally relevant pedagogy looks like in the classroom and what he is looking for when observing teachers, he remarked:

I would say, whatever populations you have represented in your classroom, you're going to make the learning, the content, the critical content, accessible to all those kids. So, if that's making sure that you have visuals, that you have labels, that you have content that the kids can make connections to, it's making sure that you're engaging the kids in dialogue where they are able to make use of not only the language, but the social interaction. You know, I just, I really think it's about access and connection and making sure that you're providing that to all kids, not just the kids that are predominantly represented in the classroom.

Richard’s description of what culturally relevant pedagogy practices looked like in the classroom also included an example of telling the story of a third-grade teacher, who was preparing to teach, and looked through some books to find content that definitely
represented other cultures. She was able to find a few books, after getting support from the librarian. His example illustrated the value of including the backgrounds of diverse students.

Next, I asked him about the unique characteristics of culturally responsive school leaders he stated:

I would say we have to have a growth mindset. I think we have to be willing to be learners, be in a stance of being a learner. I think we have to be culturally responsive. I don't think you have... There can't be "one way is the right way." I think you have to find opportunities to make connections with your students and your parents and the community and, you know, to kind of get a better understanding of them with the hope that you can make those connections and help them to be as successful as possible.

He continued with explaining growth mindsets by discussing the values of the dominant White middle-class culture in the district.

And what I would say is, a lot of times what happens, and I'm sure you experienced this, is people come into _____ with white middle class values and they expect everything to be... fit within that white lens or that white framework. And what I've found is, in my time, we can't necessarily fit everything in that white nine to five time.

He highlighted points about deficit thinking that are often applied and noted about cultural norms and backgrounds of families that deviate from the norms of the dominant culture. He said:

I have found in my time we can not necessarily fit everything in that White nine to five time; because we have a lot of families that are working hard and we assume because a family cannot make it to a family event between the hours of nine to five that they do not care about their kids. But many times, what we find out is, they are working two or three jobs and if we would just be a little bit more flexible and not put everything through our frame, that we could work out times that actually work for our parents and our families.

His understanding of culturally relevant practices connected to what he had to say about his Preparation for Equity with the interpretive codes learning from others’ experiences and as previously discussed illuminating deficit thinking. While illuminating deficit thinking was
not a highly cited theme, the significance of this interpretive code was heavily supported.

Richard explained his preparation:

I felt like it gave me a, a pretty great perspective in regards to just the system approach at the time, and especially for working in the urban district where you have so much diversity; and just how there are a lot of people when they hear "urban" and "diversity," they look at it as a deficit, but what we really learned was to have great conversations about looking at "urban" and "diversity" as things to embrace and things to celebrate. And I just really felt like it was a great model for building a belief system and a leadership stance on certain kids.

Richard discussed how his graduate leadership coursework focused on culturally responsive pedagogy through the lens of system thinking as district and building leaders. Briscoe (2016) used Senge’s (1990) work to clarify:

Systems thinking in education represents multiple stakeholders (i.e. governments, policy-makers, school boards, school communities, principals, teachers, parents and students). Within any system, a process of understanding how people influence one another within a complete entity or larger system is needed. (p. 8)

Richard recorded in the questionnaire some preparation, illustrating the interpretive code of limited preparation for teaching diverse learners, but learned a lot from reading great books, listened to learn, and engaged in challenging dialogue. He also shared the importance of leadership capacity while building a culture of trust. He was especially concerned about Leadership Practices that emphasize creditability/community and the level of trust between the school and parents. He told a story about new students coming to America as immigrants. The social worker and counselor, the behavioral health team, helped them adjust to their new country. Richard stressed the level of fear amongst immigrant parents.

He commented:

There's a level of fear for the parents where they may not trust systems or what they perceive as bureaucratic systems. So, we have to build trust with some parents. And that's how we found out that some of our kids, they do have trauma, and there will be
someone who finally establishes some form of trust with a parent and we're able to get information to better support the students.

He said that it was important to meet the needs of all students including culturally linguistically diverse students; it is important to “take time to learn about my students, families, communities. Make myself visible. Advocate for them.”

Richard’s body language, during the interview, displayed a sense of passion and care. Although he seemed quiet, his actions spoke volumes. The interpretive codes captured in Richard’s questionnaire reflected leadership practices to enhance student learning by leading through application and own life experiences. Additionally, the alignment of these Leadership Practices was visible in Richards’ interview; important to his interactions with students, parents, and the community. Furthermore, he had a strong sense of helping students become successful through Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction with the interpretive codes of monitoring practices, student engagement, and relationship practices.

Richard talked about how he monitored data with the help of his instructional coach (IC) during PLC meetings. Richard remarked:

Obviously as the building leader, I have to be able to take different stances; but I try to evoke or bring out thoughts and thinking from my teachers as I present the data, or my IC presents the data, or we just have data that's ready for us to go. I want to hear what they have to say, so that we can have all parties, you know, have a voice and then we can make a decision based on that.

When asked how the effectiveness of a culturally relevant school might be characterized and measured, Richard stated there are a series of questions related to student engagement that need to be asked. “Are all groups of students, populations of students, are they learning? Are they meeting those high expectations? Is the leader monitoring those gaps? Is there a plan to get rid of those gaps?” He continued,
then I would say, that person is on their way to be more of being a responsive school leader….So, how do you meet the needs of your student population at a social, emotional level, at a health level, a family community level?

Richard believes that relationships through high expectations are also important to student engagement in instruction while communicating love and care. He noted:

I would say not letting certain students off the hook or leaving them to their own devices because you feel that you have low expectations for them or you feel like they're not ready; that should not be happening. You should still be addressing and meeting the needs of all the kids.

The significance of monitoring data, student engagement, and relationships were elements found in his professional development and PLC documents and the observations of PLC meetings. A district level professional development included the following topics with the themes of Monitoring Data by disaggregating data and standard based planning.

The principal met with individual teachers to help them with data analysis. The second theme displayed in the agenda of Monitoring Teacher Practices allowed teachers to engage in standards-based planning for lesson development.

District-Led Professional Development: Topics:

- Analyzing Student Data//PLC Standards-Based Planning
- Individual Teachers Meeting with Principal/IC for Data Analysis
- Objective- Teachers will analyze the previous year’s data to identify students’ needs, and develop an action plan to maintain and grow student achievement.
- Teachers not involved will receive time to plan for the first 2 weeks of school.

The review of the agenda showed no attention to Culturally Relevant Practices. So far, this is similar to the district directed agendas of other co-researchers.

The PLC agenda for Richard’s school that involved all teachers follows:

Topic(s):

- Root Cause Analysis (Inquiry & Problem Identification using achievement and survey data)
- Big Questions - What are the precise problems requiring immediate attention?
• Why are these problems occurring or sustaining?

Themes similar to the district level staff development included Monitoring Data that supported teachers in the analysis of data for finding the root cause of problems. The big questions supported reflective practices related to reteaching plans for Monitoring Teaching Practices.

I described the physical setting and a detailed description of relevant events and interactions between the principal, district leaders, instructional coach and teachers in my observation field notes. This was the first observation where district leaders were present.

Teachers meet in the teacher’s lounge during PLC meetings. Fourth grade teachers were reviewing data based on state assessment interim data. The principal was positive and very clear on what he wanted teachers to do. District office staff were there to observe the principal working with teachers during PLC meetings. The instructional coach was also there to support teachers. His tone and body language were positive and he seemed to have a great relationship with his staff.

I wrote in my observation guide the discussion that ensued and interactions between the principal, instructional coach, district leader, and classroom teachers. Describe below are my field notes:

The principal was meeting with the fourth grade team of four teachers while looking at the results of the state assessment interim results in English Language Arts and Math. Teachers were identifying the five items that they scored high on and five items they scored lowest through disaggregating data related to the theme Monitoring Data. The principal facilitated the meeting for analyzing grade level data. The data compared school, district, and state scores. The principal knew the data and engaged in conversations with teachers around the work. Connected to the theme of Monitoring Teacher Practices with the focus on standards, assessments, and reteaching plans, the principal shared the need to reteach some of the standards and how they can plan for grouping their kids to help reteach some of the standards where they did not do well. He shared with the group the idea of tracking the standards and how students are performing on day to day activities that connected to the standards. The district person carefully observed Richard to see how he addressed the standards.
When asked about his leadership style, Richard described himself as a collaborative leader. He stated:

I would say the leadership model that best describes me is a collaborator and more of a... I don't, I guess you would say I tried to build capacity from the ground up and I really try to focus on PLCs and try to work on, being data-based in our decision making.

Arbabi and Mehdinezhad (2015) clarified organizations that promoted human forces using collaboration have good development and tend to pay attention to changes in a world that continues to be transformed. Given his collaboration with teachers in his building, colleagues, and central office leaders, Richard did not identify any support from the central office regarding the implementation of culturally relevant practices. I perceive that Midway school district leaders value diversity, but have yet provided Richard and other co-researchers with the level of comfortableness needed to help teachers implement culturally relevant practices.

**Case Study 2: Nicole**

Nicole is an African American elementary school principal in Midway school district. She is in her early 40s and has two children. Her formal education includes a degree in Elementary Education, Master’s in Reading, and a Specialist in Reading and Education Administration. She has worked as a teacher, instructional coach, vice principal, and currently principal in two large urban school districts. The demographics of the school she now leads include students from diverse backgrounds. The majority of her student population is Latinx 74%, African American 10%, White 12%, and 3% other. Nicole has been at her school for two years as principal and was very excited to share the things that are going on in her building.
Nicole’s school is located in the northwest part of the city surrounded by a community that takes pride in supporting the businesses and schools in that area. Her school has a unique schedule that is different from other schools in Midway school district. Students attend year-round and have scheduled breaks throughout the school year. The parents of this school community embrace the schedule and are committed to keeping it that way.

My relationship with Nicole was already established and the level of trust was apparent. We often engaged in conversations about effective leadership practices while sharing and learning from each other. At one point, our schools shared the same instructional coach and we planned and implemented our professional development sessions together. Based on the ranking of Nicole’s school, she completed the questionnaire and volunteered to participate in phase two of the study.

During the interview, Nicole was very relaxed and confident in answering questions. She talked a lot about leadership practices that had strong occurrences in two of the four themes. The first theme apprehended in the interview data was Leadership Practices: Curriculum and Instruction with preferences of such actions as monitoring practices and student engagement. Having a keen eye on monitoring instruction, studying data related to teachers and students were apparent in Nicole’s leadership style. She elaborated on the importance of spending time in the classroom monitoring practices of students and teachers. She was very aware of the curriculum and knowledgeable of instruction, having spent some years as an instructional coach provided her with some savvy skills and effective ways of supporting the development of teachers. She remarked, “Weekly the staff look at student work and data to help them understand the ‘why’ and the latest best practices. We study
those strategies and are expected to use them in the classroom to help students be successful.” Nicole described her leadership as an instructional leader that is firm, but fair with staff and students and believes that instruction comes first over all things. She explained:

I spend quite a bit of time in the classroom, as I should, and I just really get discouraged when other things get in the way. My best days are being in the classroom where I need to be, where I want to be. Looking at student work and how they are learning and what they are learning, and if they are getting what they need, and working with teachers to make sure that they are on the right track and supporting students how they should.

Nicole also shared what she is looking for when she walks into classrooms when observing teachers. She wants to make sure that teachers’ instruction match their lesson plans, what they say they are going to teach, and to see if the evidence that students produce matches the instruction. Nicole was quite interested in the degree to which students are engaged in learning. When instruction does not match, she has a deeper conversation with teachers to find out what needs to happen or what needs to be tweak. She stated:

During weekly PLC data meetings with teachers they are expected to bring in student work to see who have mastered the standards and who did not. I notice how they discuss as a team reteaching plans to implement and better support those who did not get it the first time.

As an instructional leader, her work with teachers is focused significantly on student engagement.

The documents (agendas) received from a school directed professional development and professional learning community meetings represented Nicole’s leadership practice as an instructional leader with an emphasis on Monitoring Data supported by a focus on disaggregating data and standards-based planning. The documents also suggested that
**Monitoring Teacher Practices** were important to Nicole, as depicted with *standards*, *assessments*, and *reteaching plans*.

The agenda for district-directed professional development on August 2, 2019, included teachers utilizing standards to plan units of studies, aligning curriculum resources to units, using data to identify and plan for instruction, and learning high-leverage, research based instructional strategies. Nicole’s instructional leadership style was also apparent while observing her PLC meeting with third and fourth grade teachers.

During the observation of the PLC meeting on October 1, 2019, Nicole guided teachers to look at disaggregated groups within their classrooms to target those students who had gaps in their learning. The agenda included the following:

- **Data Meeting Protocol**
  - Exemplars
  - Student work
- **Data Check-ins**
  - Student data notebook
    - Share out the contents and organization of your student notebook with your team
- **Effective First Teach Alignment at a Glance**
  - Work on your standards and targets for the week of October 7 (due by the end of the day tomorrow)
    - Standards
    - Target-explicitly spelled out for each day
  - Lesson Plans- Alignment from Standard and target
    - Student task and evidence does it match the verb
    - Please note **individual lesson plans** are due the morning of Friday, October 4 for the week of October 7th

I wrote in my observation field notes: “Nicole and the instructional coach facilitated the meeting discussing what good first-teach looked like. She talked about the alignment of standards, the learning targets, and student evidence. Because she had experiences as an instructional coach and very familiar with the curriculum, Nicole was very comfortable
navigating the guaranteed viable curriculum and knew the standards well. I observed the following:

Each teacher shared their classroom data while addressing misconceptions students had. One teacher shared how the majority of her students struggled and the need to reteach. Nicole focused on the need for her staff to practice how to reteach lessons clearing up errors and misconceptions.

Nicole stated, “this is an area that we are learning to do and will be practicing throughout the school year.” She also discussed data while looking at disaggregated groups of students.

In the past, we had not looked at it as much but this is something that was brought to our attention in the spring. We are currently looking more closely at the different disaggregated groups to find out who is getting it and where the gaps of achievement are.

Her focus on closing learning gaps are significant in Midway school district. With a high population of Latinx students, the learning gaps between white, Latinx, and African Americans are wide in the district

White and Asian students in both reading and math perform higher than their counterparts of Black, Latinx, and ELL students (see Table 3). The achievement data of the students in grades three to five in Midway School District reflect the need for school leaders to be culturally prepared and knowledgeable about leading diverse schools. However, the district’s professional development agenda, and observation of the PLC lacked a focus on culturally relevant practices. While Nicole was clearly knowledgeable about instruction, culturally relevant practices were not observed in her repertoire of instructional skills. Nicole’s notions about the inclusion of culturally relevant practices seemed to be more centered on multicultural education.
Nicole expressed in the questionnaire a *limited definition* of **Culturally Relevant Practices**, the second most frequent theme, that focused more on instructional elements and less on integration of culturally relevant practices in teaching and learning. She recorded:

> I define culturally relevant practices as practices that are inclusive of all students. Staff should build relationships with students, provide time for students to build relationships with each other. The teaching should be practical and relevant, including techniques and strategies that focus all of the senses and learning styles.

Her definition was not aligned with such culturally relevant tenets as Ladson-Billings’ (2006) or Gay’s (2010) culturally responsive; however, the inclusion of learning styles and relationships resonated with Rychly and Graves’ (2012) attention to traditions, values, language and communication, learning styles, and relationships in schools and classrooms to engage students with learning.

Most of what she shared about activities connected to celebratory multiculturalism instead of pedagogy. She described in her questionnaire and interview, yearly cultural festivals that take place every fall with students sharing and displaying information about their cultures. “With the use of tri-boards, students display artifacts, clothing, and other items connected to their culture for others to see and learn from.” Nicole commented on the high level of participation from parents and family members and how they work together while telling stories about culture. She expanded on the day to day celebrations that they do while recognizing Hispanic month, Korean, and Asian heritage in her school. Teachers are also challenged to bring in realia and artifacts that support their culture as well.

Her emphasis on **Culturally Relevant Practices** during the interview was quite different from the questionnaire. Nicole expanded her definition and was able to discuss some elements of culturally relevant practices that linked to the literature in this area.
I believe culturally relevant pedagogy looks like making real world connections for students. Helping them make those connections for what they're learning. It looks like allowing students to bring in their culture and discuss their connection. As a teacher, I'm helping you make connections because I'm giving you an example. But then I want the student to give me an example from their perception and from their world with the teaching. I'm also, again, in that moment, jumping in with students when they're making those errors and helping them to correct that. And for me, if I'm teaching something and students aren't getting it, I need to be able to switch in the moment and figure out which way I need to go.

None of these activities were the emphasis of conversations about culturally relevant practices in the PLC meetings or professional development sessions. I did find an emphasis on instructional efforts, through reteaching plans and data notebooks, that might emerge from the background experiences of students.

Based on the literature, many of the practices that Nicole described in her interview were practices of multicultural education that focus less on equity. Parkhouse, Lu, and Massaro (2019) explained that culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy are “specific approaches to ME [multicultural education] that refocus attention on educational equity and raising students’ sociopolitical consciousness so that they can disrupt the tendency of schools to reproduce social inequalities” (p. 420). Nicole referenced in the questionnaire, her preparation of including learning styles of all students.

The third and fourth themes noted, with moderate representations, were Preparation for Equity and Leadership Practices. Learning from others’ experiences through graduate preparation and from the staff, outside consultants, and other colleagues assisted Nicole in Preparation for Equity. Nicole provides opportunities for staff and students to learn from each other while sharing their cultures and backgrounds. Preparation for Equity, described in Nicole’s questionnaire, included learning from others and limited preparation for teaching diverse students during her undergraduate education.
During my undergraduate classes, I was asked to create unit plans for all of the core areas that need to include real world relevance process and had to include teaching and learning with all of the learning styles. During my administration studies, being aware and developing ways to reach all stakeholders were included in all of the classes.

Nicole’s conversation reflected instances of learning from others’ experiences, specifically acquiring knowledge from others and graduate preparation, which were different than her pre-service years. She stated,

I attended School of Education for my administration degree, and I feel that it helped me to be the administrator that I am now. We did a lot of case studies and a lot of collaboration, but more importantly we talked a lot about the urban setting and things that take place in urban schools, and that is where I am currently. We did a lot around culturally responsiveness and looking at our pedagogy.

Although she perceived that Preparation for Equity was the emphasis of her master’s program, many of her Leadership Practices focused on instruction and monitoring of student learning. When asked: What professional development regarding culturally responsiveness have you given your staff? Nicole explained meeting the needs of diverse students using standards-based language without any mention of culturally relevant practices.

And so a lot of that is around the good first teach. And so looking at that alignment, that's how we get the good first teach from the standard, to the target, to the student evidence, and what's happening with that alignment. The good first teach and then that reteach, so looking at the data from the assignments. Where students are, what they need, where the errors are, the misconceptions, and then how are we going to reteach that, and so being able to practice that. And so that is what we need to do more of. We usually get through the first part and get to write it down and talk about it, but actually practicing the reteach is where we need to actually push more, and so we're going to... Hopefully, we'll be able to do a lot more of that this year.

While Nicole appeared to be much more focused on traditional instruction and a limited multicultural approach when addressing culturally relevant practices, she has been able to be more inclusive of families and the community surrounding her school. Nicole’s inclusion of
community in multicultural celebratory activities, support **Leadership Practices** that reinforce *credibility/community* and *relationship practices* among parents and community. “So we encourage students to work with their families and parents to work with their students as a family and bring that in.”

Overall, Nichole’s approach to culturally relevant practices was tinged with elements of *learning from others’ experiences*, *multicultural preparation* and *limited preparation for teaching diverse learners*. When asked during the interview what kind of support the district provides with implementing culturally relevant practices, Nicole stated “We did not have anyone come and kind of give us that support. I talked with the staff and we discuss ways that we could bring forth all of the cultures.” She stressed the fact that many of her students not only come from Mexico, but Puerto Rico, Guatemala, and various places. “We wanted each one of our students to have representation while others learned about them. At the school distract level the only support that is given are interpreters when needed during family events and conferences with parents.”

The preparation that Nicole experienced seemed to drive how she leads her school. She is passionate about the performance of her students and aims to close the learning gaps among students while supporting teaching and learning in her building. Nicole, as an instructional leader, perceived that high expectations for students must be demonstrated by allowing instruction to come first, absent in her voice is the need for closing learning gaps through the use of culturally relevant practices.

**Case Study 3: Raquel**

Raquel is an African American elementary school principal in Midway school district and has been in the district for three years. She is in her early 40s and has a Master’s
in Education Administration and Doctorate in School Leadership. With eighteen years of experience in education, she has taught for eight years, seven years as an assistant principal and three years as principal. The school Raquel is currently leading includes students from diverse backgrounds. The majority of her students are Latinx 59% followed by European American 14%, African American 16%, and 11% other.

I had the opportunity to connect with her at a workshop presented by Django Paris who wrote the book *Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy* (2012) and Christopher Emdin who co-wrote the book *Between the World and the Urban Classroom* (2017). We were both excited about opportunities to have this topic addressed in Midway school district while supporting school leaders.

Raquel defined **Culturally Relevant Practices** in the questionnaire as “having a keen awareness of the backgrounds of the students in your school and identifying and executing ways to make classrooms and schools more inclusive.” Raquel was able to give a definition based on the literature discussed in Chapter two. She connected to the thinking that Paris shared during the training that we both attended. As noted in the questionnaire data, Raquel did not have any **Preparation for Equity** in her college courses and relied on life experiences more so than anything else to prepare her.

During the interview, she mentioned the school leader she worked under and how he helped shaped her leadership practices today. She viewed him as an instructional leader, which allowed her to pay more attention to data and the disaggregated groups of her students. Raquel stated, “This year I am really zeroing on my disaggregated groups. In the past, I think we as a school just looked at surface level data” (p. 3). She talked about bringing in people as thought partners to get additional ideas for implementation. Raquel has
had many discussions with me about student data. We shared unique ways to monitor students learning through data notebooks, data talks with individual students, and data meetings with teachers.

Raquel’s concern for **Culturally Relevant Practices** is the strongest theme in her interview with the interpretive codes of **defined culturally relevant practices** and **knowledge of culturally relevant practices**. In defining **culturally relevant practices**, Raquel appears to connect to relevant literature, especially with the emphasis on the background of students. She noted,

> And so I think it is important to have students, um, students' experiences embraced, um, and to learn about their backgrounds and who they are past just, you know, a student number your classroom. To really understand their backgrounds and where they're coming from. Um, and so it's a work in progress at my site.

As Raquel continued with the definition, she gave an example of a practice in her building that is much more connected to celebratory multicultural (Gay, 2004: Ladson-Billings, 1994) than culturally relevant practices for teaching and learning. Indeed, “it’s work in progress.”

> Um, I know we're working to build in a cultural night for families this year, something that we hadn't done in the past. Um, although we celebrate all cultures, but this really being intentional and putting that on showcase for, everyone to see.

Although Raquel bridged the topic of celebratory multicultural, what is significant about this activity is the inclusion of student voice, through an active student council. Cook-Sather (2006) explained that, “‘student voice’ as a term asks us to connect the sound of students speaking not only with those students experiencing meaningful, acknowledged presence but also with their having the power to influence analyses of, decisions about, and practices in schools” (p. 363).
Um, you know, making sure that students have a voice. We have an active student council, and they are able to express concerns and bring concerns from their classmates up to those meetings so we can talk about those things. Um, so just making sure that they're heard and, and that, you know, um, their backgrounds and experiences are embraced.

Raquel seemingly desired for the authentic voices of students to be heard and for their opinions to count, not to just be a presence in the room.

Her knowledge of culturally relevant practices was rather limited for guiding teachers toward implementation. When asked: What areas in school leadership do you wish you would have more training or experiences with? Raquel did not view culturally relevant as an area for further development. Raquel realized that culturally relevant practices was a work in progress at her school. Couched in the statement, “To really understand their backgrounds and where they're coming from. Um, and so it's a work in progress at my site.”

She wrote in her questionnaire that her preparation as a teacher and principal was much more focused on her life experiences than any class she took, which connected to the second more frequent theme, Preparation for Equity, but cited the school finance and the budget as the least area of study. Raquel stated during her interview that she had one class around multicultural education. Insightful in her conversation were comments related to opportunities to learning from others’ experiences in the district but often the trainings are not sustainable. She said,

Because all too often we have all these nice trainings and this and that. We get folders and binders and I've been guilty of this too and it's great and you're fired up, or you're pumped and you're ready to, you know, execute what you've learned and then it just goes on the shelf. And so making sure that this is sustainable. So I think the sustainability piece probably is the most important, is to sustain because it, it does no good to anyone if you use something that's gonad be dropped on the shelf at the end of school year. Because when you talk about culture, that is who I am, what I represent, um, and that shouldn't be, um uh, just narrowed down to some binder on the shelf. You know, it's much more than that.
Our next conversation was about the unique characteristics of culturally responsive school leaders. Raquel said,

Oh man. Always having your finger on the pulse of, um, the needs of your schools as it relates to just being responsive to your student population. Do you have a transient population? Do you have a population where, you know, kids need to go home and, watch younger siblings? Do you have a population where um, you know, there are lots of second language learners? Do you have a population of where, um, maybe, um, students, um, are beginning to have I don't know, awareness of ... how can I put this? Um, maybe their own, uh, gender and sexuality conformity, that sort of thing. Um, just being aware of, of all of that. Um, it's, it's a, it's a fine line because you want to make sure that there's a high level of inclusivity in it.

Again, the limited references to teaching and learning is absent in her conversation, but leaders having a pulse on the student population aligns with Gay’s (2010) definition “as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them” (p. 31). Raquel also mentioned gender and sexuality, a topic that was not approached by other co-researchers.

Raquel’s knowledge of culturally related practices appears to be more in tune to the limited knowledge of their application and measures of disaggregated data. This knowledge was apparent in her description of what culturally relevant practices look like in the classroom and indicators of its presence. When asked, what training have you given your staff that addresses cultural responsiveness? Raquel shared a limited knowledge of application:

We have not this year. Um, well we've not, since I've been there, um, like I said, we're just starting to kind of, um, develop into this awareness of, um, you know, look at our subgroups. Some of our school ... you know, our data is telling a narrative about different disaggregated groups in our building. Um, and so that's where we are in our spectrum of conversation and training.
In her discussion of the application of **Culturally Relevant Practices**, she expressed such elements as looking at data first, common assessments, cultural aspects of language, and access of families to technology. Raquel responded:

> Oh my goodness. Yeah, so again, I'm looking for that responsiveness, um, for staff and I'm looking at... are they for students. Um, I'm looking at first the data. Um, so I'll go into, you know, Miss Wright's classroom. Um, I have her data pulled up and I'm looking for those interactions between teacher and student. I'm looking for, uh, your common assessments, um, maybe if their teacher created, are they created with the mindset that um, any kid can take this test? Um, and there won't be cultural biases in the question. So that if I take this test, is Sally... and I have no... I don't know. What am I trying to say? Um, I've no background with this. I have no experience with this. It's a level of playing field.

She also viewed responsiveness as **student engagement** for the theme, **Leadership Practice:** **Curriculum and Instruction.**

Despite such a strong focus on data and assessment, Raquel realized the cultural tensions in language use of students in homes and communities often interfere with assessment. We had a lively dialogue about the cultural meaning of language which Raquel viewed as being culturally responsive. As a social function, language supports the transmission of culture from one generation to another and aids the shift of the child from family to the classroom where wider social contacts are encountered. The properties of language are highlighted by Owens (2016): a) The purpose of language is to serve as the code for transmissions between people; and b) Language reflects the collective thinking of its culture and, in turn, influences that thinking. A lively discussion about the nature of language occurred between us – that reflected exchanged of ideas.

> So those are sort of some of the things that-some of the language...” I said, you mean like if the divan compared to a couch or sofa?” [I wanted to know if our kids understood other synonyms for couch or sofa.]
Raquel: “Right, right. A sofa. Right. I inserted, “ I've always known it's a couch and a sofa. My kids' grandmother always use it as you're sitting on the divan. As a youngster, I wondered about the difference between a divan and couch or sofa.

Raquel: “Right. Right. I'm also looking at, um, and also looking at, you know, your communication home with parents. Because if we don't have access to Wi-Fi, internet, is it appropriate me for the me to send communication home electronically or do I need the mail in the backpack? Or conversely, if I know all these parents have phones and maybe it's going to get, you know, eaten up in ... by the dog in the backpack, and I know that parents are on Facebook. I know they're on Twitter, I know, you know, on social media havens, I may send it out that way. And so that piece too can be, you know, called the responsive piece.

As noted by Edwards (2011) one of the dispositions that Geneva Gay considered as important to assessment, was not just the disaggregation of data, but using culturally responsive assessment batteries. The couch and divan discussion is indicative of cultural bias that exists in assessments.

Raquel recalled district support for diversity and cultural responsiveness in several local districts, but could not recall a time when Midway School District supported work in this area, but knew for sure that it had not been done in the past several years. She perceived that some of the concerns with data could addressed with this focus.

And maybe, perhaps I've noticed a lot of the districts in the area are having, uh, trainings around diversity inclusion and cultural responsiveness and being targeted into those areas. I haven't been in this system long enough to know that has been work that has been done before and maybe I just missed that because, you know, based on, you know, when I was hired in. Um, but I don't know that we've engaged in that work as of the last couple of years I've been here. Is it on the system wide? And I wonder if some of our concerns with the data couldn't be addressed through some of that work. And I don't know what their plan is to roll work back out.

With these concerns, Raquel segued to the second most frequent theme, Leadership:

**Curriculum and Instruction** with attention to *student engagement* through student language support for English as Language Learners (ELL), a significant focal point of *monitoring practices, and relationship practices.*
She was not only concerned about the language success of ELL students but the language needs of other population of students as well. She provided a description of ways to engage students in learning through the SIOP model that targets the language abilities of ELL’s.

So then, you know, then comes the argument, will it... second language learners can't do this because they're learning the second language and that's nice. But okay, wait a minute But our data points to a native speaker- In case, we were just learning language. You know, um, doing better than them. Right. And so what I've started doing, um, what I've started doing in particular, because we do have some shortcomings with performance with our ESL population too, with our instructional strategies. What I've started doing is putting instructional strategies in each of our faculty notes are helpful. Every week they get something from the Shelter Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model, a little blurb, just a little something quick that they can execute the next day.

The Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) model is targeted instruction for increasing the language abilities of ELLs and involves eight aspects of language: Lesson Preparation, Building Background, Comprehension Input, Review and Assessment, Lesson Delivery, Practice Application, Interaction, and Strategies (Furr & Garcia, 2018).

Raquel also viewed these language strategies as useful for teachers to use each week and then eventually use with other populations of students --- “Two-three bullet points implement the next day in the classroom. So they could share. They get that, they get that every week. And so then starting there but then branching out . . . to other populations.” As Raquel discussed the nature of language and ways to increase engagement for ELLs and other population of students, culturally responsive practices were reiterated in her discussion. This time more closely aligned to the relevant literature. She said:

Yeah, probably. I don't know. (Laughs). So my definition of culturally responsive practices is just again, creating a welcoming environment for students, um, being accepting of their experiences and their backgrounds. Um, tailoring my instruction to fit those needs of what my children need beyond just academics. "Oh, I'm
deficient in reading. I'm deficient in math." But, um, maybe there are some, um, you know, like I said before, communication barriers or barriers to, "I can't stay after school for tutoring cause I got to watch my five year old brother," those sorts of things.

With progress in reading and math in mind and the notions of how to measure the effectiveness of a culturally responsive school, the conversation shifted to monitoring practices connected to Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction. Raquel stated:

Um, I think, I think those are the ways that they can be, can be measured. Um, from the student and families standpoint. I think it can be measured from the teacher standpoint in terms of, you know, observations into the classroom, professional development, the effectiveness of professional development that they perceive and the follow up, the sustainability.

In the application of Culturally Relevant Practices, the most dominant theme present in Raquel’s interview data, monitoring practices were also a focus which led to the staff’s discovery that African American boys were achieving lower than ELL students. "Um, because in particular, in our building, you talked about disaggregated groups, our African American boys are performing lower than second language learners." This discovery was precipitated by reflective practices, a Leadership Practice emphasis connected to curriculum and instruction. She remarked:

Yeah, so, um, I had one teacher say, "I want to know why disaggregated group X, Y and Z is like this in my classroom." And I felt like for that teacher, that was a big first step for her. Cause she owned it. And previously, maybe she didn't.

Raquel’s questionnaire reflected similar sentiments; “This year I’m really zeroing in on my disaggregated groups. In the past, I think we as a school just looked at surface level data.”

What was again interesting, as in the other five cases, none of the focus of the district-directed staff development, PLC documents, or observation of PLC included culturally relevant practices. The analysis of the staff development agenda reflected similar concerns.
The district-level professional development included an agenda that on September 11, 2019 incorporated the theme of **Monitoring Data** through examining *disaggregated data* and *standards based planning*. **Monitoring Teacher Practices** involved *standards* and *assessment*.

**District Professional Development**

Please bring these items to the Flex Space:

Fully-charged laptop and materials/scores from your common assessment you gave this week.

**Agenda**
- Engage
- STEM Night information
- Input Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), Fountas & Pinnell and common assessment data
- Start planning quarter 2
- Debrief

Additionally, the PLC agenda on September 24, 2019 reflected the theme of **Monitoring Data** through examining, *disaggregated data* and *standards based planning* for English Language Arts and Math. **Monitoring Teacher Practices** were *standards, assessment, and reteaching plans*.

**Agenda**

Teachers were divided in grade-level groups.

Participants: Clock, 1st grade team

**Common Assessments**
- Mid-module assessment for math
  - Students did not transfer number bonds to equations
  - Next, time teachers will give students a review day going over the various ways to solve an equation before giving the assessment
  - Overall, students did well with story problems
- English Language Arts (ELA)
  - Differentiated activities based on read aloud

**Next steps**
- Explore See Saw for ELA comprehension and phonics
- 8:30-10:00 K-2

Common movements for linking chart

Data wall (disaggregated groups need to be input)

Turn and talk
• Make pairings (ELA/Math
• Language objectives
• Determine specific questions that we could ask based on the standard and create stems
• Decide where in lesson the questions will be posed and how they should be answered
10:00 -11:30   Grades 3-5
Data wall (disaggregated groups need to be input)
State Assessment noticing
• “Test Summary” and “Item Reports” will be available after 10/18
• What went well?
• What do kids need to be more successful with testing?
TITANS (3rd is schedule for next week, 4th? 5th?)
Turn and talk
• Language objectives
• Make pairings (ELA/Math)
• Determine specific questions that we could ask based on the standard and create stems
• Decide where in lessons the questions will be posed and how they should be answered.

The observation of Raquel’s PLC mirrored the district-led professional development and the PLC documents. I observed a meeting with the fourth grade team that met in the classroom of one of the teachers. The themes from the observations were similar to those captured in the documents; Monitoring Data through examining, disaggregated data and standards based planning for English Language Arts and Math. Monitoring Teacher Practices were standards, assessment, and reteaching plans. Fieldnotes of the observation follow:

Fieldnotes:
I noticed that the classroom had lots of anchor charts to support previous lessons. Standards taught in math, reading, are posted in classroom. The classroom had walls that talk. Two- fourth grade teachers and principal are present in the meeting.

The principal told the teachers that they were going to do a walk-through of other classrooms. She reviewed the standards that the teachers were going to be teaching in those. After about 15 minutes, the group left to participate in the walk-throughs of three classrooms. During the walkthrough, fourth grade teachers observed fifth grade
teachers and fifth grade teachers observed fourth grade teachers. The principal asked teachers to pay attention to standards taught, and activities connected to standards.

When they got back to the meeting room, the principal wanted teachers to give warm and cool feedback. The principal asked the teachers what are some things that they observed and need to improve on for next steps.

After observations, the teachers gave warm feedback to support higher level thinking. What do we already know and what strategies were being used?

Reflections: Teachers learn from other teachers and are often more receiving of feedback from peers which pushes them to go deeper. They can see the skills they are trying to learn through a different lens and may walk away with strategies to increase rigor in their own instruction. One teacher commented that she was going to later visit one of the teachers to learn about a strategy used. She liked the way the strategy worked.

Raquel’s final theme was Leadership Practices that connected to Leadership:

Curriculum and Instruction. She appeared to place an emphasis on relationship practices with expressions of communicating love, valuing students and care, and having high expectations for them. In her efforts to value Culturally Relevant Practices, it was clear that student voice and involving families through cultural activities were important. In the following conversation she illuminates deficit thinking linked to Preparation for Equity and energy surrounding relationships practices is expressed,

... the first thing we talked about as a staff, my first year there was what do we want for our students? And I put a big ... and I actually took this from another principal in the district so he'd ran through this exercise with his staff. And I took the big piece of butcher paper and just wrote that question there. What do we want for our students? And some people wrote, you know, "I want them to be good readers." And some people wrote, "I want them to feel loved." And some people wrote other things. Um, and the thing that I wrote down is," I want them to, um, know who they are and be proud of where they're from." Because a lot of times, um sometimes when we are ... we have students from a certain area, there's a perception that comes along with that student, whether right or wrong, true or false.

Raquel had much to say about Culturally Relevant Practices and while these were not applied in teaching and learning throughout the school, she seemed proud of what she
had learned about this area, especially due to limited preparation in the areas during her pre-service and graduate education experiences. She wanted to see more teachers prepared through an integration of culturally relevant practices and more focus on special education.

Concerns about the wider Preparation for Equity in the district and by universities and colleges were communicated with the realization that not much support was provided from the district regarding Culturally Relevant Practices and the knowledge she acquired was from learning from others’ experiences. “And so I wonder if it's time to completely revamp our teaching, um, pre-service teaching programs.”

While Raquel described her leadership style as “very chameleon-like”, she appeared to be more collaborative and commented about the trust she had gained from teachers. “I think that if you were to poll them, they would say I'm fair. They would say I'm transparent and they would say, I know where I stand with her.” She described her leadership style in this manner:

So I, um, I think I'm a mix of all different types of leadership, um, styles. Um, I try, and tailor my leadership style to the person, and I know that kind of sounds ... seems very chameleon-like.” (Laughs). Um, but I try, and fit my style to, um, what the per ... what the individual needs because sometimes, you know, some individuals do need, um, a more authoritarian leadership style because maybe that's what they respond to. Maybe that’s just what they need and conversely, maybe others don't. And so I try, and not do a one size fits all.

While she described herself as more authoritarian, I did not view her style in this manner. She appeared to be more collaborative but felt that out of necessity the authoritarian style worked for her – the chameleon like style seemed to fit.

Case Study 4: Marie

Marie is an African American elementary school principal in Midway school district. She is in her early 50s and has two children. Her formal education includes a degree in
Elementary Education and a Master’s in Education Administration. She has thirty-one years of experience and worked as a classroom teacher for six years, a reading teacher for four years, several years as an instructional coach, and a principal for thirteen years. The school’s demographics that Marie is currently leading include students from diverse backgrounds. The majority of her student population is European American 30%, closely followed by African American 28%, Latínx 17%, and 25% other. Marie has been at her school for three years, transferring from a school where she served for 10 years. Marie’s school ranked number one in achievement based on the rankings of the top 16 achieving elementary schools.

My relationship with Marie is not new. At one point, we both were principals at different schools. During that time our schools were going through turnaround practices. Based on under-performing school data, the district provided implementation coaches from the state department of education to support us while aiming to move our schools to higher levels of achievement. The implementation coaches worked with us teaching us how to monitor various kinds of data, to implement research based instructional strategies, and to develop effective ways of supporting teachers. Marie and I also shared the same assessment manager, who helped administrators with formal, and informal assessments. What we learned as a result of this experience, is represented in Marie’s interview.

Marie met me at a public library not too far from her school for the interview. She decided that it would be a good place to meet away from her building. I felt that she was able to speak her truth in a carefree way while talking with me. During the analysis of her interview, several themes were captured and I compared these with themes of her qualitative questionnaire, documents from professional development sessions and PLCs, and
observations of PLC’s. The themes from the crystallization of data yielded a comprehensive picture of the phenomena of culturally relevant practices for Marie, as they did for other co-researchers. I first share what she had to say about culturally relevant practices in her questionnaire and then the dominant themes from the interviews that were integrated with other data sources to provide a descriptive narrative of her data.

When asked how do you define culturally relevant practices? Marie responded, “Responsive teaching/skills at teaching diverse groups of students.” She had very little to say about culturally relevant practices in her questionnaire. In the interview data, Culturally Relevant Practices was the last of the four themes.

The first theme that surfaced with the strongest occurrence in her interview was Preparation for Equity with the interpretive codes of illuminating deficit thinking and learning from others’ experiences. Additionally, Marie talked a lot about monitoring practices, an interpretive code for the theme Leadership Practice: Curriculum & Instruction. In her conversation regarding culturally relevant practice, monitoring practices took on a different purpose. I perceived the meaning of monitoring practices for Marie as related to concerns about deficit thinking about English language Learner (ELL) and special education students in her school. Teachers, according to Marie, seemed to perceive if they are not special education (SPED) or English language Learner (ELL) endorse, they are not responsible for teaching these children. The conversation with Marie centered around this mindset and proceeded in this manner:

I'm not ELL endorsed that's so we have to get some aide, that's not my job, or the SPED teacher is working with my SPED group, or we're looking at data, these are my ELL students, the response is "oh they're ELL, they're SPED", and so the conversation then that I had to have was "let's take away the label of SPED, let's take away the label of ELL, who's responsible for the 21 students in your classroom?"
"Well what do you mean? "Who's their teacher?" "Well I am." "So It doesn't matter if they are ELL, it doesn't matter if they are SPED, you are responsible for each one of your students, now let's put that label back on, they're SPED, they're ELL back on here is additional support to help you address your SPED students, here is additional support to help.

The mindsets of teachers in Marie’s school regarding ELL and SPED groups seemed to be resistant to students outside the norms expected in American schools. Paris (2012), in the examination of these cultural elements, asserted, “The dominant language, literacy, and culture practices demanded by schools fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society” (p. 93). The mindsets of some teachers in her school appeared to be couched in deficit thinking about who these students are and what they can do as learners. Marie said, “Right now they are coming into the setting, the mindset is ‘We get a pass because they are SPED, we get a pass because they are ELL, because I’m not responsible for them -- that’s this person and this person.” I interpreted Marie’s conversation about her teachers as let me teach who I have and let the SPED and ELL teachers teach them.

Marie told an interesting story of meeting with a father face-to-face about his son, who has an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) with English being his second language, and how the father was depending on the school to teach his son. She described the IEP meeting:

In that meeting, the dad was able to share that they don't know how to do the math. “And they are not able to communicate with us, we want the best for our child so we are relying heavily on you all.” And so, he was able to express that through the translator. “And so, you have our support but it is not much we can say, it is not much we can do, but if something is not right let us know and we will do what we can. However, we do not know how to do it, but we are putting everything in your hands.” And so, this morning really was an a-ha, but it was another opportunity for this child's classroom teacher to know how important her position was and is, and
that the parent is relying solely on the teacher, solely on the school to help them educate their child.

As previously highlighted, the majority of the students in her school are White with 28% African American and 17% Latinx. The previous principal was a White male who had been at the school for eight to ten years. Marie mentioned at times how her shift as a transformational leader has caused resistance from her staff. Teachers would often tell her what the previous leader did or did not do and questioned her on what she expected them to do. Marie indicated that although it is her third year she is still working on getting everyone on board. Marie proclaimed:

Well I am different from that person, and so even though this is the start of the third year that I am with them, they are coming along, but there is slight pushback, not as much as the first year, not as much as the second year. Oddly the only reason, the only reason that it [accountable for district and building reform] is tolerated is because I am not backing down and there is more of a district support. They see it as business coming from the district. So, my practice is in alignment with the district expectations.

This is where Marie’s use of monitoring practices in Preparation for Equity focused on not allowing deficit thinking to get in the way of the work. She also helped to prepare teachers for promoting equity by emphasizing reflective practices:

They may have felt like, I do not want to do this or I do not want to have to be reflective, and make that fight. So, I felt like many years I was starting over, over and over because you had to be reflective and if something did not happen that needed to have happened, I did not necessarily want to keep turning that mirror. We did a reflective piece where it was called "Turn the Mirror." And so, you got to look in your mirror, and so when no one is looking, what are you doing? And so not all the time were we doing what we were supposed to do as a result, look at our data.

Nonetheless, she seem less prepared for addressing culturally relevant practices linked to Preparation for Equity.
In her questionnaire, Marie described **Preparation for Equity** through the lens of *no college preparation* and *learning from others’ experiences*. She wrote, “My pre-service work did not prepare me to meet the needs of culturally diverse students. My experience and increased knowledge base gained through professional development has supported my abilities to support staff.” During the interview, she gave more information about her preparation and connected to the teaching and learning aspects of her preparation program. She said,

The program that I went to, I went through ______ Administrative Certification Program. I had received my Masters already through ____. And so, I went through, it took me awhile to figure out what I wanted to end up doing and then I got into that particular program through _____.

She remarked that her Administrative Certification Program addressed working in urban schools with students from diverse backgrounds that may have risk factors that affect students’ success. “However, whatever the risk factors are they must be acknowledge, and addressed.” She stated that working with at-risk students, parents, and families there are certain things that are out of her control, but it does not mean that students cannot learn.

Marie described her program,

No, but it’s like it’s urban education. Through the urban education program, really looking at diversity, looking at diversity of student populations and working with factors that might affect students’ success, like acknowledging there are risk factors but those risk factors do not keep students from learning and as a leader, how do we work with those risk factors.

She continued with describing **Preparation for Equity** and what it was like *learning from others’ experiences* through on the job training.

Okay. So, I'm having to really think back. I think, to be honest, I think I received an awareness through the program, but then the actual piece of how to make it work was through trial and error on the job and experience as I moved forward. So just, I think in the preparation program, just an awareness. But then, once I got in the field,
in the position, it's like, think back through the awareness through the textbook, through the scenarios, and then okay in real life how am I going to work through this situation?

Maire said that she wished she had more training in her preparation program at the Master’s level about how to work with trauma among students. She stated:

Students that have lots of trauma, being able to support students around behavior with trauma as the root cause of behavior. So, some more training to allow me to be able to know how to support that. And, right now I rely on counselors or social workers knowledge to be able to help. As I am interacting and experiencing, then that's giving me the on the job training or learning, or development that I need as I run into future situations.

Marie was the one of two co-researchers that raised the question of student trauma of the root causes of student behavior. When children experience trauma and stress-related events, their social, emotional, cognitive, and academic growth is compromised (Ganzel & Morris, 2011).

When schools understand the traumatic experiences of their students, they may be more likely to try to discover the causes of the trauma for identifying support interventions that avoid re-traumatization and help students develop a new repertoire of calming and refocusing skills (Dorado, Martinez, McArthur, & Leibovitz, 2016).

While monitoring practices for Marie were connected to Preparation for Equity, she also emphasized monitoring practices and student engagement for the theme Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction. Marie monitored teachers by helping them understand the root cause analysis based on what the data were telling them. As captured in Preparation for Equity, she helped her staff become reflective practitioners. In the interview Marie explained some of her monitoring practices with the use of reflection:

I felt like I had to start over, over and over multiple years because that work was hard and it didn't necessarily feel good all the time for teachers on the receiving end
of that. Teachers did not have the understanding of root cause analysis. I worked to increase their knowledge base and helped them understand what it is going to take to be a reflective practitioner.

Reflection is a process in which an experience is retrieved and evaluated and allows the examination and analysis of past experiences or data leading to growth; helps reflective practitioners think more critically about their actions (Johns, 2017).

The PLC meeting I observed included the following agenda but did not involve time for reflective practices and its importance stressed by Marie

Topic(s): Model of Instruction (MOI)  
- Review Elements  
- Share protocols  
Teacher Evidence  
  Student Evidence  
- MOI/Planning  
- Elements of Focus for the building  
- MOI/Teacher Focus Evaluation/Deliberate Practice

The district directed staff development documents for October 23 and October 30, 2019, conducted in two parts, included the following.

October 23: Elementary-Session 2-Root Cause Analysis (Foundational Causation Analysis)  
Part I  
- Review session 1’s process  
- Read precise problem statement  
- Have staff to review subgroup data specifically SPED subgroup  
- Create precise problem statement for Sped Subgroup-Whole Group  
- School-Targeted Support (TSI) and Improvement  
One or more subgroups failed to make growth or underperforming for 3 consecutive years. For this is our Sped population and/or subgroup

October 30: Part II  
Goal: To identify foundational causes in our systems that explain REASONS WHY the problem is occurring and sustaining.  
Explore & Discover-Foundational Causes, REASONS WHY: The WHAT/WHY/HOW  
As we look at our Precise Problem Statement, we want to begin to think about Foundational Theories of Causation or REASONS WHY. In other words, what’s
going on in our system or within our locus of control, that could be causing or contributing to this problem or outcome-the problem being,

“Black/African American students are the second lowest performing sub-group in Reading and the lowest performing subgroup in Math in grades 3-5.”
AND Sped Students are the lowest performing subgroup in Reading and Second lowest in Math in grades 3-5.

Brainstorm the following: Brainstorming reasons that could be contributing to the problem-What is happening in the category that is contributing to the problem
Using the Needs Assessment as data, what might be some factors contributing to the problem?
  o Curriculum, Assessment and Instructional Planning
  o Classroom Instruction
  o Tiered Support
  o Parent, School, Community
  o Leadership & Decision Making

What could be happening in the core function area that is contributing to the precise problem statement? Staff will work in groups. Do Gallery Walk to allow other groups to add input reflections.

My Field Notes: The discussion of the foundational causes seemed to link with reflective practices with the agenda designed to address why of the problem. Data analysis revealed that “Black/African American students are the second lowest performing sub-group in Reading and the lowest performing subgroup in Math in grades 3-5.” AND Sped Students are the lowest performing subgroup in Reading and Second lowest in Math in grades 3-5.”

While the theme of Monitoring data through disaggregating data with African American and Special Education students showed learning gaps, the limited use of culturally relevant practices were not considered as a root cause as teachers worked in small groups to examine what they were doing for Monitoring Teacher Practices in the areas of curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

The observation of Marie’s PLC with fourth grade teachers was held on November 4, 2019. The agenda, reflected similar themes and interpretive codes, included the following:
Review Grade Level Data
- Where did we get 70% or greater
- Where did we exceed the state

Review Individual Teacher Data
- How does it compare to grade level data
- Complete Grade Level/Teacher Comparison Grid in regard to standards taught during the 1st Quarter
  - 1st Quarter standards where we reached 70% or greater
  - 1st Quarter Standards where we need to go deeper (we scored between 50-70%)
  - 1st Quarter Standards where we need to Re-teach (we scored below 50%)

Goal Setting and Action Planning
  Teachers work to create a Plan for Whole Group Re-Teaching of Standards that were taught in Quarter 1 where class performance was below 50%

Field Notes: The PLC meeting was held in the resource room where teachers come and use the copy machine and keep their guided reading level books. The room is located in an area that is quiet away from the businesses of the school. I observed the body language of principal and notice that this might be the first time she has reviewed the data. She seemed unsure about the process of data analysis and action planning.

Similar to the district-level professional development, the topic here were on *disaggregating data* and *standards base planning* with the theme of **Monitoring Data** and **Monitor Teacher Practices** with *standards* and *assessments*. My observation field notes continued:

Field notes: The principal was going over State assessment practice data. The principal gave fourth grade teachers a data analysis report of teachers’ fall interim data for their grade level and for their class average. The 4th grade teachers reviewed their data to have conversations of what went well and what needed to happen. One teacher stated that it was frustrating how some of the students performed because she expected them to do better.

The teachers identified standards that went well as a grade level. Writing and grammar was going well for them. The teachers appeared like they were not familiar with looking at data or they have felt overwhelmed with all of the documents.

The Instructional Coach (IC) was doing most of the talking. The body language of the teachers seemed withdrawn. There was a feeling of disconnection. The principal guided teachers to celebrate themselves. Some standards they performed higher than the district and state.
The principal and the IC had discussions with teachers about the standards to address what students were expected to know and do. The IC modeled with teachers how to break down the standards and find out what they need to do by connecting the mini assessments and math flip books to support next step planning. From this observation, it appeared that teachers needed time to look at the data and process it. In order to have an effective conversation they needed to become familiar with the data.

I also viewed the PLC agenda as a way to increase engagement of students with learning linked to the theme of Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction. The importance of student engagement first appeared in Marie’s questionnaire.

She wrote, “I monitor the implementation of standards-based learning in the model of instruction. I also monitor to determine if students are actively engaged with the learning.” Marie discussed the importance of student engagement and the use of the District’s evaluation tool to increase engagement with learning and helping students feel value which leads to motivation for learning. She stated,

Well right now to support with the growth tool, the evaluation tool is the support, and that is making sure students feel valued and respected. What are you doing as a teacher to ensure that students have processed content? So, really making sure that the construction strategies are there, and that the strategies for engagement are there, and that we are really differentiating instruction that meet the needs of all of us.

Then she related a conversation she had with a teacher about engagement for students who were not learning the content. She had to remind the teacher of the importance of having high academic expectations and asked her what she would do if this were your child.

I had a conversation with a teacher earlier this week in terms of some students who were not gaining understanding of the content. And so then the dilemma was “How can I slow down?” So I had to say well “If it was your child would you find a way to slow, would you find a way to make sure they knew what to do?” She was like “Well yeah”. I said “Okay, well okay, well yeah, you got to start there. And so then let's just try to figure, try to figure this out.”

This experience exemplified Marie’s strong value and care for students. She
remarked:

I think one of the things is first making sure students feel valued. That they don't feel that they are treated differently based upon them being different. Having a different culture from their teacher or from the majority. Making sure that the environment is where students are valued and respected despite.

In her questionnaire response, monitoring practices that reflected the value displayed for students were highlighted in her work with PLC’s. “Weekly I review the data with PLC’s where we also look at subgroups of students. Staff will be learning how to become aware of language they might use to support student with language needs.”

The experiences she emphasized reflected relationship practices related to the third most frequent theme of Leadership Practices found in her data. Having positive relationships with students and high expectations are excellent ways to show students that you value who they are and believe in them (Caruthers & Friend, 2016; Edmin, 2016; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Good & Brophy, 2003). When high expectations and positive relationships are sustaining, students will rise to the occasion.

Secondly, Leadership Practices with value and care for developing positive relationships practices extended to parents with a focus on credibility/community. “Making sure parents feel welcome in the building even though they don't understand anything we're saying and that they're not treated to feel less than. With me that's at the top my list.” She described a recent activity that involved integrating families of ELL students in the school community, even if they have difficulty with the language.

And so then we had family night last night. And if I think some of our mixed families came. They did come. They may have brought an older child who is able to interact and knows the language. So they're there trying to support as best as they can, but sometimes not fully.

She later admitted that ELL families are not as involved because of the language barriers
and have difficulty sharing their experiences.

Marie also brought to light the needs of ELL students and their language needs as an essential **Leadership Practice**.

So in the end it came down to, how on your first, and second teach on your lesson can you ensure that the majority develop, have the skills for what you're trying to teach that day? So then that means you have to go back and slow way down in your planning, to see if what you have planned makes sense. And is there a piece that is missing that they will need to make that connection, and then in planning have you thought about your ELL learners, what's going to help them make the connection? Do you need to plan for pictures? Do you need to plan for this? What might you need to plan for to bridge the gap?

She addressed resistance from a group of teachers which compromised *trust* related to her **Leadership Practices**. She described it this way, “They felt they were already at the top of the achievement in the district” and displayed negative attitudes:

Why do I need to do anything different than what I'm doing since I am the top school in the district? So with that being said, with being the top, top school they're thinking there's no gaps, by being the top school I don't need to change because I'm already making the grade. And how dare you tell me that you can do something different. And so I've been allowed to close my door and do whatever I want to do, and that's been good enough and it's working, see the scores, see what I am. And, so why would I do anything different?

This resistance to change was apparent in her school and as discussed earlier, Marie’s understanding of culturally relevant practices were limited as reflected in her questionnaire responses and the lack of emphasis in professional development and PLC’s. Her admission of the limited knowledge of **Culturally Relevant Practices**, the least frequent theme, was communicated in her interview. She said,

I would have liked more knowledge or instruction in just thinking just what the nature of the work. Just becoming knowledgeable about other cultures because we know our own really, really well. And the only way that we know about the other cultures is through our on the job interactions and experiences, and that only gets stronger as you, within your years, as you interact.
When I asked her about the training provided teachers in the area of **Culturally Relevant Practices**, Marie had this to say:

> Not necessarily much per se around culture responsiveness, but maybe just looking at, it's more been, the training has more about the data, no let me back up, the training has been more about having a growth mindset maybe. Having a growth mindset than more so looking at the data trying to reinforce the mindset that we need to have to see that we have learners still in need.

In describing future training relevant to culturally relevant practices, she stated that the intent is to provide more training related to ELL learners. She seemed to avoid issues of culturally relevant practices that might make a difference in their success as learners. Marie perceived that teachers’ acceptance of her as an African American principal was a barrier to helping them teach ELL students.

> So right now it’s through the lens of second language learning, which the majority of our culture differences is for our ELL students. And so then it is the training that is already scheduled. What's the instructional strategies that I need to provide to support my second language learners. Even though the students required it, the teachers were not ready, they just were not because that whole mindset wasn't there. They were still trying to embrace me as the leader, as an African American.

Marie was clearly aware about how perceptions of race may affect her interactions with teachers. Lewis, Diamond, and Forman (2015) contended that negative connotations of race “shape institutional processes and interpersonal interactions. These are tied to a sociohistorical process of domination and subordination and ultimately undermine the opportunities for true integration” (p. 25). Marie used the lens of race to explain teachers’ reluctance to learn from her. At the same time, Marie’s focus on data permeated her knowledge of culturally relevant practices and its use to provide success for ELL students. She seemed to fall short of what is needed to implement culturally relevant practices.

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When asked about her leadership style, Marie views herself as a transformational leader. She expressed how she used to close her eyes to concerns and move on while not being reflective, but how she changed her leadership practice over time into being a transformational leader. As a transformational leader, she takes a look at what is going on in the school and asked questions to find out who is getting it and who’s not; and if so, where do they need help. Conley and Goldman (1994) and Leithwood (1994) suggested that “Transformational leadership provides intellectual direction and aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making” (p. 371). At this point, I did not agree with Marie about the characterization of her leadership style that seemed to be much more attuned to instructional leadership. She needed partnerships with teachers for innovating changes. The limited trust as a barrier to innovation was reflected in an earlier description related to instructional support from teachers:

Oddly the only reason, the only reason that it [accountable for district and building reform] is tolerated is because I am not backing down and there is more of a district support. They see it as business coming from the district. So, my practice is in alignment with the district expectations.

The trust between leaders and teachers is needed for forming a partnership in decision-making.

**Case Study 5: Charles**

Charles is a European American male, elementary school principal in Midway school district in his mid-40s. He holds a degree in Elementary Education and a Master’s in Education Administration. Charles has been a teacher for three years and an elementary school principal for over twenty years. He started his principalship at a young age and knew
early on that he wanted to be a principal. His mother was an educator and Charles attended the elementary school where she taught, growing up under her tutelage and close supervision.

The demographics of Charles’ school include culturally diverse students with the majority Latinx 72%, followed by African American 19%, European American 9% and 2% identified as other. Based on the ranking of Charles’ school, he completed the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the phase two of the study.

Charles has been at his current school for over ten years; and when he first arrived, his school was the lowest performing in the state and the enrollment was less than 150 students, but now over 200. His school currently ranks second in achievement based on the ranking of the 16 highest achieving elementary school. The first theme identified in Charles’ interview was Leadership Practices with the interpretive codes of leadership/credibility/community and relationship practices. Through his leadership, working closely with parents and the community, Charles shared how he had to change the “mindset of his students, staff, and parents” regarding how they thought about the school. In doing so, each year the staff conducts home visits with every student in the building before school started. They even do home visits with students who transfer into their school. “We just tell them that we are coming and we don’t give them an option.” Home visits gave parents, students, and teachers an opportunity to get to know each other and find out about their children as learners. He wanted parents to have high academic expectations for their children. Charles stated,

Trying to push those beliefs and expectations on the community was one of the first things I aimed to do when I first came. You know, this school was the lowest performing school in the state of ______- and the community did not know, and
newly at that time, did not care until we brought it out in front of them and said this is what’s going on and this, you know, this should not be acceptable to you. You got to expect more from your kids and you got to expect more from your school. Once I had this conversation then that was when things began to turn around.

Gaining respect and credibility with the community was key for helping to turn the school around. For Charles, it was important for parents to know that low achievement was not acceptable.

Further, Charles noted how he invested in the community by hiring community members who lived only a few blocks from the school. He hired a family specialist and a tutor who lived in the community. This staff person shared the message with the community that high expectations were expected and required.

Secondly, Charles talked about how he goes out of his way to support students and families through establishing relationships. His credibility and respect for students and families were apparent through his interactions with them. Charles commented:

I think it is my willingness you know, to help. If a kid misses a bus, um, they know to call me. I am going to go pick up that child and take them. If a family cannot make it to a music concert, you know, I will go pick them up and take them home. If they need things outside of school whether it be mattresses, food, clothes you know they know that I am the first person there. Our social worker can talk on phone where to get those things for them.

Charles truly believes in supporting families by doing whatever it takes. He stated,

So, whatever it takes, sometime paying someone’s utility bill, you know, it just those things that do not happen often. but when they do word of mouth spread and you gain that credibility in the community, that you are going to do whatever it takes to help their kids and I think that means a lot.

As a result of his helping spirit and establishing relationships with students and their families, Charles pointed out how the attitudes of parents have changed. He said,

They do not jump to conclusion when challenges happened, but come with a positive attitude saying, ‘I heard this happened rather than being accusatory’. It is just a
different attitude—they come to school knowing that they have our trust. Parents know that it is not my school, this is their school, our school together.

Charles’ determination to have positive relationships with students and parents was supported by the Bridgeland et al. (2006) study. Participants perceived that low expectations, poor relationships with adults, lack of resources for struggling students, and poor leadership were contributing factors to low achievement. Charles viewed himself as a leader who follows through with “what he says he will do.” I felt Charles’ desire to have positive relationships with families and community members. I observed in his body language that he refused to let failure be the narrative of his school.

The second theme identified strongly in the interview data was **Leadership Practice: Curriculum and Instruction** with the interpretive codes of *monitoring practices*, *student engagement practices*, and *relationship practices*. During the interview, Charles elaborated on how he monitors students’ data by keeping a focus on growth and achievement. He shared how he is happy for those who often pass their assessments; yet, feel at times, frustrated at the numbers because too much focus is on those who are passing and not enough on those who are growing. For example, Charles stated,

> I am excited for that kid who was at the first percentile and who is now at the twenty-fifth percentile. That is the kid who you may have just saved his life because now he is growing, he is feeling it. His confidence is there.

I observed data charts posted in his office showing school goals and the number and percentage of students in each grade level that need to meet those goals on the state assessment. I also noticed similar charts when I observed his PLC meeting:

When you enter the building you immediately see students’ data posted on the bulletin board by Charles’ office. The data show the percentage of students making grade level on ____ and _____. Attendance data is shown as well.
When you go into the gym you will see a chart posted on the wall of a line graph showing students’ current reading levels. Each student is assigned a number for parents to use while looking at the line graph. The line graph shows the reading progress of children based on their reading level.

The opportunity for parents to see the growth and development of their children was evident for the sub-theme monitoring practices Charles pointed out “the biggest and most important role as a school leader is still being that instructional leader” reflected in the documents and observation of a PLC meeting.

One of the four documents, (agendas) received from Charles’ Staff Development, was considered a district-directed session on October 30, 2019 that exhibited the district’s focus on Monitoring Data. Having a close eye on monitoring data and instruction reflective the sub-theme of disaggregating data and the theme of Monitoring Teacher Practice with reteaching plans. To support disaggregating data, Charles had teachers look at students in grades kindergarten through third to identify those who were performing below grade level. Charles and his staff used the root cause analysis framework while examining data connected to achievement, suspension, and attendance. The process oriented agenda included the following:

Root Cause Analysis Framework

- Introduce—
  Mix groups into two K-5 teams
  Share goals of our RCA cycle
- Activate and Engage—
  Pair up to discuss assumptions
  Process and Collaborate as whole groups
- Explore and Discover—
  The What, Why and How
  Drill Down Graphic Organizer
- Organize and Integrate
  Both teams share their Precise Problem Statements
- Explore and Discover
  Jigsaw Core Function Areas
The Five Why’s Instructional Sheet seemed to be a great exercise for Monitoring Teacher Practices which would allow teachers to modify their teaching plans.

His meeting with second grade teachers in their PLC meeting supported similar practices of disaggregating data for Monitoring Data as well as assessments and reteaching plans relevant to the theme of Monitoring Teacher Practices. The agenda included the following:

2nd grade PLC Agenda
November 7, 2019
3:00
• Look at results of Mid Module 4 assessments
• Plan for reteach from Mid Module
• Family Night Math plans
• Literacy Planning

My observation of the PLC mirrored the agenda. This was the first observation that was aligned with Charles PLC’s document. My field notes included the following:

Teachers’ focus was on math lessons and assessing the understanding of students. At the reading table where everyone sat, Charles asked teachers what work they were going to discuss today. Teachers said that they looked at their mid module assessments and realized that only a few students got it, five from one class and seven from another. Teachers began separating their papers, stating who got it and who did not,

Charles led the discussion asking what do they think got in the way? Did students know the why of the lesson: He asked them to look back at their lesson plans and try to see where the students got stuck. One teacher stated that the students are struggling on the different strategies. The other teacher said that parents are telling them that they do not understand the new math.

Reflections: As the teachers reviewed their assessments to determine students’ understanding of the new math, I did not hear the excuses conversation that some teachers often use to explain the failure of students. Teachers were willing to collaborate with others using ways to reteach the concepts and work with parents so
they could better help their children. I was not surprised at the ease teachers expressed working with parents.

Teachers’ approaches to learning can make or break diverse students; they can undermine reform efforts with their deficit beliefs about what African American and Latinx students are able to do and learn (Finnan & Swanson, 2000). In contrast, reflective teachers who examine and alter their beliefs and practices may be more capable of providing multiple learning opportunities that require engagement and critical thinking for all students. In this situation, this was exactly where the principal led the teaching, asking them to think about barriers to learning and to consider reteaching plans.

Charles’ focus on **Leadership Practices**, the second most frequent theme in his data, emphasized building relationships with parents and community members, indicative of their level of comfort. Notably, the PLC meeting included planning for Family Math Night.

The other teacher said that parents are telling them that they do not understand the new math. One teacher shared a worksheet explaining the four different strategies that students needed to know in order to understand how to do the math correctly. She asked Charles if she could send the sheet home explaining to parents how to help their kids. She also asked if she can send a cheat sheet in case parents struggled helping them.

Charles asked the teachers what day they were having their Family Math Night. Each grade level was required to have two nights of instruction with parents. The teachers said that they would plan it after Thanksgiving break. Charles told them to begin looking at third quarter math strategies and include them when they have their Family Math Night.

Charles also monitors feedback from parents. Each year Midway school district distributes surveys for parents to complete. Based on the feedback, Charles questioned himself by saying,
I know that there is a huge core that believes and trust in us, but I also question, who am I not reaching? And they are the ones I am after too. Who am I not reaching? Who have I neglected? Is there a certain group of people that I have not spent enough time with?

In his attempts to help all kids be successful through increased *engagement* for learning, Charles turned to after school tutoring and additional help in reading.

The implementation of after-school tutoring programs and expert help in reading were several ways Charles supported *student engagement practices*. When students are engaged with learning, they are curious and excited about learning, teachers and students learn from each other, and there is less disruption in learning (Harcourt & Keen, 2012). He proudly described the tutoring program and assistance with reading.

We got our after-school program, our kid-zone program, and we are fortunate that we are able to do what we want with tutoring. Students get two to three extra hours every week. I have teachers that are willing to put in the extra time to support and help them.

Students who receive tutoring are able to stay at school until 6:00 p.m. First, they eat a snack, attend tutoring for one hour, and then go to after school care that is held in his building. He advocated for the after-school program so his students could benefit from it. Working closely with the after-school program to provide tutoring for those students, grades kindergarten to third, and home visits contributed to the success of Charles’ school.

At one point, Charles hired a consultant who once worked in Midway school district and had some savvy skills teaching effective reading practices. After receiving several years of working with staff, Charles said,

The tutoring program runs like clockwork. Her expertise helped set the stage for the tutoring program. We are seeing some different things going on. Seventy-five percent of our kids are getting a second teach and their parents do not mine having their kids hang out here for two to three hours extra every week. Students are growing and passing assessments.
The growth of special education students was also important to Charles for *student engagement*. He shared the story of a student who came to special education in first grade and by the time he was in the fifth grade he performed at the 99 percentile on his assessment. He emphasized the importance of growth and seeing how far some of the students have come.

Through my analysis of his questionnaire data, conversations, review of documents, and observations of PLC, I began to understand his leadership style. Charles described himself as a servant leader and values relationships, sub-theme *relationship practices*, with students and staff. I certainly agreed with this view. Servant leaders engage students, parents, and indigenous contexts through developing meaningful and positive relationships with community, and as advocates for school and communities, they find overlapping spaces for bringing the community into the school (Khalifa et al., 2016) He learned about being of service to others from a professor in his leadership preparation program. He stated,

> I think without a question, again that goes back to my professors that I had at the University of _____ and some books we studied. I think that is how I have always viewed myself, is that I am in service to my students, I am in service to my teachers, I am in service to my school community, so whatever I have to do to show that is what I am willing to do and I think that helped me gain trust and respect from the people that I work with and families that I support.

Being of service for Charles meant having a willingness to do whatever it takes inside and outside the school which also communicated *Preparation for Equity* with an emphasis on *learning from others’ experiences* through learning from students, colleagues, parents and community members, and professors of graduate education, and *reflective practices*.

He noted that his preparation came from twenty-five years of real-life experiences. Charles stated, “Listening to students, parents, and community members as they share their
challenges has been the best experience I have received”. He enjoys learning and stated how he still keeps in touch with his 80 year-old elementary school principal, who is a mentor for him and was an immense influence on him from elementary school years to now. He learned from his graduate education professors that service to students meant pushing them, yet showing them love and support. “You know, they are going to see how much we love them. They going to see how much we support them and that is the biggest thing that we have going for us”.

Charles told a story of a parent where showing her loved and respect changed the parent’s interactions with the school. “At that time, the parent was 22 years old with five kids and she came to our school to enroll some of her kids and was tough as nails.” He described the situation in a way that showed love and understanding for the parent. “The dad is in jail and the mother is mad about her situation. Her rudeness did not stop us. We loved on her and by the end of the day she was showing love back.” He said eventually they (parents) all jump on board. “So, we get to see some incredible changes from kids and the community.”

Charles’ demeanor and Leadership Practice: Curriculum and Instruction coupled with Leadership Practices and Equity Preparation helped to shape and change his school. While interviewing him, I could see in his body language and hear in his tone his leadership tenacity and a refusal to let excuses get in the way of the work that he and his staff are doing. Charles’ understanding of Culturally Relevant Practices, as identified in the sub-theme or interpretive code of student-centered/background, was closely aligned to the research in this area. This was the least talked about theme in questionnaire and interview data. His limited knowledge of culturally relevant practices was exemplified in the lack of
integration culturally relevant practices in teaching and learning which were not points of implementation in his questionnaire, interview, observation of PLC and professional development documents.

He wrote in response to the open-ended question related to the definition of culturally relevant practices the following: “Student-centered focus on unique student backgrounds.” During his interview, he expanded on the definition and communicated that the characteristics of culturally responsive school leaders as having high expectations for students. When asked about his daily practices to meet the needs of all students, including culturally and linguistically diverse students, questionnaire data revealed actions related to reflective practices which were also connected to Leadership Practices. He wrote:

Helping teachers become reflective practitioners about what and how they teach. Are we thinking about our students interests, background, and language needs. Helping our school use data to make sure we meet the needs of all student subgroups is another daily practice.

Many of the previously discussed elements were certainly exemplified in his focus on Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction as well as Leadership Practices. Garcia and Chun (2016) asserted:

The use of diverse teaching practices and high expectations likely contribute to students’ academic self-efficacy. It is of high importance that teachers and leaders help to instill in students the belief that they are capable of succeeding in school. These behaviors can possibly help decrease the academic achievement gap among students with diverse backgrounds. (p. 183)

Charles specified, “I am just a leader having those high expectations and talking the talk and walking the walk with those kids and trying to push those beliefs and expectations on the community”.

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I found it evident that Charles values student and care as part of his Leadership Practices as well as staff, and community. His actions as a servant/instructional leader, who came into his school ten years ago and made sufficient changes while changing the beliefs and mindsets of those inside and outside the school, were impressive. Having a strong belief in the community by investing in them help point the school in the right direction. Charles’ belief in high expectations speaks volumes; however, the need for culturally relevant practices was absent in his voice and is still a much-needed practice in his school.

Case Study 6: Ruby

Ruby in a European American elementary school principal in Midway school district. She is in her late 40s and holds a degree in Elementary Education and a Master’s in Educational Administration. Ruby was a classroom teacher and an instructional coach for 14 years and has served as a school principal for 14 years. The majority of Ruby’s work experience has been with Midway school district. The demographics of Ruby’s school include students from diverse backgrounds with the majority of her student population being Latinx 66%, African American 15%, European American 14% and 5% identified as other. Based on the ranking of Ruby’s school, 14 of N=16, she completed the questionnaire and agreed to participate in the study.

While meeting with Ruby, I thought it was important for her to learn more about me and why I was doing this study. At first, she seemed nervous until I shared with her that I was learning as well, explaining my role as a co-researcher. Her body language indicated a sense of relief while establishing trust. Ruby explained she felt better because she viewed herself as not being proficient in the area of culturally responsiveness. Ruby noted in her
questionnaire that her definition of culturally relevant practices feels archaic (primitive). She stated that she had no preparation in her college courses to prepare her. Ruby noted:

First, let me say that there were no college courses that taught about the needs of culturally diverse students or culturally relevant practices. I remember learning in college to embrace diversity within my classroom, but I had no idea what that meant. Taking Master’s level courses in the late 1990’s was the first time I was ever taught about culturally diverse students. I don’t feel that that course prepared me for the real world of culturally diversity in school.

The theme of Preparation for Equity with the interpretive code no college preparation aligned with Ruby’s statement of not being proficient in this area.

Noted in the questionnaire, Ruby takes pride in listening and learning from others. She admitted that to understand culturally responsive practices, there is a need for her to do more and often apologized for not doing enough. Ruby perceived that she is constantly learning and often acquired knowledge from the students she had in her classroom and from parents that have invested time teaching her how to educate their children. Ruby added how she learned most from staff members whose culture is different from hers. Ruby contended,

Since then, I have taken several classes which have more prepared me in cultural diversity and cultural responsiveness, but, as I was taking classes to become a building principal, none of my coursework prepared me.

Interest in culture responsiveness seemed evident in the Ruby’s interview, this topic was of interest and she wanted to learn more. The most frequent theme was Culturally Relevant Practices with the interpretive code knowledge of culturally relevant practices. Ruby indicated, “One of the closest things that she can think of was when she had to take classes to become ESL endorsed where she was taught how to work with multicultural children and multicultural education in all those classes.” Ruby stated, “In my opinion, it did not dive deep enough for the diversity that we have in our buildings now.” She explained:
The classes at that time, focused more on family life and how the male figures are going to treat women in leadership roles differently than the females will. She connected that with females being subservient to the husbands.

Ruby felt that limited knowledge of Culturally Relevant Practices influenced her preparation for cultural responsiveness which was lacking in her pre-service and graduate education for leadership. She stated, “Cultural responsiveness isn't always something that you teach and I mean, that you can easily read about and know how to apply that in your building.” I asked her to describe what culturally relevant pedagogy looks like in the classroom and what she looked for when observing teachers. Ruby explained:

The things that I'm looking for are high expectations for all students. That all students are given the same opportunities. And then, also, too, one of the things that's important, and I know it sounds corny, but we need to be reading text that is written by black authors, written by Hispanic authors, for Hispanic children, by Hispanic children, for black children. We need to be exposing kids to all kinds of things. Not just the singsong books, it needs to be expanded to everybody.

When asked what areas of school leadership you wished for more experience, Ruby said more around culturally responsiveness. She mentioned how she made lots of mistakes in her early days of leadership and stated:

I still make mistakes, don’t get me wrong, but I made a lot of mistakes with families because I am only coming from my perception and, obviously, that’s not where a lot of our families come from. And had I had a better background knowledge or more forethought in being more responsive to the people I was working with, I would be further, I would have not made some of those mistakes.

She conveyed a story during her interview that involved a letter from a parent she kept and the pain of that experience is still with her today.

Ruby said she would send notes home of negative behaviors that took place with an African American boy and failed to say anything positive. Though 25 years ago, her story is so insightful and indicative of today’s experiences of African American boys in our
classrooms. Losen, Hodson, Keith II, Morrison, and Belway (2015) reported discipline gaps likely to reflect alienation from Black, male youth as early as kindergarten:

At 12.5 more Black elementary students than White elementary students suspended per every 100 enrolled, Missouri’s Black-White discipline gap was the widest in the nation at the elementary level, and it also had the highest Black elementary suspension rate of any state. (p. 17)

I have included the full experience here.

I would like to share one more thing. When I was teaching, one of my first years of teaching, I was teaching first grade, I believe it was first grade and I got a letter from a parent. This is not one of the great memories, but now, it's a good memory. I had written in this little boy's agenda, his list of sins of the day and all the things he had done naughty all day long. And it was a little black boy and a smart little black boy, and his mother wrote me a letter back that it still probably could bring tears to my eyes thinking about how much that letter hurt me. I have the letter still, about how I did not know and she called it out. “You, young white woman, do not know how to teach or how to reach African American boys”. And though it's funny is you know this woman and I'm not going to tell you who it is.. read it over, and over and over. And how could she? I'm being reputable, equitable. I'm writing him up as well as I'm writing up all these other kids, what they did wrong, what they did wrong. However, that was probably one of the most telling things that it still stuck with me and this is my 28th year, so I'm going to say that was at least 25 years ago and that I still have the piece of paper. But, it was one of the most eye opening things that a parent ever said to me. I don't know, I was hurt, but I wasn't being culturally responsive. I was not treating him the same way. I did not have ears to hear that then. But, in my hindsight and looking back, I did have different expectations and I have learned a lot since then.

Ruby stated that she uses the letter as a reminder to be culturally responsive while working with students from diverse backgrounds. She firmly associated this experience to limited knowledge of Culturally Relevant Practice connected to Preparation for Equity.

Noted in her questionnaire was the theme, Preparation for Equity, that communicated her level of preparation for teaching and for working with diverse youth which was also the second most frequent theme in her interview with interpretive codes of preparation for teaching diverse students, learning from others’ experiences, and
illuminating deficit thinking. Ruby talked about not having any formal training in teaching diverse students when she first came to Midway School District and later received some training from an outside consultant. Ruby remarked:

We have not done any formal training except for, like I said, a few years ago, we did, well, it's been many years. When I first came to this school, it was a primarily ESL school, I'm going to say 85% ESL. And then, there was some ownership changes within the apartment complexes, and the group of people coming in started to change a little bit, and that's when we had. ____ come in and give us a formal training. [Well,] more formal training, but other than that, we have not done any culturally responsive training with the staff.

She identified several district leaders that she has learned from over the years and commented that many of those positions have been taken away and are no longer there. However, one person remains that she can always contact.

And then, ____ is always another strong one that I, still to this day, can ask questions to and go to. So, they have been a big, big influence. But then, like I said, those positions in the district were taken away. And still, resources if I were to have any specific questions. But, unfortunately, other than those two in the district with their past, I feel like the district just expects us to be able to know, that should be in our repertoire already.

Ruby told the story of learning from the secretary in her building, who has been instrumental in helping her with issues of diversity. She stated:

Another piece to that would be that one of the people that I've learned from most in my last 13 years, while being a principal, is I have a secretary who is African American and she has taught me the most. So, in my tenure as a principal, I was with her for three years at______, and then, now. When I respond in a way that she disagrees with, with a parent, she will close the door and she will say, here is from that parent's perspective and here is how you responded. Now, let's talk through this. And so, she has talked through with me a lot of, not only racial diversity, but socioeconomic diversity, just diversity of the way people are brought up, religious diversities. And it's one of those people that I can go to and ask those questions because she's got just an open door. She's lived in so many diverse areas, and so she knows a lot of things and people. And so, that I think, and then I share that with my teachers, things that I learned from her that I learn about families.
Ruby admitted that she was not prepared at the undergraduate or graduate level for implementing culturally relevant practices. She highlighted in her questionnaire that she spent a lot of times learning from others, but the implementation levels regarding culturally relevant practices are non-existent.

She said that the expectations for Culturally Relevant Practices should be in our repertoire of skills and mentioned the book A Framework of Poverty by Ruby Payne was useful to her understanding. At this particular point in our conversation, I could not discern her understanding of poverty and diverse cultures, but the following statement helped me to understand the connections Ruby made between race and poverty.

A lot of times, we think that culturally responsiveness is racial, but it's not always racial. And a lot of things that we struggle with at our school, is that we have below socioeconomic status. We have HUD apartments in our neighborhood, and those families are living way different than we go home to and that we were brought up, a way different life than we were brought up. And some of my teachers forget, don't realize that the students aren't going home to homes like they have, or had or are raising their children like. And so, we have those conversations a lot around Christmas time. We talk a lot about not having your kids write letters to Santa because that might be an expectation at your house, but some of these houses, Christmas might not come on December 25th. It might come when the income tax check comes back or they're going to be getting needs met, not necessarily an Xbox like they want.

Her comments are connected to the culture of poverty paradigm, popularized by Oscar Lewis with the book, The Children of Sanchez (1959), ethnographic studies of small Mexican communities where he theorized 50 attributes of poverty: “frequent violence, a lack of a sense of history, a neglect of planning for the future, and so on” (Gorski, 2008, p. 32). He suggested a universal culture of poverty that remains prevalent today “that people in poverty share a ‘consistent and observable ‘culture’” (Gorski, p. 32). Ruby’s preparation for
teaching culturally diverse students seems to be shaped by a culture of poverty that she even shares with her teachers.

The culture of poverty raised here is couched in illuminating deficit thinking and Ruby provided a past district practice, that in my estimation, enhanced deficit thinking about the background of diverse students. She stated that this experience was not enough and more needed to be done to help teachers meet the need of diverse youth.

When new teachers join our district, they go on a bus tour of our neighborhoods. They take the new teachers on a bus, and they take them around, and they drive them around ______ Street and they drive them around, I don't know where, but some of the lower socioeconomic places. I don't know the conversations that happen on the bus. I don't know what they're telling the teachers, but to me, that's not enough. And so, I guess what I would like for them to know is really what our kids are like, and families are like and really what culturally responsive teaching is. And that would be to show them, to tell them, to be teaching these things, to have those courageous people that are willing to lead the conversations to come in and talk to these new teachers.

For me, this was the culture of poverty on display that Gorski (2008) mentioned. As Ruby stated, “I don't know the conversations that happen on the bus. I don't know what they're telling the teachers, but to me, that's not enough.” The stereotypes that are perpetuated in one that Ladson-Billings (2014) highlighted, “the notion that poor children are living in chaotic and unruly lives and that schools are their last hope for redemption – the one place that could bring order to their lives” (p. 10).

Ruby smiled when she talked about her school and the Leadership Practices she implemented while working with students and staff. The excitement in her voice demonstrated a deep sense of love and care which was noted in her questionnaire. She wrote:

I try to overcome my short coming in this area by showing students love acceptance: For love and acceptance is are understood by both.
And I ask more questions. I never been told no when I am trying to learn about people and cultures.

Ruby demonstrated the same love and care when I received a teacher from her building. Based on her school’s enrollment, a teacher from her building had to move to my school to support the high enrollment. Ruby created a letter that she wanted me to read to my staff to ensure that love and care was demonstrated to the teacher. She met with me to interview, but instead she brought the teacher with her to meet me and share the importance of taking care of the teacher once she began working in my school. After talking with both of them, ensuring Ruby that she would be demonstrated care and support, we rescheduled the interview for another time. That demonstrated to me that Ruby is very connected to her students and staff.

This pattern was also clear in her interview, “Sometimes students just need to feel loved, but you need to know how they receive that love and give that love back because it’s not always like we are used to or when we were brought up.” I thought about what Nieto (2010) had to say about caring not being enough; teachers can care for children who may live in poverty or violent neighborhoods, and still have deficit theories about their abilities to be successful in school. “Feeling guilty or ‘being nice’ are not enough to combat racism that involved the systemic failure of people and institutions to care for students of color on an ongoing basis” (Nieto, 2010, p. 265). I was relieved when Ruby added, that strong leaders have high expectations for all kids, not just “Asian kids or Indian kids cause that’s the way they are, is just smarter or whatever stereotype that goes with.”

She also addressed high expectations for increasing student engagement. “And a lot of that, I can observe in the classroom and to see, Oh, you're only calling on the kids that
raise their hands and the kids that are willing to speak. So, you're not calling on ESL kids or whatever the issue may be.”

Ruby talked more about Culturally Relevant Practices, Preparation for Equity, and Leadership Practices and had much less to say about the dominant theme for most of the co-researchers, Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction that involved the Midway School District’s heavy focus on monitoring student data. The couple of remarks she made was centered around making sure data are disaggregated. Ruby stated,

But, the biggest thing is when we look at data, we need to also group our kids and say, is it always ESL kids that aren't understanding or not succeeding well, or is it always our black kids that are understanding. And if it's ever grouped like that, then we need to look at why that is happening. And so, that we talk about a lot, is when you start to cluster the kids that aren't getting it, is that coming from what is the teacher doing and we have to get down to what the teacher is doing.

Guided by the district’s focus on data, the coding of her documents also illustrated Monitoring Data through disaggregating data and standards base planning. Monitoring Teacher Practices using standards and assessment appeared to also be the focus of this district-directed professional development.

Her agenda for the district-directed professional development was rather short, but since I was familiar with the format and conducted a similar session in my building, I knew how the session was designed.

District Professional Development
October 23, 2019

PD 1:45-3:45
• Focus on Goal setting and Action Plan for State Assessment interim (Grades 3-5 in Rm 168)
• Grades K-2 in Rm 131 MAP mini tests.
• 1 hour of unit planning in PLC teams.
The PLC agenda was much more detailed and planned by the principal and instructional coach with the same two themes as an emphasis. The difference was in Monitoring Teacher Practices with attention given to reteaching plans.

**PLC Meeting**
November 5, 2019
Student Centered Data Meeting

- What is the intent of our meeting?
- What is important and why?
- What matters the most?

**Weekly Data Meetings**
- What standard is being addressed?
- What do students need to know in order to be successful?
- What is the data telling you?

**Connect back to the standard**
- What is the largest gap between the highest and lowest performing student?
- What connections are you making?
- What gap in student knowledge are you seeing?
- What standard is your class/student struggling with the most?
- I noticed that more ______ tested at ______
- I noticed that overall ______% tested ______
- I wonder why ______ happened

**RETEACH**
- When do you plan on re-teaching?
- What strategy will you use for re-teaching?
- Show us what it will look like

**NEXT STEPS**
- What are your next steps?
- What do you do now?
- What supports might you need?

My observation of the PLC, held on September 24, 2019 resonated with similar themes of **Monitoring Data** and **Monitoring Teacher Practices** that supported the theme **Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction.** My observation field notes are included below.

I observed the PLC meeting of the 3rd grade team which took place in the professional development room with charts that showed data for the state assessment scores for all grades. I noted a chart with today’s PLC work. The charge was to find:
- Percentage of students on grade level in math
- Percentage of students on grade level in reading
Teachers were also given a chat about quarter one standards for recording the scores of students followed by an Action step chart for every grade level. Questions posed were:

- What do we notice?
- What are we proud of?
- What do we do now?
- What do we need?
- Who are my focus students?

The principal was leading the meeting showing teachers how to capture their data with the Instructional coach and two 3rd grade teachers as participants. Teachers were given a data sheet for them to put in information to monitor students’ progress. Teachers are able to put in weekly data sheets of students testing results on each standards taught. Teachers discussed how they were going to chart student’s data (weekly scores on each standard tested). They were tracking all students to see which students from various racial or ethnic groups were making progress and to identify those who needed help.

**Reflections:** I left the meeting taking what I observed with plans to implement within my own school. I thought to myself this process will help us monitor students more closely and identify quickly any adaptations they may need. These teachers knew upfront which kids were passing or struggling and what needed to be retaught.

In conclusion, when asked what leadership model best describes you and why? Ruby said, “I feel like I'm an instructional leader in the respect that I was an instructional coach for three years before I did the job.” She indicated that she did not know the different names of leadership styles but felt being an instructional leader was a fairly easily job. She also did not view herself as a top-down leader. “I also feel like I'm not a top-down. I feel like I can present an idea, and then I want the people to buy in and help create how we get there.” I told Ruby that I thought she was making a reference to transformational leadership. Her description resonated with Leithwood’s (1994) earlier statement “Transformational …aims at innovating within the organization, while empowering and supporting teachers as partners in decision making” (p. 371). Ruby stated, “Yes, I like to share the end goal, like I want it to
look like this… those details don't necessarily bog me down. It's let's work together to figure out the details to get there.”

**Cross Case Analysis**

Finding the similarities and differences across the individual cases through incorporating cross-case analysis yielded a fuller and deeper analysis of the phenomenon of inquiry regarding culturally relevant practices. Khan and VanWynsberghe (2008) noted that this procedure for case analysis is likely to identify a number of factors connected to the outcomes of the cases. Case analysis also supported my understanding of why one case is different than another. For example, it was clear that Charles valued community input and through Leadership Practices that highly focused on establishing *credibility/community* his case was quite different than the others. Table 9 gives a visual display of the commonalities and differences across the six cases, followed by a discussion of these elements.

Table 9

*Cross-Case Analysis*

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<tr>
<th>Questionnaire</th>
<th>Richard</th>
<th>Nicole</th>
<th>Raquel</th>
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### Summary of Findings

As Table 9 depicts, cross case analysis revealed that half of the co-researchers mentioned *leadership practices to enhance student learning* linked to the theme of Instructional...
Leadership Practices in the questionnaire. The two interpretive codes of leadership practices to enhance student learning and show students value and care were not present in the questionnaire responses of Richard, Nicole, Raquel, Marie, and Ruby. Charles was the only co-researcher with data that reflected both interpretive codes. Ruby’s response in this area was show students value and care. This theme was connected to both Leadership Practices and Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction in the interviews where the majority of the participants viewed relationships as important. Most of the participants, five of six, viewed establishing relationships with the community, as a Leadership Practice, which led to credibility (credibility/community). Collaborating with families and communities, especially with non-mainstream groups is considered a high leverage equity practice (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017)

The majority of the co-researchers indicated in their written responses that they were not Prepared for Multicultural Education, even during their pre-service or training as leaders. Most of what they learned about diversity at this level was through learning from others such as colleagues and staff. Nicole indicated that she had course work related to multicultural education during her pre-service training and her graduate program addressed teaching in urban communities. Richard and Nicole seemed to have a better understanding of preparation for teaching diverse learners than the other four co-researchers. The findings are similar to their interview responses regarding Preparation for Equity, all of the co-researchers said their preparation involved learning from others’ experiences. Most of their comments related to preparation for teaching diverse students, lacking support from the district, emphasis on multicultural education instead of culturally relevant practices, and no college preparation. All of the co-researchers communicated limit knowledge related to
implementing **Culturally Relevant Practices** and their definitions of culturally relevant practices were more related to diversity including multicultural concepts in the questionnaires and interviews. This finding is aligned to Groski’s (2016) that multicultural education often deflates issues of diversity and individuals place less emphasis on racism and heterosexism. Yet, most of them understood the value of student backgrounds as key elements for relationship building which were strongly communicated in the interviews with the theme **Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction** and the theme **Leadership Practices**, but less in the questionnaire, only Richard wrote about love and care in the questionnaire. Trust issues appeared to be concerns of only two of the co-researchers with Richard perceiving a high level of trust among the teachers and Marie questioned the level of trust among teachers. Two of the six participants illuminated deficit thinking, captured in the voices of four of the co-researchers who appeared to be unconscious of personal biases and assumptions when addressing **Preparation for Equity**.

The strongest theme in the interviews was **Leadership Practice: Curriculum and Instruction** linked to *monitoring practices* and reflected in the interviews of all co-researchers as they discussed the importance of *disaggregating data* to promote *student engagement* which also showed up as a strong interpretive code in transcripts of all the co-researchers. These monitoring practices were also uncover in the district-directed staff development, school PLC agendas, and observations of PLCs with the themes of **Monitoring Data** with interpretive codes of *disaggregating data* and *standards-based planning* and **Monitoring Teacher Practices** reflected in *standards, assessments, and reteaching plans*. 
Conclusion

Communicated in this chapter was a discussion of how the study was conducted with an outline of research activities, details related to the selection of the co-researchers, and a brief recap of data collection and analysis that formed the case studies. The descriptive case studies of Richard, Nicole, Raquel, Marie, Charles, and Ruby resonated with their sense of preparation for teaching culturally diverse learners and the reality that their preparation programs failed them in this respect. What they have managed to learn about elements of culturally relevant practices, especially the richness of students’ backgrounds as starting points for implementation, was compromised by limitations regarding experiences in this area coupled by Midway’s school district’s accountability agenda and lack of support for the implementation of culturally relevant practices.

With an accountability environment that emanated from the past focus on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the current reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA), Every Student Succeeds Act (Saultz, Fusarelli, & McEachin, 2017), the ongoing emphasis on increasing student achievement and more accountability is a priority of the Midway School District. These co-researchers’ data strongly converged on monitoring practices for increased scores on standardized tests. With an increasing Latinx population of students, it was startling to find only a few comments regarding teaching this population and the needs of African American boys. A couple of the co-researchers indicated African American boys were consistently low performers in grades three to five. At this point, culturally relevant practices are not viewed as instructional practices for implementation in Midway School District.
Cross-case analysis culled from the within-case analysis similarities and differences in themes across the cases to identify a number of factors connected to the outcomes (Khan & VanWynsberghe, 2008). This procedure was useful for answering the research questions, the emphasis of Chapter five. The lens of co-researchers’ experiences draws on the multiple data sources of achievement data reports, the open-ended questionnaire, interviews, observations, and documents.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

In the concluding Chapter, I provide the findings of this heuristic multiple case study related to my inquiry. Data sources included an open-ended questionnaire, in-depth interviews, achievement data, observations, and documents that supported crystallization of the phenomena of culturally relevant practices. A summary of the findings are outlined by the research question. Further, chapter 5 provides a discussion of implications of findings for districts and schools and also suggests what preparation programs can do to prepare educational leaders to be stewards of culturally relevant practices. Recommendations for future research are provided based on the findings of the study. Given that this study began as a heuristic inquiry that drew on my experiences, I conclude with reflections regarding my research journey and what I learned about my own leadership efforts for implementing culturally responsive practices.

Answering the Research Questions

Accountability, with a huge focus on increasing student achievement, has become the overarching purpose while leading in Midway school district. School leaders are guided to implement data driven practices while working with teachers and students and are responsible for keeping track of all students’ performance levels. As stated in the cross-case analysis, the strongest theme Leadership Practice: Curriculum and Instruction, linked to monitoring practices reflected co-researchers practices. With a district focus on monitoring data, important matters such as learning and practicing culturally relevant pedagogy has become invisible in many Midway district schools. Bureaucratic initiatives often become
barriers to school leaders’ instructional decisions regarding what is best for students. School leaders feel the pressure knowing that what gets implemented is often determined by district office administrators’ evaluation of principals. These accountability factors, guided by federal and state legislation such as ESAA, consistently hold districts accountable while at the same time keep them from considering the implementation of culturally relevant practices in schools.

I began this investigation with four sub-questions that supported one central question that addressed: How do urban elementary principals perceive their preparation for providing teachers assistance with culturally relevant instruction? This section provides a discussion of each question and brings together data from the collective case study. The cross-case analysis that identified commonalities and differences among the six cases was useful for this task.

Sub-question # 1: What culturally relevant instructional practices do they observe in their daily interactions with teachers?

Co-researchers strongly highlighted in the interviews, documents, and observations two prevalent themes while working with teachers. The themes Leadership Practice: Curriculum and Instruction and Monitoring Data. The sub-themes of monitoring practices and student engagement were identified in the interview data of all co-researchers. The majority viewed relationships as ways to engage students with instruction. These instructional practices indicated a focus on traditional norms of instructional practices instead of culturally relevant pedagogy. The interpretive codes of disaggregating data to promote student engagement was a common practice outlined in the district-directed staff development and PLCs agendas and observations of PLCs. All co-researchers monitored
teacher practices while having critical conversations around standards-based planning, assessments, and reteaching plans. During these conversations teachers were engaged in understanding how to plan effective lessons and knowing what standards were asking students to know, do, and understand. Co-researchers discussed with grade level teams their knowledge of the standards, cleared up misconceptions and discussed walk-throughs where they looked for ways teachers monitored data. Common assessments such as mid-modules and end of unit modules were used to measure students’ growth. Teachers tracked students’ performance and created reteaching plans if needed. The absence of culturally relevant instructional practices was clearly invisible in the interactions of co-researchers with teachers in Midway School District.

**Sub-question # 2: What ways are professional development needs of teachers identified?**

Due to district-directed professional development, two Wednesdays of each month the district shapes the work that schools and teachers must perform; therefore, co-researchers do not have the autonomy to create professional development experiences based on what teachers identified as their needs. Midway School District emphasized the following areas as requirements for developing principals and teachers:

- Working with principals to ensure strong effective leadership is apparent.
- Ensuring that teachers are effective and are able to improve instruction with ongoing professional development related to standard-based planning and monitoring of student data.
- Looking at the instructional program and student needs to ensure that it is rigorous and aligned to state academic content and standards.
Using data to inform instruction and allowing time to collaborate about the data.

In short, professional development needs of teachers were not identified.

Sub-question # 3: What professional development opportunities do teachers experience?

Due to high accountability factors directed by district leaders along with a high need to increase student achievement, co-researchers of Midway school district directed their attention to standard based planning, disaggregating data, and creating reteaching plans while keeping alert of the school’s overall performance. These leadership practices to enhance student learning were identified in the questionnaire, documents, and interviews and linked to the themes of Leadership: Curriculum and Instruction and Instructional Leadership Practices. As noted earlier, teachers worked together in grade level teams addressing standards, charting data on grids, and identifying which students to re-teach based on data. When I asked her about the training provided teachers in the area of Culturally Relevant Practices, Marie’s response was typical to that of the other co-researchers:

Not necessarily much per se around culture responsiveness, but maybe just looking at, it's more been, the training has more about the data. … Having a growth mindset than more so looking at the data trying to reinforce the mindset that we need to have to see that we have learners still in need.

When teachers are not given the freedom to share and address what’s needed to help them develop professionally, deskilling occurs. Giroux (2013) called attention to deskilling of teachers, and I contend that of principals as well. He asserted that “teachers have been reduced to the status of specialized technicians within the school bureaucracy whose function then becomes one of the managing and implementing curricular programs” (p.461).
In Midway School District this environment has reduced the freedom of principals and teachers to implement culturally relevant practices that meet the needs of students. The question becomes within the “hyperstandardized, hyperaccountable” (Royal & Gibson, 2017, p. 1) environment of the district if principals are willing to risk their “professional standing, income, and job security” to be culturally relevant educators?

Sub-question #4: What support do urban elementary principals need to cultivate and sustain culturally relevant instruction within their schools?

The majority of the co-researchers indicated in the questionnaire that they were not prepared in their pre-service training for leadership which connected to the theme Preparation for Multicultural Education. Although some of the co-researchers, such as Nicole, had course work related to culturally relevant practices and a better understanding of teaching diverse students, none of them were able to present a complete picture of culturally relevant practices and what is required for implementation. Richard shared how he learned from others while working with colleagues and staff members which was the experience of most of the co-researchers. Ruby made comments regarding diversity training when the population of her school became more diverse: “We have not done any formal training except for, like I said, a few years ago, we did, well, it's been many years…but other than that, we have not done any culturally responsive training with the staff.”

The findings regarding Preparation for Equity were also observed with all of the co-researchers as they elaborated on their preparation in questionnaires and interviews. There was some understanding of multicultural education and diversity, but no college preparation was noted of culturally relevant instruction. The co-researchers found a
disconnect in obtaining support from Midway school district regarding the support for culturally relevant practices.

There is a need for urban school districts, such as Midway school district, to implement and sustain equitable leadership practices while understanding social justice leadership in K-12 schools. In a nut-shell, social justice educational leadership emphasizes the belief that all students can and will reach proficiency, without exceptions or excuses, and that schools ought to be organized to advance the equitable learning of all students. (Delpit, 2006; Jordan, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2005). Far too long inequities, gaps in resources, opportunities, and outcomes have affected nondominant groups which may be contributing factors to the academic achievement gaps among African American, Latinx, and White students.

Further, limited understanding of equitable leadership practices will continue to be a concern if educational leadership preparation programs do not make adjustments within their programs. There is a need for school and district leaders to be adequately prepared to lead, create, and cultivate educational environments where all of the children in their care are achieving academic success (Evans, 2014, p. 105). “School and district leaders need explicit articulation of leadership practices and tools that focused on fairness in processes, structural and learning conditions, whereas student’s outcomes within the context are equal with nondominant students and families” (Anderson, 2001, p. 3).

Summary

The high leverage practices in the following section, should be considered as ways to provide equitable leadership within the Midway School District that will lead to equity and social justice. Yet, it will take courageous leadership among schools to overturn the current
environment of accountability and standardization that has culturally relevant practices “under siege” (Royal & Gibson, 2017, p. 1). Further, as Royal and Gibson asserted, “We believe this tenet is most important for students from historically marginalized communities, but we recognize that educators cannot engage their students in sociopolitical consciousness if the educators are socio-politically unconscious and/or racially dysconscious . . . “ (p. 3).

**Implications of Findings: The Elements of Leadership for Equity**

Each of the co-researchers identified what they perceived as their leadership styles. Richard described himself as a collaborative leader. Collaborative leaders tend to motivate groups to action and are less likely to give orders or directives; they value relationships with individuals and minimize power differentials (Kramer & Crespy, 2011). Richard said he tries to build capacity from the ground up, focusing on the work with PLCs. As a collaborative leader, Richard stated that he takes different stances but involve teachers in decision making. Nicole and Ruby viewed their leadership style as instructional leaders; both had been instructional coaches in the district. Nicole saw herself as the front-line leader in her school (Spencer, 2009); accustomed to the experiences of coach and mentor (Hallinger, 2005) charged with leading as an instructional leader by facilitating the improvement of teaching and learning (Blasé & Blasé, 2004). Ruby did not see herself as a top-down leader and wanted people to buy in to her ideas and to help create the paths to success. Raquel described her leadership style as authoritarian, desiring unilateral decision-making by maintaining a distance between the leader and followers, communicating authority over the group (Hogg & Adelman, 2013). Raquel perceived that she has a more chameleon style, but the authoritarian style is what teachers respond to in her school. Marie described her style as transformational. This leadership style, articulated by Burns (1978),
places an emphasis on building commitment to the vision and goals of the school and then empowers teachers as partners in decision making (Leithwood, 1994).

As a servant leader, Charles explained,

I think without a question, again that goes back to my professors that I had at the University of _____ and some books we studied. I think that is how I have always viewed myself, is that I am in service to my students, I am in service to my teachers, I am in service to my school community, so whatever I have to do to show that is what I am willing to do and I think that helped me gain trust and respect from the people that I work with and families that I support.

He felt that putting students, teachers, families, and the community at the center of his work in schools were significant to the success of students. “Servant leadership is a belief that organizational goals will be achieved on a long-term basis only by first facilitating the growth, development, and general well-being of the individuals who comprise the organization” (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004, p. 355). Co-researchers described themselves with fairly traditional leadership styles. None of them consider equity leadership as a way to provide equity and justice within districts and schools.

Due to the many inequities that take place in schools, educational leaders are faced with many dilemmas that require a critical need for leaders to be prepared for equitable leadership. Merchant and Shoho (2006) argued that these inequities often reflect societal injustices related to issues such as poverty, sexism, heterosexism, and racism. Principals who practice leadership for equity are needed to help change the inequities that challenge urban districts such as the Midway School District today. Galloway and Ishimaru’s (2017) study was instrumental for identifying recommendations to provide an equitable and social just environment in Midway School District.
Overall educational leadership as a field, Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) indicated has not placed an emphasis on the practice of social justice and equity in K-12 schools and what is needed to actually implement social justice leadership. The questionnaire responses of the 10 participants and eventually case studies of six co-researchers pointed to limited understanding of social justice leadership and preparation “to adequately lead, create, and cultivate educational environments where all of the children in their care are achieving academic success” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 3). Additionally, school districts do not have adequate tools to measure education leadership practices which were illuminated in the voices of the co-researchers as well. These tools should incorporate “fairness in processes, structural and learning conditions, and student outcomes within the context of an unequal playing field for nondominant students and communities” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 3).

In a district where reform efforts are much more focus on bureaucratic, top-down accountability initiatives that are standards-based, implications of findings suggest the systemic integration of leadership for equity in Midway School district is needed. A type of leadership that might “shift from efforts that manifest a deficit articulation of problems and solutions that seek to address individual deficits or poor socialization to practices that reflect an equity lens with actions that address structural and systemic conditions, processes, and barriers that exacerbate societal inequities” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 7). These practices align with literature related to transformative leadership, social justice, and culturally responsive leadership.

The work of Galloway and Ishimaru resonated with Gorski’s (2016) argument that calls for a focus on equity instead of culture. He insisted that much of the nomenclature in the field of culture such as cultural competence, cultural proficiency, intercultural education,
and cross-cultural education have diminished issues of equity, with the exceptions of culturally relevant teaching and culturally responsive teaching approaches to multicultural education. After being heavily trained in multicultural education, he is hesitant to include this method in his workshop and training because people tend to reduce it to celebrations and diversity and silence systemic issues related to racism and heterosexism.

Galloway and Ishimaru (2017) asserted that past leadership versions of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards, 1996 and 2008, for preparing leaders have been woefully short of “attention to equity, historically oppressive systems and practices, and resulting outcome disparities experienced by nondominant students and families” (p. 3). Furthermore, the “silence made issues of race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender, sexuality, and other group-based marginalizations an afterthought in leader preparation and has reified dominant discourse and practice” (p.3). The newer set of standards, Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL), generated after the examination of ISLLC standards, included an entire standard devoted to equity and cultural responsiveness in leadership which represents a bold step: “Specifically, the element indicates that effective leaders: ‘confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status’” (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2017, p. 5).

**Recommendations for Changes in Practices**

After examining National Leadership standards, Galloway and Ishimaru (2017), using a Delphi technique for generating expert feedback with three rounds of data collected from a group of 40 researchers, practitioners and community members, developed a final list
of 10 high leverage leadership practices. They wanted to know: What would leadership standards look like if developed through a lens and language of equity?

These high leverage practices serve to counter systemic and structural barriers that keep barriers to equity in place and have implications for “leadership preparation, policy, and tools to support organizational leadership for equity” (p. 1). The high leverage practices the group identified are briefly summarized below and have connotations for the findings of the 10 participants, six who were co-researchers, regarding culturally relevant practices.

1. Engaging in Self-reflection and Growth for Equity: Examine own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and privileges. Understand how privilege, power, and oppression operate from an historical perspective in schools and the larger society.

2. Developing Organizational Leadership for Equity: Develops others as leaders and builds their capacity to examine their own and others’ practices and underlying biases and assumptions. Dialogue about equitable teaching and learning grounded in systemic and historical understandings of disparities and collaborate to change their educational practices to reach the goal of high quality education for each student.

3. Constructing and Enacting an Equity Vision: Engages in an inclusive process with the entire school community to develop an explicit and collective responsibility for the success of each student regardless of background. Models vision in action to demonstrate high expectations for educator practice and for student learning and achievement; utilizes inclusive, democratic decision-making processes; and employs strategies for countering push-back to sustain and enact the vision.

4. Supervising for Improvement of Equitable Instruction: Support staff in improving equitable instructional practices (such as culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, drawing on Equitable leadership high leverage practices of that funds of knowledge, English learner instructional strategies, etc.). Emphasis is placed on individualized feedback on instructional practices for equity during classroom observations, ongoing opportunities for educator collaboration to engage in collective learning and improvement, and staff accountable for providing equitable access to content and meeting the learning needs of each child.
5. Fostering an Equitable School Culture: Builds authentic relationships across the school community, furthers community understanding, and deepens belonging and voice for students, families, and staff who have been traditionally marginalized, openly addressing instances of racism, classism, homophobia, bullying, etc. Attention is given to learning in all interactions to foster a culture of high expectations and collective responsibility. Disciplinary impacts on particular student groups are examined and policies and strategies that maintain student access to instruction and prioritize relationships, restoration, and learning are implemented.

6. Collaborating with Families and Communities: Maintains meaningful and ongoing relationships with parents, families, and community leaders, especially those from nondominant communities, to centrally engage them in the educational process and school improvement for equity. Ongoing, two-way communication to gain and build deep understanding of the diversity of beliefs, values, practices, and cultural and social capital in the school community. The school is positioned as part of the community and community capacity is built to meaningfully and strategically engage in enacting a collective equity vision.

7. Influencing the Sociopolitical Context: Collaborates with teachers, parents, community members, unions, and other organizations and coalitions to address the roots of systemic inequities by publicly advocating, creating and influencing equitable and socially just policy and implementation. Principals and others in formal power positions strategically use their power and authority within the system and act as allies to educators, students, and parent/community leaders for equitable policies and systems to ensure a high quality education for every student.

8. Allocating Resources: Equitably allocates resources, redistributing financial, material, time, and human resources to support teaching and learning for students who historically have not been well-served due to their race, ethnicity, class, or home language. Also advocates for the equitable use of resources throughout the system.

9. Hiring and Placement Personnel: Recruits, retains, and promotes staff with strong equity commitments, understanding, and skills and staff of color. Makes equity-based staff placements with priorities of placing the most skilled teachers or principals with the students who have greatest need.

10. Modeling Ethical and Equitable Behavior: Leads by example, demonstrating integrity, advocacy, conviction, transparency, and persistence for pursuing equity. Follows through on commitments even in the face of risk, challenge, and push-back. (pp. 20-21)
The six co-researchers that formed the case studies indicated a need to be prepared for teaching in diverse settings; however, their knowledge was limited to multicultural practices that tended to promote diversity than how to be advocates for equitable leaders. These high leverages practices are also useful for leadership preparation programs, providing opportunities for dialogue and discussion regarding relevant research and literature. Midway School District can use these to guide their professional development programs.

**Future Research**

As a co-researcher, and understanding what it means to implement culturally relevant practices, I found this study to be of interest to me as a school leader with a high population of diverse students in my district and school. The findings of the six co-researchers revealed that culturally relevant practices were not implemented in their schools. Future research should consider ways to address this problem in Midway School District that continues to derail equitable outcomes for students. I have outlined several recommendations to consider.

- Identify school districts that have begun this work and study their implementation relative to professional development conducted, support given to leaders, and buy-in from teachers, parents, and community members.

- Conduct research with teachers who are implementing culturally relevant practices in their day to day interactions with students and access their academic and behavioral outcomes.

- Study new teachers entering a district to determine if they are better prepared to implement culturally relevant practices in urban settings.
• Replicate a similar study with central office administrators to determine their support for the implementation of culturally relevant practices.

Final Reflections

As a school leader working in an urban school district, I always find it valuable to constantly refine my practices while leading teachers and working with students from diverse backgrounds. Being a learner and exercising what I have learned to increase my knowledge and skill set, while aiming to increase student achievement, this journey has been very impactful. From the beginning, I was linked with a strong cohort of principals that often pushed my level of development. During this journey, I developed as a researcher and became excited about the opportunity to explore my research topic in order to find out what other urban elementary school leaders do in their daily practices as culturally relevant leaders. As an African American woman growing up in urban schools, it has always been my desire to ensure all children, especially children from diverse backgrounds, have access to a quality education provided by teachers and leaders that have their best interests at hand. Having a better knowledge of culturally relevant practices and the daily interaction of these practices being fully present within the school culture, as well as apparent in teaching and learning, has motivated me to become a better school leader.

While working with co-researchers of this study, I became more aware of the limited training related to culturally relevant practices that school leaders have received from undergraduate and graduate level course work or professional development. During the field work phase of this study and my interactions with co-researchers, it became glaringly clear that Midway School District was not providing training and support for principals and teachers. None of the co-researchers were able to give a clear definition of culturally
relevant practices and often what they described was more connected to multicultural education or diversity training. The most insightful revelation about the dangers of only acquiring knowledge about culture and diversity without being equitable and socially just came from Gorski (2016). He helped me understand how culture and celebratory multiculturalism can diminish the goal of establishing such environments in schools. Co-researchers’ implementation of culturally relevant practices was hijacked by an extreme district focus on standards and accountability. Most co-researchers, including myself, experienced high levels of accountability that focused on data, standards-based planning, and reteaching plans in Midway School District. Accountability and mandates can often get in the way of what is relevant and needed in schools for the success of all children.

First, it will take adjustments and changes in preparation programs while working with aspiring school leaders and providing them with the tools necessary to implement culturally relevant practices in their schools. Some of the changes may require examining current course work for school leaders and integrating content with conversations around race, diversity, and equity. Secondly, leadership practices must allow self-reflection and growth for equity while examining ones’ own identities, values, biases, and assumptions. Finally, it will take Midway School District to become committed to culturally relevant practices throughout the organization and to partner with higher education institutions, communities, and families to provide active and rigorous professional development that promotes self-reflection and examination of biases and attitudes regarding race, ethnicity, language, gender, and heterosexism (Gorski (2016; Royal & Gibson 2017).

In closing, this research journey has been impactful and has increased my knowledge level as a school leader. As a result of this study and my interactions with the six co-
researchers, I am more committed to finding ways to implement culturally relevant practices within my school and district.
I am conducting a case study to explore the daily practices of school leaders and how they lead their schools using culturally responsive practices. This questionnaire will be used to explore your experiences. Please complete demographic information and provide responses to the open-ended questions. Use the back of the form or additional paper, if needed.

Name: ________________________________

Gender: ________________________________

Race or Ethnicity: _______________________

Years taught: __________________________

How many years have you been a principal? __________________________

How do you define culturally relevant practices?

In what ways did your preparation as a teacher/principal prepared you for meeting the needs of culturally diverse students within your school?

What do you do within your daily leadership practices to meet the needs of all students including culturally and linguistically diverse students within the school?

If you agree to participate, your identity will be protected with the use of a pseudonym in place of your name. Following the guidelines of the Institutional Review Board at UMKC, you will be asked to complete a consent form to indicate your agreement to participate voluntarily in the study.
Please indicate your interest in participating in this study.

Yes_________    No___________

Email Address;

Thank you for taking the time to complete this short questionnaire.
APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWING PROTOCOL

I thank and appreciate you for taking the time to meet with me today. I understand that this is a very busy time of the start of a new school year while getting your building in order and making sure your teachers have what they need to be successful. Today, as co-researchers we are going to discuss your experiences as a school leader and your day-to-day practices of culture responsiveness used while leading your school. This interview is being recorded and will be transcribed at a later date. You will have the chance to review the final transcript. I want you to feel comfortable talking at a normal pace without interruption. Please remember that all responses will be anonymous.

(Turn on recorder)

Please state your pseudonym for the recording.

1. Describe the leadership preparation program that you attended and share how it prepared you for the role of the principalship?
2. What areas of school leadership do you wish you would have had more training or experience with?
3. What leadership model best describes you? Why?
4. With a high percentage of diverse students, how do you bring students’ perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds into the school culture and community?
5. What are the unique characteristics of culturally responsive school leaders? (Khalifa et al., 2016)
6. What practices do you do to ensure that culturally responsive leadership is practiced in your school?
7. What training have you given your staff during staff development around culture responsiveness?
8. Describe what culturally relevant pedagogy looks like in the classroom and what evidence are you looking for while observing teachers?
9. How must the effectiveness of a culturally responsive school leader be characterized and measured? (Khalifa et al., 2016)
APPENDIX C

OBSERVATION PROTOCOL FOR DAILY PRACTICES OF PRINCIPALS:
A HEURISTIC CASE STUDY

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REFERENCES


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VITA

My name is Angela Wright and I am an Elementary School Principal. Driven with a love for learning. I began my education career with a Bachelor’s degree in Elementary Education and a Master’s in Education Administration. With over 25 of experience in education, I have had the pleasure of teaching primary, intermediate and middle school grades, as well as two years as an assistant principal and twelve years as principal. My leadership is based on the belief that every child should (must) have an equitable opportunity to receive a quality education. Driven by data, focused and intentional, my leadership style aims to create a harmonious learning environment which can foster students’ academic, cultural, social-emotional, behavioral and physical development. I strongly believe in the old adage that it takes a village to raise a child; and I feel responsible ensuring that the school supports students, parents, families, and the community. I feel honor to lead a staff that is caring and passionate about the work and our students. These characteristics help me lead an environment where excellence is required and putting students at the center of our work. The following awards and recognitions have supported my work:

- Principal of the year finalist- 2019
- Employee of the Month- 2018
- University Advisory Board Member
- Ad-hoc Advisory Superintendent Board Member
- American Businesswomen’s Association: High Achievers Chapter
- Northeast Alliance of Black School Educators.