

BLACK PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING
AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP IN URBAN SCHOOLS:
THE ROLE OF BELIEFS, VALUES, AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

BLACK PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE LEADERSHIP IN URBAN SCHOOLS: THE ROLE OF BELIEFS, VALUES, AND LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

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Black principals who are leaders of predominantly Black urban schools experience the challenges of leading in school environments where students experience a higher rate of poverty, violence, and trauma, as compared to their White counterparts. Historically, pre-*Brown v. Board*, Black principals sought to create learning environments where they focused on a “whole child” approach, not only attending to the academic needs of students but also equally prioritizing their physical, emotional, and social needs as well. A component of a whole child approach is what, in more recent years, is referred to as social-emotional learning (SEL). Black principals today who believe in a whole child, holistic approach express the challenges of employing an SEL approach in environments of high accountability and high demand for behavior consequences. Historically and currently, Black principals operating in an “ethno-

humanist” role express a connection with students that motivates them towards a compassionate, culturally responsive, individualized approach with their students. This qualitative study was done through interviews with 10 Black urban school principals to learn more about their beliefs, values, and practices with regards to SEL and Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL). Using a composite narrative case study approach to protect the identities of individual participants, study findings are presented as three major themes representing the articulated beliefs, values, and practices of the study principals: (1) Caring for Students: (2) Caring for Community, and (3) Caring for Self. A discussion of the findings revealed how the participants’ childhood experiences and upbringing informed their leadership practices, grounded in self-awareness and self-care, allowing them to sustain themselves in order to meet the social, emotional, cultural, and educational needs of Black children in urban schools. The study concludes with implications for practice and a proposed framework that bridges social-emotional learning and culturally relevant and responsive approaches to urban school leadership.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

As a Black principal in an urban school district in NYC, I experience daily the joys and pains of my students and families. Alongside them, I celebrate the accomplishments they achieve and share the struggles they bear while navigating the challenges of life in an urban community, high in poverty and low in resources. During my own struggles as a beginning school leader 8 years ago, I learned through trial and error that paying attention to the holistic development of the child and the child's family is essential in the support of their success. In my own leadership of Thurgood Marshall Academy Lower School (TMALS), a small public elementary school in Harlem, New York City, we have created a family that cares for and nurtures not only the academic development of our children, but the cultural, social, and emotional development of all members of our school community. It is a priority at TMALS and a huge part of the successes of the school that we see our children, acknowledge and celebrate their identities, and consistently—however challenging—attend to their holistic needs and the needs of their families. The focus on cultural responsiveness and the direct link that it has to the child's social and emotional health is a non-negotiable expectation and occurs organically throughout our curriculum and school culture experience. Through the trial and error of new leadership, I learned, after being in a constant reactive state, that my

school community needed a proactive approach that met their holistic needs. We would therefore be preventing fires as opposed to putting them out throughout the day. The goal was also to provide tools and resources to the community in order to build their capacities as individuals, therefore contributing to the positive quality of the full team and the learning environment. As a part of my leadership, bringing both Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) together has involved the use of research-based best practices from several scholars in both fields. Through daily check-ins with students and staff on emotions and moods; identifying and recognizing those feelings through interaction with Yale RULER's Mood Meter, Meta Moment, and Blueprint; and participating daily in mindfulness practices, the school community is able to work continually on the self-awareness and self-management components of SEL. Through cultural rituals, routines, and integration of student identity in curriculum materials and approaches, teachers hold high expectations for students and regularly incorporate diverse cultures and perspectives into the learning experiences they provide for their students. This work has also incorporated an important group in our school community—our parents and extended family. The leadership of parents and grandparents in the learning experience has been key to the success of the approach. This dissertation topic is who I am as a school leader; it is what I believe in and why I wanted to further investigate the beliefs, values, and practices of my colleagues who work to lift their students and families, despite the historic marginalization of our communities and the barriers and obstacles we experience.

According to the Slave Code, the literacy of Black enslaved people was strictly forbidden and criminalized. The education of Blacks was a threat to the system of

slavery. Even after slavery was abolished, Black children in America have historically been marginalized through the systematic and structurally racist policies of the formal public school system, dating back to the first formal schooling of ex-slaves post-1865. Anderson (1988) found that the formal education of Black children who were ex-slaves in the South was created as a way to continue their function as laborers as they did in slavery. Under the guise of providing education to Black children, public schooling began with Black teachers in training being forced to engage in manual labor in order to have them “internalize the value of hard work they were expected to instill in their students” (p. 49). Today, Black students who are living in urban communities continue to be marginalized, often experiencing the challenges of poverty, failing schools, neighborhood violence, single-parent homes, and a lack of social and emotional outlets (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). These children often come to school disengaged and are disproportionately disciplined (Sparks & Klein, 2018). According to Delpit (1995), a culturally responsive approach and institutional caring allows students the ability to manage these challenges, build meaningful connections with peers and teachers, and engage more fully in their learning, ultimately resulting in academic achievement in school.

As an additional burden to children in predominantly Black urban school communities, the societal ills of racism and poverty further impact their emotional health (Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, & Kelly, 2006). The resiliency of Black children who experience poverty, single-parent homes, foster care, neighborhoods with increased crime and violence, and institutional as well as actualized racism is apparent in the ability of many who manage to function and thrive in school, despite their daily experiences

(Brown, 2008a; Miller, 1999). Factors that impact a student's ability to manage external and internal conflicts also affect their social and emotional growth which, in turn, may impact their ability to connect with others and their potential for experiencing academic achievement in school (Goleman, 2007). Goleman (2007) also noted that students who are lacking in social-emotional learning experience a disconnect with peers and teachers, resulting in disengagement and lack of achievement in school. Delpit (2012) concluded that the only way we can create the excellence students in urban classrooms need and deserve is to "provide children with the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of their own competence and worthiness and that of their families and communities" (p. xix).

Background

In the general sense, social-emotional learning (SEL) has a direct impact on a student's physical, mental, and academic development (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006). There is a direct correlation between emotional intelligence and student behavior, decreased bullying, and increased self-concept (Constantinos & Eirini, 2011). However, as Delpit (2012) explained, when students are made to feel disconnected from the educational environment, "they doubt their own competence" and "typically respond with two behaviors: they hide (hoods over faces, heads on desks) and try to become invisible, or they act out to prevent a scenario in which they will not be able to perform and will once again be proven less than" (p. 14). The side effects of anxiety, low self-esteem, inability to communicate emotions, or lack of opportunity to do so have a negative effect on all of our children (Salovey, Stroud, Woolery, & Epel, 2002). Along

with all children who are negatively impacted by anxiety, low self-esteem, and inability to communicate, Black children in particular are further compounded with racial trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Franklin et al., 2006). Black children are directly and indirectly impacted by racial discrimination and violence. J. Lee (2002) emphasized that “from a cultural perspective, we know that the meaning and emphasis of particular emotions are influenced by different traditions of socialization” (p. 803). Black children have been socialized to cope with racism. King (2006) illustrated, through an analysis of research literature, that Black education under “Jim Crow” segregation encouraged Black children not to “internalize negative stereotypes and to learn emotional self-control in response to experiences of micro aggression” (p. 804). Later on, with the scholarly work of Asa Hilliard, there was a shift in the 1960s to a sense of “Black resilience” in Black education that was “rooted in conceptualizing Pan African identity as a tool for community empowerment” (King, 2006, p. 804). Professor Hilliard held the position that education “should have as its primary aim, the holistic development of the child, with a particular focus on what we can call the moral development of the person” (J. Lee, 2002, p. 801).

Problem Statement

Policies and practices implemented for Black students in urban school communities regarding social-emotional learning and culturally responsive school leadership primarily lack the perspectives of the people doing the work. Gordon (1990) indicated that as the population of students of color continues to grow in public schools, Black children continue to see less success in school as compared to White students, and

the blame continues to fall on the victims. Black students who are living in urban communities often experience the challenges of poverty, failing schools, neighborhood violence, single-parent homes, and a lack of social and emotional outlets (Elias et al., 2003). These children often come to school disengaged and are disproportionately disciplined (Sparks & Klein, 2018). Gordon (1990) explained that “reclaiming one’s culture (cultural history and knowledge) is an essential aspect of an authentic being” (p. 97).

As an additional burden to children in predominantly Black urban school communities, the societal ills of racism and poverty further impact their emotional health (Franklin et al., 2006). The resiliency of Black children who experience poverty, single-parent homes, foster care, neighborhoods with increased crime and violence, and institutional as well as actualized racism is apparent in the ability of many who manage to function and thrive in school, despite their daily experiences (Brown, 2008b; Miller, 1999). Factors that impact a student’s ability to manage external and internal conflicts negatively affect their social and emotional growth which, in turn, may impact the student’s ability to connect with others and experience academic achievement in school (Goleman, 2007). Goleman (2007) also noted that students who are lacking in SEL experience a disconnect with peers and teachers, resulting in disengagement and lack of achievement in school. Students who may present as resistant, while managing the challenges of poverty and trauma, must be supported in developmentally appropriate ways. Delpit (2012) concluded that the only way we can create the excellence students in urban classrooms need and deserve is to “provide children with the emotional ego

strength to challenge racist societal views of their own competence and worthiness and that of their families and communities” (p. xix).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district. Historically, Black principals have employed a “whole child” approach. LaPoint, Ellison, and Boykin (2006) defined the education of the whole child specifically as it relates to Black children as one that “can be described as an approach where there is a focus on the proactive, interactive and comprehensive cultivation of Black children’s development within their natural developmental frame of reference as well as their historical and existing functional cultural context” (p. 374). Black principals can “create environments where teachers are supported, where student success is a priority, and where excellence rather than minimum competency is the standard” (Tillman, 2008, p. 599). Delpit (2012) held the position that the curriculum is key; “if the curriculum we use to teach our children does not connect in positive ways to the culture young people bring to the school, it is doomed to failure” (p. 21). Recent data have shown that the achievement gap between Black and White students persists. Across the United States, the Black-White achievement gap continues to reflect that Black students underperform as compared to their White counterparts (Bohrnstedt, Kitmitto, Ogut, Sherman, & Chan, 2015). In terms of current initiatives, specifically in NYC, SEL has replaced the “whole child” terminology in much of the discussion around the ways in which we address the academic and social and emotional needs of children. The current

need for SEL in schools is well-documented in research across the fields of education and psychology. Students excel socially and academically in programs where SEL is central. There is a direct correlation between emotional intelligence and student behavior, decreased bullying, and increased self-concept (Constantinos & Eirini, 2011). Their apparent silent resiliency does not suggest, however, that there is no impact on their learning, ability to focus, and emotional well-being (Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevarez, 2017). The side effects of anxiety, low self-esteem, inability to communicate emotions, or lack of opportunity to do so all have a negative effect on our children (Salovey et al., 2002). Along with children who are negatively impacted by anxiety, low self-esteem, and inability to communicate, Black children in particular are further compounded with racial trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Black children are directly and indirectly impacted by racial discrimination and violence and what Horsford (2011) described as the vestiges of desegregation. Morris (1999) explained that Black students in schools are “marginalized, de-culturized, academically tracked and disproportionately disciplined” (p. 318). King (2006) held the position that “providing education that engages community-mindfulness and rebuilding the community, physically, spiritually and culturally, is one of the strongest recommendations that emerged” in her research (p. 34).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework outlines the characteristics of SEL and CRSL, where they intersect and overlap based on the CASEL Framework (see Figure 4) and CRSL Framework (see Figure 6). The conceptual framework further depicts the reflection of SEL

and CRSL in the beliefs, values, and practices of Black urban school principals for Black children. The themes and ways of Caring for Students, Caring for Community, and Caring for Self, which are central to the study, are also impacted by the SEL and CRSL characteristics, along with the beliefs, values, and practices of the principals (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Conceptual framework

The framework outlines the relationship between the Black principal and their approach to supporting Black children and the school community. Tillman (2004) described pre-*Brown* Black principals as “committed to the education of Black children,” working to educate Black children in “the face of resistance” (p. 101). Ward Randolph and Robinson (2017) noted that the narratives of Black educators and leaders pre-*Brown* showed how they “employed a cadre of overeducated Black professionals who actively sought to be shepherds of the Black community establishing an unintended benefit of high expectations and achievement” (p. 24). In a study of Black female principals, Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) highlighted the “self-drive and self-determination that the women espoused” in relation to the “structures of oppression in their own childhoods” (p. 156). The study also noted the “care, empathy, compassion and emotional intelligence” which “Black women principals have been found to possess while navigating difficult circumstances to bring about change” (p. 155). Moorosi et al. made note of a notion the Black principals described as being “pupil-centered” where there was an intense focus on the individual student and his or her “holistic development” (p. 154). In the holistic development of the child, the leaders exercised a “care about providing positive role modeling for the children who may not have much exposure to success in their community” (p. 157). This tied directly into Siddle-Walker’s (2004) idea that “care means liberating others from their state of need and actively promoting their welfare” (p. 4). Tillman also described “interpersonal caring and resistance” as prevalent themes in the research on post-*Brown* Black principals (p. 124). This culturally responsive approach emanates a culture of care. Cavanagh, Macfarlane, Glynn, and Macfarlane (2012) described how a “culture of care requires schools and teachers to be cognizant of how the

school and classroom values, beliefs and practices make it safe for all students to engage, to contribute, to belong and to feel confident in their own cultural identities” (p. 1). The concept of care is central to SEL. Siddle-Walker (2009) described Black educators and leaders dating back to the 1930s who exercised a level of care and attention to the emotional well-being of Black children in a time of blatant and violent acts of racism. This was the idea that teachers would help students “see past where they could see,” in terms of their beliefs about their own ability to succeed (Siddle-Walker, 2009). Institutional care and its alignment with interpersonal care show a connection to the idea that there must be alignment in philosophy and practice for the benefit of the children (Siddle-Walker, 2009). This aligns closely with a culturally responsive approach that echoes the underlying premise of social-emotional learning.

Research Question

What are the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district? This major research question sought to understand the perspectives and practices of Black principals and the ways in which they meet the social, cultural, and emotional needs of Black students. How do they employ a holistic approach to the needs of their children? How do they view social-emotional learning and how do they see their roles in the work? There is a current expectation in New York City public schools for principals to employ practices that focus on SEL. The current mayor, in collaboration with the city’s school chancellor and teachers’ union, are collaborating on an expansion to social-emotional programming in New York City schools. This study sought to understand how Black

principals currently work to meet the needs of their students and how they define SEL in their individual communities. Black students in urban school communities experience additional life factors that impact their social and emotional development and well-being. This major research question and interview protocol sought to understand how Black principals consider the unique social and emotional needs of Black students while navigating the current climate of accountability, state testing, school violence, anti-Black racism, and poverty. The interview protocol centered on how Black principals lead in their current context, their perceptions of social and emotional needs, their students and how they meet those needs as school leaders who identify as Black.

Limitations and Delimitations

The principals chosen for the study came primarily from one urban school district in New York City. The principals all identified as Black and shared their work, neighborhood, and school demographic experiences. However, all of the principals, because of district mandates, were trained and strongly encouraged to use restorative practices in their schools due to a high number of suspensions in the district. The study was delimited to principals who work in a high-poverty, high-special needs, and low-achieving district. Although state achievement in the district as a whole is well below 50% proficiency district-wide, there are bright spots in the district, with individual school performance being higher at some schools. As a Black principal in an urban school district and a colleague of the participants, who share similar experiences, my role is important to consider as part of the data collection and analysis of findings.

Role of Researcher

As a Black school leader in an urban district in New York City, I am familiar with and experience many of the same challenges identified by my peers in terms of leadership; the impact on our children; outside forces such as racism, trauma, and poverty on the school community; and the pressures of high-stakes testing accountability. My experiences as a Black woman and how I am perceived as a leader also impacts the way I lead and view the leadership of others. I have worked in an urban predominantly Black school district in NYC for 23 years of my career as an education and school leader, with 8 years serving as principal in my current school. I have always worked in Title 1, high-poverty schools and was exposed to the importance of social, cultural, and emotional learning only in the last 11 years of my career. The school that I currently lead is focused on social-emotional learning, cultural responsiveness, and academic achievement. Because I was a colleague of the participants in the study, the participants were comfortable in sharing their beliefs, values, and practices in SEL and cultural responsiveness because they were aware that I too experience the same challenges and struggles as a leader in a similar school community as their own. Functioning within an insider researcher status through a practitioner's lens allowed for deeper insight and understanding into the responses of the participants. Anderson (2002) emphasized the value and validity of insider/practitioner research when he indicated that "practitioner research can make contributions beyond the scope of traditional research" (p. 23), which is what this study aims to accomplish.

Summary of Methodology

This research was a qualitative study of the perspectives and practices of Black principals in a predominantly Black urban school context. The study used a composite case study approach. Willis (2018) described composite narratives as a method used to relay a single story through the data from multiple interviews. A qualitative study allowed for a deeper understanding of the perspectives of Black principals, and how their beliefs, values, and practices reflect the ways they work to meet the social, cultural, and emotional needs of their students. Qualitative research is most appropriate when the goal of research is to explain the practices of individuals based on the perception of their experiences in a given context (Stake, 2010). Creswell (2002) noted that a qualitative research design is appropriate when a researcher seeks to understand relationships. Hearing directly from the principals was the best approach to gain the information needed for the research.

Significance of the Study

The study shed light through insightful conversations from Black urban school principals about the beliefs, values, and practices they employ in leading predominantly Black schools. Using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) Framework and the Framework for Culturally Responsive School Leadership, this study examined the ways in which Black principals perceive and practice SEL implementation and a whole child approach that requires a centering in culturally responsive leadership. The literature aligned with a recommendation of social and emotional programming that “promotes the mental and social well-being of students

including mentoring, tutoring programs, extra-curricular programs, bullying prevention, character education and opportunities for students to take on leadership roles and express their views” (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008, n.p.). Tillman (2008) shared the argument presented by Hilliard that concluded:

When teachers, leaders, parents, and communities decide that African American children will receive an education that facilitates academic and social excellence, the teaching and learning paradigm changes in fundamental ways. In a paradigm that promotes, academic and social excellence, educational goals are pursued and achieved by “gap closers”—teachers and leaders who demonstrate their capability to move student from low achievers to high achievers. (p. 598)

On the whole, the vast majority of new teachers struggle most with a holistic approach, balancing discipline and positive classroom culture while trying to build a relationship with students that results in high expectations for students in the form of care and a push. In classrooms where positive classroom culture is not evident, learning does not occur with the same effective rate as in those classrooms with high levels of positive classroom culture. Tillman (2008) noted that “Hilliard argued that teachers and leaders must create and sustain educational environments that are characterized by positive interpersonal relationships—they must be caring and just for all students” (p. 601).

In the climate of school shootings, violence, depression, bullying, and student suicide, requirements for teacher and leader preparedness must be addressed in order to provide teachers and leaders with the skill set they need to enter a newly defined way of teaching, leading, and relating to students. Scott, Moses, Finnegan, Trujillo, and Jackson (2017) pointed towards the Black Lives Matter movement and the more visible connection between policing practices that are even more prevalent in the Trump era and how those policies are reflected in the school system. Students of color are also victims of racialized community policing practices that impact their view of authority.

The question remains, “Can social-emotional learning in schools meet the needs of Black children and might there be benefit to incorporating SEL with culturally responsive and relevant approaches?” Although both seek to provide a positive learning environment for students in urban settings, they are usually seen in isolation of one another. The voice of the Black urban school principal is virtually absent on the topic of SEL and culturally responsive practices.

Historically, Black principals pre- and post-*Brown v. Board* sought to work against deficit-minded thinking and practices that have denied Black children an excellent education (Tillman, 2004). These Black leaders and educators stood in opposition to inequity, risking their jobs and making sacrifices in order to provide the highest quality education possible for their children, despite inadequate resources. Today, Black school leaders continue to stand against inequitable policies and practices that marginalize their students. This research thus investigated ways to continue the focus on the whole child, while connecting SEL and culturally responsive practices through gaining the perspectives of Black urban school principals on how they are currently experiencing and implementing SEL practices, and how culturally responsive and culturally relevant practices intersect with SEL. The unique perspectives of Black principals of predominantly Black schools are missing from the literature and should be prioritized. The barriers and challenges that they face in terms of mindset, cultural norms, funding disparities, and conflicting punitive discipline perspectives inhibit their full immersion in the work.

Definition of Terms

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) defined *culturally relevant pedagogy* as “a way of teaching students in which they (a) experience academic success; (b) develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and (c) develop a critical consciousness” (p. 160).

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: Geneva Gay’s (2018) definition of *culturally responsive pedagogy* is “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 29).

Culture: Killman, Saxton, and Serpa (1986) defined *culture* as “shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes and norms that knit a community together” (p. 89).

Discipline Gap: Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) wrote that “The *discipline gap*—which is often characterized by racialized disparities in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and court citations—is a direct indication that school cultures are hostile toward minoritized students” (p. 8).

Emotional Intelligence: Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990a, 1990b) coined the term *Emotional Intelligence* (EI), describing it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 5).

Institutional Racism: The organization Solid Ground defined *Institutional Racism* as “the systematic distribution of resources, power and opportunity in our society to the benefit of people who are white and the exclusion of people of color” (p. 1).

Minoritized: “Individuals from racially oppressed communities that have been marginalized—both legally and discursively—because of their nondominant race, ethnicity, religion, language, or citizenship” (Khalifa, Gooden & Davis, 2016, p. 1275).

Race: The following definition comes from Hollins and Govam (2015):

There is no biological basis for racial categories, and genetic research has shown we have more within-group variations than between-group variations. Races are socially and politically constructed categories that others have assigned on the basis of physical characteristics, such as skin color or hair type (or eye color). Although there are no races, perceptions of race influence our beliefs, stereotypes, economic opportunities, and everyday experiences. (pp. 157-159)

Racial/Ethnic Identity: The following definition also comes from Hollins and Govam (2015):

Racial/ethnic identity development is a sense of self that is shaped over time by experiences. Because we live in a society that stereotypes groups of people, most often people of color, in negative ways, it is important to have a foundational strength rooted in who you are that is able to effectively deal with society’s -isms. There is research that shows the more you see your racial/ethnic identity in positive ways and take pride in your group identity, the more positive your mental health. Racial/ethnic identity develops over time. It is not linear but rather circular, meaning that people can go in and out of stages of development, returning to an old way of thinking or remaining in one particular stage for a long period of time. (pp. 157-159)

Racial Trauma: Franklin et al. (2006) described the effects of “invisibility syndrome” and the “emotional abuse” associated with racial trauma (p. 10). Invisibility syndrome manifests as the psychological result of microaggressions against the Black child. These microaggressions are “acts of disregarding the person of color, based on

biased beliefs” (p. 13). These repeated acts of aggression can result in trauma for the child that includes a belief in his or her own inferiority.

Restorative Practices: As defined by the New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE, from the website nycdoerestorativepractices.org), restorative practices “aim to make children more empathetic, better listeners, and better at understanding others’ emotions. Starting the practice at an early age is vital to establishing norms and buy in to the programs.”

Social-Emotional Learning: Zins and Elias (2007) defined *Social-Emotional Learning* as “the capacity to recognize and manage emotions, solve problems effectively, and establish positive relationships with others, competencies that clearly are essential for all students” (p. 1).

Urban: Merriam-Webster defined this as “of, relating to, or designating a city or town. Characteristic of or accustomed to cities.”

Whole Child: LaPoint et al. (2006) defined the education of the *whole child*, specifically as it relates to Black children, as one that “can be described as an approach where there is a focus on the proactive, interactive and comprehensive cultivation of Black children’s development within their natural developmental frame of reference as well as their historical and existing functional cultural context” (p. 374).

Summary

This chapter presented the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research question, summary of methodology, significance of the school leader, and definitions of necessary terms. The subsequent chapters in this dissertation outline the

supportive literature, methodology, findings, and recommendations. Chapter II next presents a detailed outline of the literature as it relates to the following topics:

- Black urban school principals: The significance of the school leader in social-emotional learning and culturally responsive practices in schools.
- Black children, trauma, racism, poverty, and violence: The need for social-emotional learning/emotional intelligence in urban schools, and social-emotional learning and school discipline policies in urban schools.
- Culturally responsive approaches and social-emotional learning.

Chapter III outlines the qualitative research methodology chosen for this study and how the results were analyzed. This study used a qualitative research design with semi-structured interviews with Black principals in an urban district in New York City.

Chapter IV outlines the findings based on the interviews with Black principals and coded patterns around their beliefs and practices regarding cultural responsiveness and SEL as well as their intersection.

Chapter V concludes with key findings and recommendations for future research.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this research was to investigate the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they work to meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district in New York City. In this literature review, the discussion begins with the context of urban schools, specifically in the New York City setting, and the mandates and initiatives placed upon district public schools led by the school's Chancellor, under mayoral control. The research continues with school discipline policies and practices within NYC schools as well as the effect of restorative and culturally responsive approaches to school discipline methods.

The literature details the ways in which Black principals historically and presently seek to meet the needs of Black children who may experience the effects of community trauma, racism, poverty, and violence. Social-emotional learning and culturally responsive approaches impact the ways in which educators meet the holistic needs of Black children. The research specifically has shown the effect of Black leadership on the Black child, the role and significance of the Black principal in the lives of Black children, and the role of the Black leader's beliefs and experiences on their leadership of Black children. Finally, the review examines the characteristics and intersections between social-emotional learning and culturally responsive approaches.

Urban Education in New York City

In the New York City public schools, principals depend on support from their district offices. District offices and borough central offices provide professional development to school leaders. In many cases, principals can seek out their own professional development. The principals expressed challenges with working in communities with high poverty and high levels of trauma, and the struggle with adequate funding to commit to SEL and CRSL practices and professional development. In a district where professional development is primarily focused on academics due to the poor achievement of students overall, little time is spent preparing principals to manage the additional challenges that come as a result of student trauma and mental health.

Urban District as Context

As the largest public school system in the country, New York City serves more than 1 million students in over 1,500 schools in 32 community school districts. There are zoned schools where students are assigned to schools in their zone or neighborhood based on their home address. Unzoned schools have their own processes for admissions but give preference to those living in the neighborhood. The NYC school system is run by a Chancellor, who is appointed by the mayor; the NYC school system has been under mayoral control since 2002. Along with the Chancellor, leadership teams serve in various capacities. For example, the Panel for Educational Policy is the “governance body” that is in charge of school location and school closures for poor performance. This panel includes the Chancellor and 13 members, eight appointed by the mayor and the other five appointed by borough presidents. Students also serve as non-voting members of the Panel

for Educational Policy. There are advisory committees, Citywide and Community Education Councils that consists of nine elected parent leaders and two community members who are appointed by the Borough President, and there is also a non-voting high school senior on the council. Community Superintendents oversee the 32 districts and each supports a group of schools in a given area. More recently, there are newly appointed Executive Superintendents who oversee Borough Citywide Offices. The Executive Superintendents also supervise the community superintendents and the borough office support staff who support schools with human resources, health, special education, testing, budgeting, and facilities.

The district in which the study was conducted is an urban school district in New York City. The district is predominantly Black and high poverty, with a majority of schools is designated as Title 1. Unique to this district, there is a concentration of charter schools. School choice and the charter school movement have both aggravated racial isolation. Racial isolation is described by Massey and Denton (1988) as the strategic separation and segregation of Black people enacted through residential and housing practices and the deliberate creation of ghettos. Despite parent and community protest, the segregation persists (Moser, 2016). In terms of segregation, 19 of the 32 districts had 10% or fewer White students in 2010 across the five boroughs. According to the Civil Rights Project report, “73% of charters across New York City were considered apartheid schools (less than 1% white enrollment) and 90% percent were intensely segregated (less than 10% white enrollment) schools in 2010” (New York Schools Most Segregated in the Nation, 2014). In the district where the study took place, school leaders shared that there is a disparity in resources where charters have access to private funding that allows them

to upgrade facilities and increase resources like technology and classroom staff. The allure of charter schools for families negatively impacts the district public schools. School leaders also shared that they often take in students who are “forced out” or “counseled out” of charters. Often, those students have social-emotional difficulties or special needs. The competition and disparity between district and charter schools pit schools against one another, competing for the same pool of children. District schools struggle to stay afloat with dwindling enrollment.

The practice of “redlining” was evident in the neighborhood where the district is located. The neighborhood was deemed an undesirable location for home buyers after the Fair Housing Act (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004). Ironically, the same areas are now in demand. The demographics have shifted due to gentrification, which has been described as a “political process” (Bernt, 2012, p. 3045). The White population of students in public schools in the district is at 4%, although their current population in the community is above 10%. Although the White population has grown in the neighborhood, the district has not seen that rapid growth as of yet.

Collins and Williams (1999) examined the effects of segregation on the mortality rates of African Americans and found that such elements as segregation and concentrated areas of poverty have an adverse effect on the life span of African Americans. Factors such as neighborhood violence, lack of resources, and adequate health care all contribute to the mortality rate of African Americans in segregated communities (Collins & Williams, 1999). Many generations of Blacks living in the neighborhood are products of the strategic process of spatial isolation, according to Massey and Denton (1998), who noted that the Black ghetto has remained a part of many U.S. cities, like New York City,

since its creation in 1920. Today, the median income for Blacks in the district is less than \$37,000, while homes are being purchased by the “settlers” of gentrification for more than \$3 million. The price of renting in this particular neighborhood has risen by 171% between 2009 and 2017 (Solis, 2017). Despite gentrification, the poverty rate in the district is at 80.6%.

Housing projects have become a “normal” state in Black neighborhoods where “social isolation” and the “physical separation of the races” remain as evident as they did in the mid-21st century (Massey & Denton, 1998, p. 17). Residents of housing projects live in environments that can be “unpredictable and unstable,” causing many to have a “fatalistic view of life” (Dreier et al., 2004, p. 67). The ghettoization of the neighborhood persists as “segregation persists,” and “black isolation deepened” during the 1970s when the ghetto “gave birth to a permanent underclass” (Massey & Denton, 1998, p. 61). Despite the pockets of gentrification and the increase of working African Americans, areas of poverty are still evident as one travels through the neighborhood.

Education Policy Mandates and Initiatives

The current Chancellor, appointed by the mayor, has collaborated on an agenda towards Equity and Access for All, which entails a series of mandates and expectations for districts and schools to increase awareness and antiracist practices through implicit bias training and restorative practices training that is occurring across the city. The challenge of training a staff that reflects the size of the New York City public school system is monumental. Some districts and schools have had the training and some have not. An awareness is being built across the system and equity has been at the forefront of all branches of the system. The website for the New York City Department of Education

(NYCDOE) outlines the expectations for Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education with a list of things “required by all schools and districts” (The Department of Education, 2020, Resilient Kids, Safer Schools, para. 5). Elements are in full alignment with the values and beliefs of the principals in the study, such as seeing students’ identity and valuing their backgrounds; being aware of historical incidents of bias and oppression; and building connections with students, families, and communities. However, some of the expectations from the NYCDOE ask that principals interrupt racist policies and practices that are out of their control. For example, the language of the expectations states, “Identify and stop racist practices that marginalize students” (The Department of Education, 2020, Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education, Our Approach, para. 1). The principals in this study have not received implementation support regarding CRSE or CRSL. As the principals shared, they have no control over policies that are top-down. Some of these policies they may feel are marginalizing their students, specifically Black and Brown students, and are inherently racist, such as discipline policies, high-stakes testing, and some special education practices. The goals presented by the NYCDOE are needed and honorable goals. The “what to do” is evident, as is “why it should be done,” but the “how” is not yet evident. The ongoing support for those leading the work in schools is not yet evident across the system.

In terms of SEL, schools individually select programs to use that they have to fund with their own budgets. Often with many competing priorities, budgetary decisions have to be made that may not leave much funding for special programs that focus on SEL or CRSE. Professional development in SEL is needed for all staff; however, this can also be costly, and without funding earmarked for those purposes, money may be taken from

or allocated elsewhere for compliance purposes. Leaders themselves need professional development. In NYC, through programs such as RULER, school leaders receive leadership coaching through a connected organization called Star Factor, that engages them in emotional intelligence building in both their professional and personal lives. Stern and Brackett (2012) noted that “the development of key skills that permeate personal and professional landscapes leads to lasting changes that promote quality teaching and leadership” (p. 266). In addition to the personal stresses in the lives of school leaders, they also struggle to manage the compounded stresses of the work they take home each day, and they need support in navigating strategies to manage their emotions across their professional and personal lives. RULER provides emotional intelligence building support for leaders in collaboration with an organization called Star Factor.

Many of New York City’s school superintendents, principals, and staff have been trained in the Yale Institute for Emotional Intelligence’s RULER Approach. More than 300 NYCDOE schools have adopted the Yale RULER Approach and are implementing it with various levels of success; altogether, there are more than 1,800 NYCDOE schools. Implementation support is the key to any program’s success. The RULER Approach is widely utilized throughout the United States and abroad and includes a series of practices that allow the students, staff, and families opportunities to develop the skills to recognize and regulate emotions for a more positive learning and life experience. It has been up to the determination of the local superintendents to select or “mandate” the common use of the program in their districts; therefore, some schools have access and some do not.

Unique to the RULER Approach, a component of principal SEL leadership coaching is included.

The mayor endorses the Sanford Harmony Program as the SEL program of choice. The DOE website states that schools will “receive supports to teach their students how to develop healthy relationships through this SEL curricula” (The Department of Education, 2020, Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education, Our Approach, para. 1).

School Discipline Policies and Practices

Social and emotional positive behavioral supports can serve as a preventative measure to the use of excessive suspensions and punitive disciplinary measures at schools. Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (2018) suggested that Black and Brown marginalized students in urban school communities are suffering the effects of a higher rate of suspensions and expulsions, as compared to their White counterparts. Brown, Maggin, and Buren (2018) made reference to a study that showed that “while one-third of students with emotional or behavioral disorders were students of color, three-fourth of students identified as at risk were minorities (Carrero, Collins, and Lusk, 2017)” (p. 433). In the same study, Brown et al. noted specifically that “Black students comprised of nearly 90% of students of color (Carrero, Collins, and Lusk 2017)” (p. 433).

Education policy points to the need for positive behavioral supports for students and the need for “requirements and routes to certification of teachers of core content to include classroom and behavior management components that are effective in preparing teachers to address both the academic and social/emotional needs of diverse students” (Losen, 2011, p. 17). In Title IX of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act

(ESEA), teachers must meet certain state criteria in order to be considered “highly qualified.” Losen’s policy brief noted that teachers’ “training in classroom and behavior management should be a part of the definition” (p. 19). Losen explained that Title II’s “eligibility requirements could require that State Applications include training in classroom and behavior management that are effective in preparing teachers to address both academic and social emotional needs of students” (p. 17). New teachers often struggle with behavior management strategies and enter school unprepared to deal with the challenges that many students bring to school with them. Higgins and Moule (2009) studied preservice teachers’ perceptions of “niceness” and control in classrooms, their integration into a predominantly Black school community, and the struggle they encountered with a university approach vs. a school-based approach. High expectations for students are a key part of a culturally responsive approach where students develop ownership for their behaviors and skills that improve their learning experiences and lives (Delpit, 1995; Higgins & Moule, 2009; Milner, 2006).

Unhealthy environments exist for many students of color. Not often is a root cause analysis or preventative approach utilized when students are exhibiting what may be perceived as aggressive behaviors that lead to disciplinary interventions. In a 2017 study conducted on the use of EI as a moderator in anger-related aggression, Garcia-Sancho, Dhont, Salguero, and Fernandez-Berrocal found that situational stressors such as environment, over time, increased a “chronic state of higher psychological distress” that can lead to increased aggression. The study also found that building the skill of emotion regulation abilities was directly correlated to decreases in the risk of physical aggression (Garcia-Sancho et al., 2017).

Khalifa et al. (2016) wrote that “The discipline gap—which is often characterized by racialized disparities in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and court citations—is a direct indication that school cultures are hostile toward minoritized students” (p. 8). Positive behavioral supports and progressive discipline measures can serve as preventative approaches to the common punitive discipline strategies used by many schools. In their policy brief on discipline and policing, Scott et al. (2017) noted that policy should require funds be redirected from the use of increased school policing to increased funding for counselors and SEL support structures and systems for students.

Black students, particularly Black males, are suspended at a higher rate, as compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). The U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights documented that out of total preschool enrollment, Black children represented 18% of those enrolled, but 48% of preschool children received more than one out-of-school suspension. White students, on the other hand, who represented 43% of preschool enrollment only represented 26% of preschool children receiving more than one out-of-school suspension (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2013).

Urban school leaders therefore must be mindful of the disparity in suspensions as they relate to race in order to provide a restorative approach to discipline in their schools. Elias (2009) linked the poor performance of students in urban schools to the lack of presence of SEL supports for students. Similar to Scott et al., Elias also pointed out that the emphasis on test-based accountability is narrow and neglects the multiple measures that reflects the social-emotional side of our students. Scott et al. (2017) suggested that policymakers “invest in the strengthening of curricula and activities that are more

grounded in socio-economic development and the development of new pathways to teaching for students of color” (p. 9). The literature also suggested that policy must address teacher preparation programs to ensure that teacher certification require teachers to be adequately prepared to address the effects of trauma that marginalized students experience, which can manifest through behavioral challenges in classroom. When the classroom environment is not a safe space and students’ social and emotional needs are not met, students are “more likely to disrupt the learning process and head towards dropping out from it, often emotionally prior to physically” (Waxman, Gray, & Padron, 2003). Black and Brown marginalized students who experience emotional and behavioral issues are dealing with issues such as “regular occurrences of parental illness, economic hardship, bullying, pressure to join gangs, negative peer groups and feelings of hopelessness” that they bring to school with them (Elias, 2009, p. 839). Because students are not able to leave these feelings at the door when they come to school, schools would serve students best by utilizing programs that address their emotional and social needs. Elias (2009) suggested that students have a bank of emotional regulation skills in order to manage the increased rigor and expectations in the academic program they are now encountering.

Many charter schools that have predominantly Black and Brown student populations use a “zero tolerance” approach to discipline that further marginalizes students of color under the premise of enhanced opportunities for students of color. Winton (2012) pointed out that students who are already at risk of failure are further targeted through punitive measures that increase the likelihood of academic failure and detachment from school. Winton also observed that those who oppose the zero tolerance

philosophy suggest that “emotional supports for students at risk of academic failure and misbehavior, caring relationships, and developmentally appropriate interventions that focus on correction and learning from one’s mistakes are alternatives to zero tolerance” (p. 468). This approach is counter to the zero tolerance policy that Winton outlined echoed Elias’s findings that showed students need a learning strategy that includes activities and curricula that promote students feeling connected and a sense of belonging in the classroom, thereby allowing them to engage in class activities and collaborate with peers. Students who feel engaged and connected are less likely to disrupt the learning environment. There are long-term consequences for students who are suspended or expelled (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Winton cited the many researchers who agree that these suspended and expelled students have difficulty re-entering the school environment positively and often experience academic and social challenges in school as well as a feeling of disconnectedness. Elias (2009) and Winton (2012) noted that the learning experience is relational. As such, the relationship that students have with teachers in climates with increased caring and trust, where staff work collaboratively and proactively to address discipline, allows them to feel a sense of belonging that permits a stronger connection to the school and its culture. These schools have lower levels of suspensions because of their proactive approaches as well as lower levels of student maladaptive behaviors.

Graves et al. conducted a 2017 study entitled “Examining the Effectiveness of a Culturally Adapted Social-Emotional Intervention for African American Males in an Urban Setting” at Duquesne University. Seeking to assess a “culturally adapted version” of an SEL program called Strong Start, the study examined the disproportionate use of

discipline policies such as suspension and expulsion on Black males and how an intervention program can be useful in providing the skills of emotion regulation to help students engage in more positive experiences and relationships in schools. In the study, they examined the effects of an SEL-based intervention program on 61 urban elementary African American male students. The students were 98% eligible for free and reduced lunch. The findings of the randomized delayed treatment control design resulted in positive outcomes for the students in relation to their skill development of self-regulation and self-competence. However, the intervention did not show an impact on the students' ability to show empathy, their sense of responsibility, or behavior. The researchers noted this gap in the program's design and based on research outlining the experiences and needs of African American males, and reflected in the lack of full impact on the boys. In order to increase the impact of the program's efforts, the recommendations for the study pointed to the need for a culturally relevant approach to intervention for African American males. In the post-intervention interviews and surveys done with teachers of the students, the teachers expressed the positive intent of the program and the need for SEL supports. However, teachers also expressed that the program did not focus as much on the skills needed to address the experiences of the African American boys with gun violence, trauma, incarcerated parents, neighborhood violence, and single-parent homes, for example. Graves and Aston (2017) advocated the view that Black students benefit from a positive self-concept surrounding their racial identity when they noted: "when Black students report having a positive view of their race and ethnic group, they are more likely to develop a stronger sense of belonging to other members of their own group, which in turn allows them to better cope with sociocultural stressors such as prejudice

and discrimination (Jones & Neblett, 2016)” (p. 77). Graves and Aston cited several studies, including those of Constantine (2006); Shin (2011); and Grills, Cooke, Douglas, Subica, Villanueva, and Hudson (2016), and presented the argument that “greater adherence to Afrocentric cultural values was predictive of higher levels of self-esteem and perceived social support satisfaction” (p. 77).

Meeting the Needs of Black Children

Black neighborhoods with concentrated poverty result in increased instances of negative environmental experiences, including physical, biological, social, and emotional factors (Garo, Allen-Handy, & Lewis, 2018). Children in neighborhoods with concentrated poverty experience higher rates of indirect and direct violence. Those children also experience increased instances of “asthma, tuberculosis, and other respiratory illnesses, allergies, lead poisoning and associated brain damage” (p. 249). These stress-inducing traumatic experiences impact a student’s mental and emotional wellness as well as cognitive and behavioral functions, leading to increased referrals to special education and academic challenges (p. 249). Jones (2007) explained that exposure to violence negatively affects a child’s “emotional and cognitive development” while repeated exposure to violence, can impact the child’s “sense of safety needed for normal development,” and cause it to “collapse or never fully develop” (p. 125).

As a result of community violence, children are increasingly experiencing PTSD, when they may at times re-experience and re-enact the trauma in their minds with alternate endings or experience sleep disorders, nightmares, startle reflexes, and more (Bell & Jenkins, 1991). These children often act out in classrooms and display

maladaptive behaviors such as violence, antisocial behaviors, lack of focus, and poor social interactions with teachers and peers. Shakoor and Chalmers (1991) defined co-victimization as the harm that is done to those who witness the violence. This has a long-lasting effect on the child, who can experience a lack of trust, anxiety, and change in his or her personality after the trauma.

Racial trauma is also a reality for Black children. Franklin, Boyd-Franklin, and Kelly (2006) described the effects of “invisibility syndrome” and the “emotional abuse” associated with racial trauma (p. 10). Invisibility syndrome manifests as the psychological result of microaggressions against the Black child. These microaggressions are “acts of disregarding the person of color, based on biased beliefs” (p. 13). These repeated acts of aggression can result in trauma for the child that includes a belief in his or her own inferiority. Harrell (2000) defined racism as

a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial group designations ...where members of the dominant group create or accept their societal privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving nondominant-group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources. (p. 43)

Jones (1997) made the distinction between individual, institutional, and cultural racism. Black children in school can experience individual racism as the effects of the perceptions teachers and peers have of them that impact the way they are taught and treated in the classroom. Institutional racism is experienced as the policies and practices in school systems that negatively impact Black students—for example, disproportionate discipline policies. Cultural racism is described as the power structure that marginalizes Black students in ways that become customary everyday practices. White privilege normalizes cultural racism.

Community Trauma: Racism, Poverty, and Violence

For the past 20 years, New York City's poverty rate has fluctuated between 19-21%. According to New York University Furman Center Core Data from 2011-2015, close to 1.7 million New Yorkers were living in poverty. Neighborhoods with high poverty are also often plagued with violence, crime, poor-performing schools, and lower levels of college-educated adults. African Americans and Hispanics are more likely to live in impoverished neighborhoods (New York University Furman Center, 2016).

In nearly 20% of New York City neighborhoods, approximately 30% of families live below the poverty index. The rate of children and seniors living in poverty is above the U.S. average poverty rate (New York University Furman Center, 2016). In *American Metropolitcs*, Orfield (2002) showed the correlation between poverty and race, and stated that African Americans and Latinos who are regularly discriminated against in the housing market often remain in poverty due to social and economic separation. In New York City, there are 334 housing projects containing 178,895 apartments in 2,602 buildings. The actual population of residents living in housing projects in New York City is approximately 600,000 (10 Surprising Facts About NYCHA, New York's 'Shadow City', 2012). Those living in housing projects often take a "fatalistic attitude towards life" because of the unstable nature of the neighborhoods in which they live (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004, p. 67). Dreier et al. (2004) went on to describe how the lifespan of a Black man living in Harlem is shorter than a man living in extreme poverty in Bangladesh.

Social-Emotional Learning in Urban Schools

Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer (1990a, 1990b) coined the term *Emotional Intelligence* (EI), describing it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 5). According to Goleman (2007), “People who are emotionally adapt—who know and manage their feelings well, and who read and deal effectively with other people’s feelings—are at an advantage in any domain in life” (p. 36). Across environments, including school and workplace environments, research has shown that those with higher EI have higher functioning and effectiveness (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006). Students who receive instruction in building EI show increased social skills. EI is described as not only a recognition of one’s emotions and the emotions of others, but also a set of cognitive abilities. These cognitive abilities are specifically seen when presented with emotion-based problems to solve—hence, the increased ability to function in work and school environments where problem solving is a regular occurrence. In a study conducted by Arefnasab, Zare, and Babamamoodi in 2012, the participants’ abilities to problem solve were more evident in those with higher emotional intelligence.

The literature has suggested that the teacher is the central most important factor in the teaching of SEL in schools (Elias et al., 2003). SEL has a direct impact on a student’s physical, mental, and academic development (Cherniss et al., 2006). The ability of students to recognize and identify emotions, regulate emotions when necessary, show compassion, exhibit positive relationships with others, and make well informed decisions in challenging situations are skills that identify as Emotional Intelligence (Goleman,

2007). EI is defined by Salovey and Mayer (1990) and explained by Brackett and Rivers (2014) as the “mental abilities associated with processing and responding to emotions, including recognizing the expression of emotions in others, using emotions to enhance thinking, and regulating emotions to drive effective behaviors” (p. 4). SEL is built on the findings in the research on Emotional Intelligence.

One program focused on building EI in school communities is the RULER Approach program, created in 2003 by Dr. Marc Brackett at Yale Institute. The RULER Approach was inspired by Dr. Brackett’s uncle, Marvin Mauer, an educator who began the work in the 1970s. RULER features various components that are, at best, woven into the daily fabric of a school culture. Teachers and staff are also included in the process of building EI daily through mood check-ins, charter agreements, processes for handling stressful moments, and strategies for long-term stressful relationships and situations. Teacher comfort, commitment, and culture are determined to be the deciding factors in the successful implementation of SEL in the classroom (Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012).

The links to negative behaviors in school with the inability to regulate emotions is a theme across the literature. For example, in a 2003 study of 152 adolescents in Grade 7, students who reported a less effective ability to regulate emotions also reported a higher rate of depression and behavior problems (Silk, Steinberg, & Sheffield-Morris, 2003). The literature coincided with linking student ability to function in school and relationships with peers and teachers with students’ level of ability to regulate emotions and recognize the emotions of others (Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, & Brackett, 2016). Students with higher EI showed enhanced positive relationships with peers, decreased

aggressive behavior and poor decision making, decreased disciplinary action needed, and received fewer suspensions, compared to their peers who did not receive SEL support (Rivers, Brackett, Salovey, & Mayer, 2007). Those students with increased SEL enjoyed school and attended more regularly. Cherniss et al. (2006) also found that children who were exposed to more social and emotional supports had increased achievement in academics.

In a 2011 study entitled “Classroom Emotional Climate, Teacher Affiliation, and Student Conduct,” Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson, and Salovey examined the connection between classroom culture regarding emotion and student behavior. The role of the teacher in the study was assessed as a mediator as well as the degree to which the teacher had a supportive relationship with the students and how the students perceived that relationship. The study was conducted in 44 diverse urban schools with 90 Grade 5 and Grade 6 students (n = 2,000). Methods used were classroom observations, student surveys, and conduct grades. The student survey measure used an eight-item questionnaire that assessed students’ perceived relationships with teachers. For example, some questions on the student survey were “My teacher understands me” and “I like my ELA teacher this year.” Students responded using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = agree a lot, 5 = disagree a lot). The findings suggested a clear and distinct correlation between positive classroom emotional culture and positive student behaviors, as mediated through the student/teacher relationship.

Black students in urban schools experience poverty at a higher rate, as compared to their White counterparts. Munin (2012) noted in his research:

In an equitable society, if Whites constitute 65% of the total population, they should also make up 65% of those in the low-income bracket. But this group is actually 23.6 percentage points lower in representation in the low-income family category. Conversely, Blacks make up a larger percentage than their overall size in the low-income population by 9.8 percentage points. (pp. 4-5)

Milner (2013), who examined the ways in which poverty can impact Black children in the learning environment, noted, “Inside of school, there are pedagogical approaches that have important implications for students living in poverty” (p. 2). The poverty levels of Black children in the New York City public school system have historically been quantified according to data obtained through Free and Reduced Lunch price forms. The U.S. Department of Education (2001) conducted a study of 71 high-poverty schools in New York City and found that across those schools, students experiencing poverty achieved at lower levels, as compared to those students not living in poverty. Poverty impacts the quality and quantity of resources available to children (Lacour & Tissington, 2011). Studies have shown that there is a concentration of Black and Latino students in high-poverty schools (Saporito & Sohoni, 2007). The factors that impact the lives of children and families living in poverty may also decrease their access to effective learning (Evans, 2004). Poverty has harmful effects on the physical, social-emotional, and intellectual abilities of children and their families. Several researchers (Levanthal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000) noted the factors that exist in the lives of children living in poverty that includes more punitive parenting strategies, high stress, violence, crime, substance abuse, and single-parent homes. The financial strain and stress levels that poverty places on families and their children can impact the ability of parents to attend to the needs of their children.

Culturally Relevant and Responsive School Approaches

Killman, Saxton, and Serpa (1986) defined culture as “shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes and norms that knit a community together” (p. 89). Siddle-Walker (2009) described how Black schools employed cultural relevance before the historical precedent case *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). She emphatically described the wholesome care and advocacy that were culturally responsive ways of being during this era. She also described the Black educators and leaders dating back to the 1930s who exercised a level of care and attention to the emotional well-being of Black children in a time of blatant and violent acts of racism. Siddle-Walker discussed the “aspirational” and “interpersonal” care of Black educators. This “ethic of care” idea reflected how teachers would help students “see past where they could see,” in terms of their beliefs about their own ability to succeed. Institutional care and its alignment with interpersonal care show a connection to the idea that there must be alignment in philosophy and practice for the benefit of the children (Siddle-Walker, 2009). Much can be learned from this era of Black schools by identifying ways in which modern, predominantly Black schools can reclaim the focus on care and advocacy that many Black educators emanated before desegregation.

One culturally relevant approach follows a framework designed by Gloria Ladson-Billings, based on her research around what she coined *culturally relevant pedagogy*. The three major areas include a focus on “Academic Success, Cultural Competence and Critical Consciousness” (Ladson-Billings, 1995, pp. 160-162). The perspective of dedicated, invested teachers who believe and know that “all students can and must succeed” is essential to this approach (p. 163). Through the use of culturally

relevant texts and culturally competent lesson planning approaches, Ladson-Billings explained that teachers are using the culture of the students as “a vehicle for learning” where parents and family members are also engaged to participate and share their “cultural knowledge” (p. 161). Ladson-Billings noted that “students must develop a broader socio-political consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” and “engage the world and others critically” (p. 162). There is little research on the connections between SEL and culturally relevant practices. However, this is an important connection to be made because social-emotional awareness can surface in contexts that are unique to the cultural characteristics of the students. For example, Hammond and Jackson (2015) and Muhammad (2018) included skill-based instruction centered on intellectuality through challenging content as a part of a culturally responsive approach. Their approach is in more alignment with Gay’s definition. Geneva Gay’s (2018) definition of culturally responsive pedagogy is “using cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant and effective for them” (p. 29). This attends to the intellectual needs of the students while also attending to the need for an identity-centered focus. Hammond and Jackson (2015) went further to identify “affirmation and validation” as part of their Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching. They noted in the framework the need for building a “sense of self efficacy, positive mindset, reducing social emotional stress, providing care and a push, building a socially and intellectually safe environment and using a restorative justice frame” (p. 17).

Wade-Boykin (2006) conducted a series of experimental studies in which he found that that African American fourth and fifth graders saw higher performance when they engaged in what he called “communal learning” (p. 379). C. D. Lee (2001) illustrated in her work the concept of “cultural modeling” as a way to connect the students’ everyday experiences and knowledge with academic content. Tillman (2008) explained how Dr. Hilliard

argued that people of African descent must know their culture, schools must recognize and include African culture in instructional materials, teachers and leaders must have high levels of cultural proficiency and African American communities must use their culture as a foundation in the academic and social development of its children. (p. 600)

Dr. Gholdy Muhammad (2018) studied literacy in the historically Black context, examining the ways in which literacy was taught to Black students pre-*Brown* that promoted a stronger and deeper learning and understanding for Black students. As Muhammad noted, “Youths need opportunities in literacy pedagogy not only to explore multiple facets of self-identity but also to learn about the identities of others who are different from them” (p. 138). She explained the need to return to a framework that includes identity and criticality focused not only on individual identities but on collective identities as well.

Black Principals Leading Urban Schools

For the purposes of this study, *Blackness* is defined by Lomotey (2019) as one who is “African centered,” or of African ancestry. The Black urban principals in this study, identified as being of African ancestry, with Black seen as a race with a variety of countries of origin, traditions, and cultures within.

The historic disenfranchisement of Black students; the lack of access to and disproportionate resources related to housing and property; and institutionalized racist policies are in direct correlation with the underachievement of Black students (Lomotey & Lowery, 2014). Lomotey and Lowery (2014) noted that successful Black principals believe in high expectations for students and work to create environments that approach students' individual needs; however, they are aware that "academic success is not enough" (p. 397).

Similar to the more blatant oppressive systems and racist structures pre- and post-*Brown*, modern-day Black principals more than 70 years later still face racist, oppressive structures that marginalize Black and Brown students. Principal LeeAndra Khan described the challenges of leadership as a Black principal in a 2016 article in *Education Digest*. She mentioned the challenges of speaking up against the marginality of the Black and Brown children in her care and the strategic way she needed to craft courageous conversations so as not to offend White teachers to the point that they would resist change. She also discussed the possible perception of being viewed as exclusionary or racist when speaking up for Black students. As well, she noted the challenges she faced in feeling "wretched" when holding Black students "accountable for social standards that may marginalize the very essence of who they are" (p. 6). In a study on Black female principals, Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) highlighted the "self-drive and self-determination that the women espoused," in relation to the "structures of oppression in their own childhoods" (p. 156). The study also noted the "care, empathy, compassion and emotional intelligence" which "Black women principals have been found to possess while navigating difficult circumstances to bring about change" (p. 155). Moorosi et al.

made note of a notion that Black principals described as being “pupil-centered,” where there was an intense focus on individual students and their “holistic development” (p. 154). In the holistic development of the child, the leaders exercised a “care about providing positive role modeling for the children who may not have much exposure to success in their community” (p. 157).

The Role and Significance of the Principal

The leader is central to driving the school community to recapture positive ways of being for our schools. According to Wilson Cooper (2009), “Principals have not adequately addressed the cultural tensions and separatist politics that marginalize ethnic and linguistic minority students and their families” (p. 695). Wilson Cooper also noted:

Transformative leadership constitutes a form of liberatory political praxis, whereby leaders use their positional power to promote democracy, redress inequities, and empower various stakeholders, including marginalized students and families. Through collaborative methods, leaders then develop inclusive governing structures and communities. (p. 696)

The role of the “transformative leader” is key in approaching the cultural work grounded in social justice and ensuring that efforts do not further marginalize groups of students. The changing cultural politics in schools are a challenge that leaders must be willing to address with risk taking (Wilson Cooper, 2009). Similar to Wilson Cooper (2009), Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn (2011) further dissected the social and cultural context of today’s schools and the changing demographic by promoting the need for a more culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy. The focus on developing leaders who are able to move past the personal when addressing cultural relevance to a place of the professional is paramount (Horsford et al., 2011). When describing urban school environments, Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2016) noted that “developing effective

leaders becomes a vital part of the process of recruiting and retaining the best teachers for children who have been marginalized” (p. 1273). As it is with culturally responsive practices, the success of SEL practices school-wide requires the support of the school leader. According to Elias, O’Brian, and Weissberg (2006), effective integration of SEL into schools will require transformative leadership. Scott, Moses, Finnegan, Trujillo, and Jackson (2017) suggested that historically marginalized communities need leaders who can engage students in SEL work through collaborations with community-based organizations and entities.

In 2017, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) commissioned DePaoli, Atwell, and Bridgeland to conduct a nationally representative survey of 884 Pre-K to 12 public school principals and interviews with 16 superintendents as well as 10 district-level research and evaluation specialists. Over the course of 2 months, principals, superintendents, and research and evaluation specialists participated in surveys and interviews to assess their perspectives on the role of SEL in schools. The representation of schools was diverse, with each school at a different stage in its SEL implementation. The findings that focused around “attitudes about SEL” showed that school and district leaders valued SEL for all students, with most of the leaders (83%) considering SEL as “very important” in order to promote the necessary skills of social and emotional development in all students. Almost all (99%) of the principals from a variety of low- and high-poverty schools believed that SEL could be taught in schools. They also overwhelmingly responded positively regarding the benefit of SEL supports for all students, regardless of socioeconomic background. Almost all of the principals held perspectives that SEL can positively impact school culture, student

behavior, reduced discipline referrals, reduced bullying, relationships between students and teachers, student success, and movement into the workforce. It is important to note that although the principals believed there is a positive impact on student academic achievement, they were less confident (68%) about the ability of SEL to advance academic achievement in students. They did, however, believe that increased SEL would also increase student engagement. It is important to note that there are critics of SEL who consider the approach not academic-based and a “fad.” Critics of SEL suggest that the approach requires a psychological expertise for which teachers are not adequately prepared.

The literature also aligned with a recommendation of social and emotional programming that “promotes the mental and social well-being of students including mentoring, tutoring programs, extra-curricular programs, bullying prevention, character education and opportunities for students to take on leadership roles and express their views” (American Psychological Association Task Force, 2008, n.p.).

In the researcher’s experience as a school leader, the vast majority of new teachers struggle most with a whole child approach, balancing discipline and positive classroom culture while trying to build a relationship with students that results in high expectations for them in the form of care and a push. In the researcher’s experience, in classrooms where positive classroom culture is not evident, learning does not occur with the same effective rate as those classrooms with high levels of positive classroom culture. The principals in the pilot study all agreed that training for teachers was key. As policy briefs in the literature have suggested, a further recommendation was that funding should be invested in teacher preparation towards requirements for teachers that include positive

and proactive classroom management training addressing the social-emotional needs of students.

In today's climate of school shootings, violence, depression, bullying, and student suicide, the preparation and requirements for teacher readiness must be addressed in order to provide teachers with the skill set they need to enter a newly defined way of teaching and relating to students. Scott et al. (2017) pointed towards the Black Lives Matter movement and the more visible connection between policing practices that is more prevalent in the Trump era and how those policies are reflected in the school system. Students of color in schools are also victims of racialized community policing practices that impact their view of authority. Scott et al. noted the need for community-based policing programs to collaborate and "integrate with school restorative and transformative justice initiatives to shift the emphasis from discipline and punishment towards capacity building and positive behavioral interventions and supports" (p. 4). This collaboration for the benefit and support of the children may impact a more positive interaction and collaboration between community police and the citizens they serve. A narrow focus on accountability, excellence, and achievement cannot be maintained while ignoring what children are experiencing emotionally and socially if students' academic success and performance in schools are expected to increase.

The Role of Values, Beliefs, and Leadership Practices

Tillman (2004) described pre-*Brown* Black principals as "committed to the education of Black children" and working to educate Black children in "the face of resistance" (p. 101). Tillman also noted the value of Black principals to the community pre-*Brown* where they were "regarded as the authority on educational, social and

economic issues,” while “establishing the Black school as the cultural symbol of the Black community” (p. 102). Anderson (1988) wrote about the whole child focus at the Zion School, established in 1865, with an all-Black administrative and teaching staff. Tillman (2008) cited Asa Hilliard’s research on the Zion School, where they held high expectations for students and created a safe and caring environment that placed students in the center. Tillman advocated the view that Black principals pre-*Brown*

exhibited various forms of caring: exposing students to good teachers and good teaching, being sympathetic and empathetic, being compassionate, and seeing children who were often held hostage to inequitable systems and institutional racism as human beings. These Black principals were master leaders, gap-closers, innovators, translators and transformers. They exhibited what Dr. Hilliard argued that all students must have beyond tests or alternative teaching techniques—“love.” (p. 602)

In a qualitative life narrative study in the *Journal of Negro Education* in 2010, conducted by Witherspoon and Arnold and titled “Pastoral Care: Notions of Caring and the Black Female Principal,” four Black principals were interviewed and the patterns in their narratives were examined. The study found that themes of “social justice and care overlapped” (p. 228). The care shown by the leaders was centered around others. This tied directly into Siddle-Walker’s (2004) idea that “care means liberating others from their state of need and actively promoting their welfare” (p. 4). Tillman also described “interpersonal caring, and resistance” as prevalent themes in the research on pre-*Brown* Black principals (p. 124). Lomotey (1993) created the phrase *ethno-humanist* to describe the role of Black principals consisting of a “commitment to the education of all students, confidence in the ability of all students to do well, and compassion for, and understanding of, all students and the communities in which they live” (p. 396). In his study of a successful Black principal of a predominantly Black school community, Gooden (2005)

observed that the leader held an ethno-humanist role, in that he had “compassion for African American children and the confidence in their abilities” that kept “the leader engaged as he or she struggle[d] to transform a situation of despair and hopelessness into one of infinite possibilities” (p. 649). According to Tillman (2008), pre- and post-*Brown* Black principals “resisted deficit ideologies and individuals who sought to deny Black children an equitable and excellent education” (p. 594). In addition to the ethno-humanist role, a common bond and shared experience exist among Black principals and Black students that allow for a unique connection. Mitchell (1992) explained this bond as a “kinship” and noted “African American students may learn better and achieve more when they have the opportunity to operate within the type of kinship system which has nurtured them in their lives outside of the school” (p. 24). In communities where students have been historically marginalized, the connection of Black students to Black teachers and leaders is key in their perspectives on success. Foster (2005) discussed the benefit for researchers to study the success of Black principals in order to examine the conditions they create for student achievement and success.

Bridging Social-Emotional Learning and Culturally Relevant and Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsive practices and the emotional intelligence building components of SEL are essential to one another (Simmons, 2019). Garner, Mahatmya, Brown, and Vesely (2014) acknowledged that “both cultural and social factors shape SEL” (p. 167). Garner et al. went on to explain that the delivery of SEL programming is directly impacted by the sociocultural competency of the educators and leaders delivering the programming and the cultural competency of the SEL programs themselves. In terms

of teacher development, we as humans are cultural beings and, as such, hold our own perceptions and worldviews that impact our service to others. Teachers who also are in the service of others must acknowledge the individual cultural differences that may impact the treatment and perceptions of those whom they serve who may not share their cultural background. There must be an effort to learn and acknowledge the cultures of others in order to hold a more multicultural approach (American Psychological Association [APA], 2003). Many schools with changing demographics need to adapt to address the individual needs of their students. Individual beliefs and fears in changing demographics can cause students to be marginalized (Wilson Cooper, 2009).

In 2018, Larson, Pas, Bradshaw, Rosenberg, and Day-Vines conducted a study examining the connections between student behaviors, culturally responsive teaching practices, and proactive behavior management. The study included 274 teachers in 18 schools. The quantitative, multimethod approach involved the collection of observations of culturally responsive teaching practices and teacher surveys. The results indicated a significant correlation between culturally responsive teaching and proactive behavior management strategies. The results also indicated positive outcomes in student behaviors in those classrooms with culturally responsive practices and proactive behavior management strategies used.

A tool called “The Teacher Culturally Responsive Strategies subscale of the ASSIST” was used to assess what was defined as culturally responsive teaching practices. The tool used a scale with seven items: Teacher connects lessons to real-world examples, Teacher integrates cultural artifacts reflective of students’ interests into learning activities, Teacher engages in storytelling or sharing, Teacher uses positive

humor to engage students or defuse problems, Teacher gives students opportunities to co-teach or co-facilitate learning, Teacher gives direct commands, and Teacher employs rhythm or “call and response” instructional strategies (p. 158). The findings from the study showed a correlation between teachers’ ratings of self-efficacy and culturally responsive practices. The findings also pointed to the need for research that would result in more multifaceted assessments for culturally responsive practices in the classroom.

Simmons, Brackett, and Adler (2018), in their issue brief for the Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University, indicated several key findings regarding the need to situate SEL in an equity framework. They found that “Five barriers contribute to inequitable access to a high-quality SEL education,” including the effects of “poverty, exclusionary discipline practices and policies in school, lack of trauma-informed practices in school, implicit bias in school staff, and educator stress and burnout” (pp. 4-6). Their study also indicated the five opportunities to address the barriers, including “School racial and socioeconomic integration initiatives, restorative justice practices for school discipline, trauma-informed system interventions, culturally competent and equity-literate educators, and SEL and mindfulness programming to support students and teachers” (pp. 6-9).

Using a whole child approach employed historically and presently by Black principals is essential to address the achievement and opportunity gaps for Black students in urban schools today. It is not enough to hold a narrow view of success for Black students that focuses only on testing and limiting definitions of academic success. Children in predominantly Black urban school communities experience the societal ills of racism and poverty at a higher rate than their White counterparts. The trauma that these

students experience can have a negative effect on their emotional health. The aim of this present study was to identify the ways in which Black principals of predominantly Black urban schools utilize their own experiences, beliefs, and values in leading in culturally responsive ways that center around social-emotional learning and a focus on the whole child. Elias (2009) and Winton (2012) noted that the learning experience is relational. As such, the relationship that students have with teachers in climates that have increased caring and trust, and where staff work collaboratively and proactively to address discipline, allows them to feel a sense of belonging that gives them a stronger connection to the school and its culture. Silk, Steinberg, and Sheffield-Morris (2003) noted the higher rates of depression and behavior issues in students who had difficulty regulating emotions. These stress-related difficulties then led to behavioral problems that were not adequately addressed; therefore, disparate discipline policies were enforced instead of the restorative and preventative social-emotional practices that would allow the students the strategy of regulating and managing the stress. Delpit (2012) explained that students who are not connected to the instruction in the classroom, and who are made to feel “less than,” will behave in ways that inhibit their positive learning experiences and therefore minimize their ability to learn effectively. As Knight-Manuel and Marciano (2018) explained:

Enacting culturally relevant teaching and learning practices throughout a school environment can provide more-equitable opportunities to ensure that all students, particularly culturally and linguistically diverse students are supported academically, socially, emotionally and civically in an increasingly diverse global society. (p. 2)

As the researcher of the present study, I hope to find that an approach acknowledging and celebrating the identity and culture of children, while simultaneously

supporting their social and emotional development, would allow children to experience a positive connection with school and lead towards academic and social-emotional success.

The purpose of this research, then, was to investigate the beliefs, values, and practices of Black school leaders centered around meeting the social, cultural, and emotional needs of Black students in a predominantly Black, urban school district. The major research question was: “What are the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district?” This study utilized a methodological approach consisting of a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews with Black principals of predominantly Black urban schools.

As the researcher, I sought to understand the ways in which these Black principals lead and how their unique experiences allow them to employ social-emotional approaches that address the needs of their students in the Black urban context. The voice of the Black principal is lacking in the research on SEL and culturally responsive practices. The role of the “transformative leader” is key in approaching the cultural work grounded in social justice and ensuring that efforts do not further marginalize groups of students. Changing cultural politics in schools are a challenge that leaders must be willing to address with risk taking (Wilson Cooper, 2009). Similar to Wilson Cooper (2009), Horsford et al. (2011) further dissected the social and cultural context of today’s schools and the changing demographic by promoting the need for a more culturally relevant and antiracist pedagogy. The focus on developing leaders who are able to move past the personal when addressing cultural relevance to a place of the professional is paramount (Horsford et al., 2011). When describing urban school environments, Khalifa et al. (2016)

noted that “developing effective leaders becomes a vital part of the process of recruiting and retaining the best teachers for children who have been marginalized” (p. 1273). As it is with culturally responsive practices, the success of SEL practices school-wide requires the support of the school leader.

Little research is available on the connections between SEL and culturally responsive approaches. However, this is an important connection to make because social-emotional awareness can surface in contexts that are unique to the cultural characteristics of the students. Although both seek to provide a positive learning environment for students in urban settings, they are seen in isolation from one another. After reviewing the literature and conducting the pilot study, this researcher found that the voice of the Black urban school principal is virtually absent on the topic of SEL and culturally responsive practices. In future research, the researcher hopes to find out more about ways to connect SEL and culturally responsive practices and gain the perspectives of Black urban school principals on how they are currently experiencing and implementing SEL practices and how culturally responsive practices intersect.

Various conceptual frameworks have been applied to both cultural responsiveness and SEL. This study used a conceptual framework that centers Black school leaders as well as Black children and their own experiences, beliefs, values, and practices, and how they employ the components of cultural responsiveness, social-emotional learning, and emotional intelligence to lead their predominantly Black urban schools where students experience trauma, racism, poverty, and violence at a higher rate, as compared to their White counterparts (see Figure 2). The framework shows the relationship between the Black principal and the Black child, and the impact of outside forces such as racism,

trauma, poverty, high-stakes testing, and school discipline policies on the Black child and Black principal. This study also utilized components of four frameworks: Ready for Rigor: Zaretta Hammond's Framework for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (see Figure 3); the CASEL Core SEL Competencies Framework (see Figure 4); the Nation at Hope's How Learning Happens Framework (see Figure 5); and Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL Behaviors (see Figure 6). These frameworks can be combined to ensure the emphasis on both cultural responsiveness and SEL. The conceptual framework (Figure 1) attempts to reflect where the two frameworks intersect and overlap. At the current stage, the frameworks on their own show components that overlap; however, cultural responsiveness is not indicated in the SEL frameworks, although social awareness and equity are mentioned. In the cultural responsiveness framework, there is some mention of "reducing social emotional stress" and creating a "socially safe" learning environment. The interview protocol used with the principals in the study centered around their beliefs, values, perceptions, and experiences as they relate to various components of these frameworks and how students' experiences and needs impact how they lead in these frames.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the literature on Black urban principals was explored along with the ways in which Black students experience trauma, racism, poverty, and violence, and how they impact their learning experiences, culturally responsive approaches, the need for social-emotional learning (SEL) and emotional intelligence (EI) in urban schools, SEL and school discipline in urban schools, and the significance of the school leader in

both SEL and culturally responsive approaches. SEL is an integral part of a culturally responsive approach. The two approaches are often seen in isolation from one another but must work in tandem. In order to be responsive to students' needs culturally, educators and leaders must attend to their social-emotional needs and vice versa. Our cultural beliefs, perceptions, and experiences in the world impact who we are as social and emotional beings, how we perceive ourselves, and how we interact with others. More research is needed to lift the voice of Black urban principals to shed more light on how their lived experiences, beliefs, and perceptions impact their approach to SEL and cultural responsiveness and how successful leadership practices can be implemented for the benefit of students of color. The question remains: "Does social-emotional learning in schools have a one-size-fits-all approach or are there additional factors that can and should impact how SEL is taught in different schools?" Little research is available on the connections between SEL and culturally responsive approaches. Although both approaches seek to provide a positive learning environment for students in urban settings, they are often considered separate. The barriers and challenges that principals face in terms of mindset, cultural norms, funding disparities, and conflicting punitive discipline perspectives inhibit their full immersion in the work. Thus, the unique perspectives of Black principals of predominantly Black schools are missing from the literature and should be prioritized.

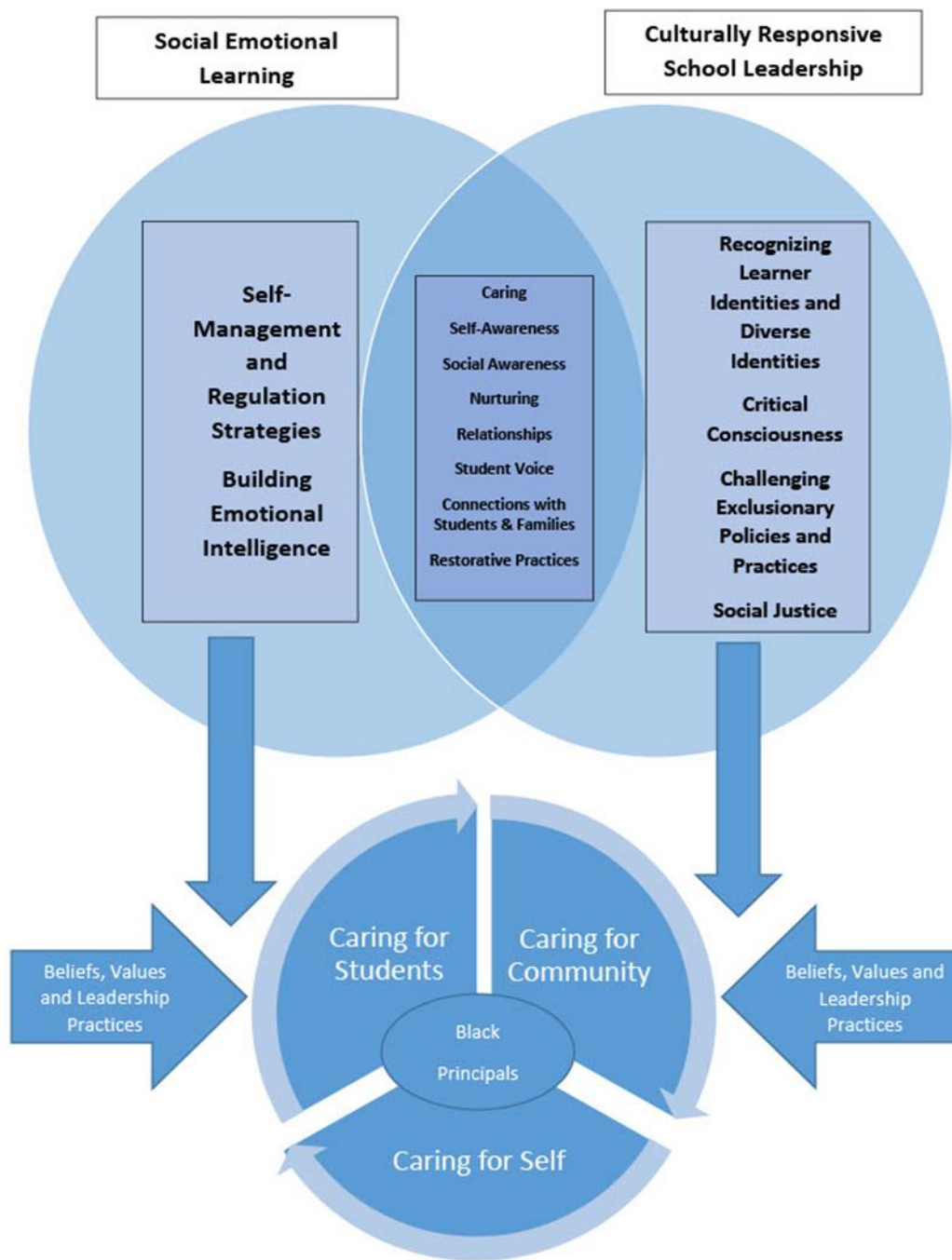
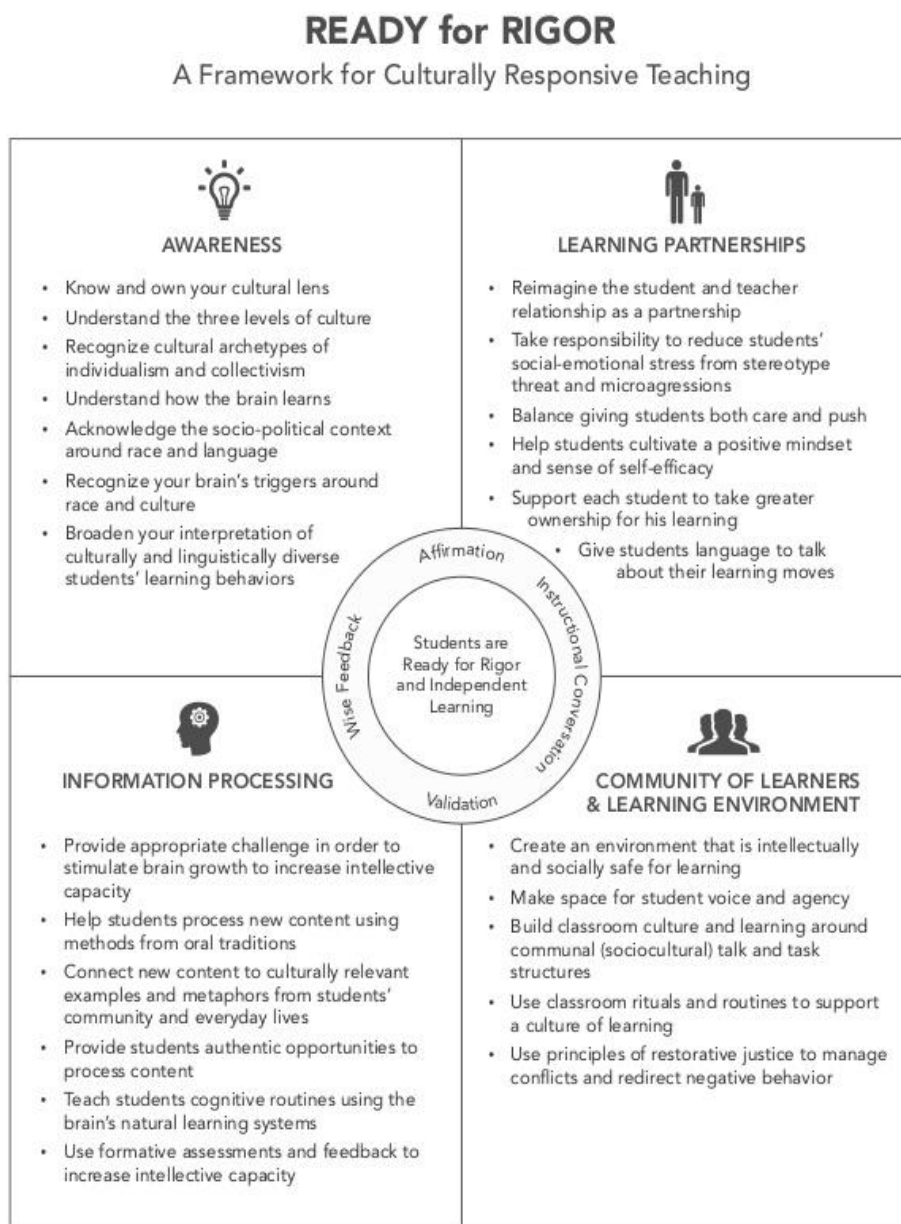


Figure 2. Conceptual framework



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www.ready4rigor.com

Figure 3. Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching

From Ready for Rigor, by Zaretta Hammond, 2017, retrieved from <https://crtandthebrain.com/resources/>



Figure 4. The CASEL framework for core SEL competencies

From CASEL (2017), retrieved from <https://casel.org/core-competencies/>

The Evidence Base for How Learning Happens



Figure 5. The evidence base for how learning happens

From Nation at Hope (2019), retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/programs/national-commission-on-social-emotional-and-academic-development/>

TEACHERS COLLEGE
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DEPARTMENT OF ORGANIZATION AND LEADERSHIP
PROGRAMS IN EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework

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Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors	Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006) • Uses school data and indicants to measure CRSL (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004) • Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools (Ishimaru, 2013; Smyth, 2006) • Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011) • Using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice (Skrla et al., 2004) • Leading with courage (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1988) • Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing teacher capacities for culturally responsive pedagogy (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003) • Collaborative walkthroughs (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Creating culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003) • Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services (Skrla et al., 2004) • Creating a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • Engaging/reforming the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) • Modeling culturally responsive teaching (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Using culturally responsive assessment tools for students (Hopson, 2001; Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Bratton, 2003)
Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010) • Building relationships; reducing anxiety among students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Modeling CRSL for staff in building interactions (Khalifa, 2011; Tillman, 2005) • Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007) • If need be, challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Acknowledges, values, and uses Indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2010, 2012) • Uses student voice (Antrop-González, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Using school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends (Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2007) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing meaningful, positive relationships with community (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001) • Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and other roles (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006) • Finding overlapping spaces for school and community (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012) • Serving as advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012) • Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006) • Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2002; Flessa, 2009) • Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information (Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) • Connecting directly with students (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)

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Figure 6. Culturally responsive school leadership framework

From Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis (2016)

Chapter III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Chapter III describes the research design and methods used in this study to examine the beliefs and values that inform the practices of Black principals concerning social-emotional learning and culturally responsive school leadership in predominantly Black schools in New York City. As a principal who is Black, who uses social-emotional learning as part of my leadership practice in a predominantly Black elementary school in Harlem, New York City, I am particularly interested in the beliefs, values, and practices of the principals—what they hold as most important in their leadership of Black children. I am interested in what they do at their individual schools to nurture the needs of Black children, how they prepare themselves for the work they do daily, and what motivations allow them to face the challenges of the role. This chapter provides an overview of my use of a composite case study design, participants, data collection and analysis methods, limitations and delimitations, and my role as researcher. In the section that follows, there is a description of each of the three cases that reflect this composite case study of urban school leaders in the nation's largest school system.

Research Design

I used a qualitative research design. Qualitative research is most appropriate when the goal of research is to explain the practices of individuals based on the perceptions of their experiences in a given context (Stake, 2010). Qualitative research is often used in educational research as most appropriate in researching a problem where the variables are not clear. Creswell (2002) noted that when researchers use qualitative design, there may be a lack of literature about the phenomenon of study and the researcher may need “to learn more from participants through exploration” (p. 39). I interviewed 10 Black principals leading urban schools located in a predominantly Black school district where the student population, although located in a culturally rich neighborhood, is disproportionately exposed to racism, trauma, poverty, and violence. All of the principals work in a school system that is more recently focused on equity, cultural responsiveness, and social-emotional learning (SEL). I sought to explore the perspectives, beliefs, values, and experiences the principals hold that reflect SEL and culturally responsive approaches to leadership as viable strategies for supporting student learning and success. I chose a qualitative research approach because it allowed for an examination of the principals’ multiple beliefs, perspectives, practices, and values through their rich conversations. This approach honors the perspectives of the principals and allows them to be the creators of their own narratives. I chose a case study design because case study, as Stake (1995) explained, requires multiple perspectives that a researcher can gather and construct without a focus on the “best view.” Yin (2002) defined case study as “a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between a phenomenon and context are not clear and the researcher has little control over the

phenomenon and context” (p. 13). Stake (1995) defined case study as “a specific, a complex, functioning thing,” which “has a boundary and working parts” and is “purposive” (p. 2). Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that with a case study design, the “investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (case) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (p. 96).

This study design used a composite case study approach. Willis (2018) described composite narratives as a method used to relay a single story through the data from multiple interviews. In this study, three composite case studies were created from four one-on-one interviews and one focus group discussion, altogether using the voices and perspectives of 10 different principals from a single district (see Table 1 later in this chapter). Because the racial identity and demographics of the district may compromise the identity of the participants, the composite approach was used to protect the anonymity of these public figures. Willis (2018) asserted that composite narratives have the “advantage of allowing the presentation of contextualized stories, without resorting to fiction, whilst offering a significant degree of anonymity” (p. 476). In a study of Black faculty, Patton and Catching (2009) used the composite approach to protect the anonymity of the faculty members, given the low number of Black faculty in the particular program studied. The political nature of the study would also have negatively impacted the faculty, had their individual direct quotes been used and their identity compromised. Patton and Catching (2009) noted that the composite approach allowed them to “bring similar themes that arose across narratives together to present a more cogent picture of the participants’ experiences, while simultaneously allowing unique experiences to unfold” (p. 717). The goal of the composite narrative, then, was to

examine the group of individuals and how they “navigate their life and work,” as opposed to a method of “distinguishing between” the participants (Willis, 2018, p. 473).

According to Wertz, Nosek, McNiesk and Marlow (2011), the composite narrative is a “reflective story” in that it creates an image of the narrative that emerges from the voices of the participants. They continued to explain that it is not a “simple retelling,” but an “interpretation by the researcher in several important ways: through her knowledge of the literature regarding the phenomenon under enquiry, through listening and hearing the stories told by the informants, and through her own reflexivity during the process” (p. 5882). Gordon (2007) asserted the view that “Rather than stressing observation as a method, we stress participation: acknowledging our positionality, engaging in dialogue and synthetic practice. Reflexivity is a critical and aware process for transformative practice” (p. 95). Preston (2012) stated that “composite stories show rather than tell the reader, thereby increasing the potential for the information to resonate with the reader” (p. 44). This composite narrative approach therefore also allowed for the data from this study to be more readily usable for those in educational administration outside of academia.

Participants

Participant Selection

The principals chosen for the study were 10 current or recently practicing Black principals working in the same public school district in the K-8 context, ranging in seniority (see Table 1). The district consists primarily of Title 1 schools. Eight of the

principals were currently practicing at the time of this study, two of the principals were recently practicing principals.

Participant Profile

Case studies require purposeful sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As Patton (2002) noted:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry, thus the term purposeful sampling. (p. 273)

Purposeful sampling was used to select of principals studied here. All of the principals in the study have worked with the same citywide public school system and were also working in the same urban, predominantly Black school district. Each of them has experienced similar demographics; social justice issues facing their school communities; similar neighborhood dynamics along with similar mandates; and state, city and district expectations and requirements as related to compliance, testing, and accountability. The district where each of the principals led has historically been challenged with poverty, low student achievement, and disproportionate suspensions, as compared to other districts. The principals were all located in a high-poverty, high-needs, low-achieving district. The principals all identified as Black, although culturally their identity varied in terms of birthplace and origin. They were all leading schools within the K-8 context. Although they shared many commonalities, each worked within his or her own individual school communities and each had a unique school culture as defined by his or her leadership. Their individual leadership styles and priorities impact their perspectives and should therefore be examined through their lenses and their voices. This specific case

study was bounded to a set of individuals who identified as Black, worked with a common system, and served in the same position of school leadership. The participants defined Blackness as being of African ancestry. They shared the common experiences of being Black in America and were diverse in terms of their countries of origin which impacted their ethnic identity.

The composite case study developed for this study allowed for a compilation of similar perspectives. Through the voice of each principal, their individual and multiple perspectives on SEL and culturally responsive leadership were analyzed. The principals did not use a common program or common practice regarding cultural relevance, cultural responsiveness, or SEL. However, all of the principals, because of district mandates, were trained and strongly encouraged to use restorative practices in their schools due to a high level of suspensions in the district. The knowledge that can be gained from the perspectives of these principals will allow us to understand how they navigate the challenges of leading in an urban community and seek to meet the needs of Black children in their unique ways. Moreover, it will be possible to understand the common practices and/or perspectives they hold as most important in their leadership. In Table 1, the principals are listed in terms of their years in service, current or retiree, gender, and racial identity. The table also shows the timing of the interviews as well as the category under which most of the participants' responses fell. For example, Principal A, despite the question, mentioned community and relationships in her response. The theme of community and relationship building was a priority for Principal A, as evident in her responses across topics.

Table 1. *Principal Profiles*

Principal (pseudonym last names)	Years of Experience	Gender
Principal Gaines	23	F
Principal Hanley	21 (retired)	M
Principal Issac	9 (retired)	F
Principal Amin	9	F
Principal Frederick	8	F
Principal Barnes	5	M
Principal Charles	5	F
Principal Desmond	5	F
Principal James	5	M
Principal Evans	1	F

Data Collection

The sample size was 10 elementary and middle school Black principals in a New York City urban public school district. Participants chose the most convenient location for the interview, which consisted of 18 open-ended questions. Interviews took place in person or over the phone. Participants' information was kept strictly confidential. Pseudonyms were used to identify the principals who the composite case studies consist of. Only 1 hour or less of their time was required to complete the interview protocol. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. The voices and perspectives of the principals may add value to the field of education leadership in allowing us to better understand the beliefs, values, and practices of these school leaders in their unique and common contexts and how they as leaders navigate the challenges their children face in

order to work to meet the needs of Black students. To maximize the demanding time of the principals, I conducted the interviews in a semi-structured format with predetermined, open-ended questions that allowed each principal to elaborate as needed. In addition, a follow-up focus group was conducted. The nine individual interviews were conducted with eight current and two recently practicing principals in one predominantly Black urban school district. Several of the principals were concise in their responses during the first interview. I revisited several principals through a focus group to gain more insight into their responses.

Selection and Context

A follow-up focus group was conducted with four of the individual interviewees and one current principal interviewee from an earlier pilot study on SEL and Black Leadership. The principals ranged in years of service from less than 1 year to 23 years. They represented elementary and middle schools in one district. The schools ranged between 200-600+ students, with populations decreasing due to charter school options. Several of the schools were co-located with charters, and some of those relationships were strained. The poverty ranged from 49%-96% poverty indexes at the schools. The English as a New Language populations were all below 10%. The population of students with disabilities ranged from 18%-32%. All of the principals identified as Black, with diversity within their ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds. This was a minimal-risk study.

The data were collected through the use of semi-structured interviews, which are ideal when there is only one opportunity to interview an individual (Bernard, 2012). The format of predetermined research questions allows for clear, consistent criteria for each

participant to guide the interview. This permitted a reliable, consistent comparison of responses that were coded and analyzed for patterns. The questions were all open-ended to allow participants the opportunity to shed new light on the topics discussed. The open-ended question format ensured that the researcher respected the voice of the participants and refrained from leading questions (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The researcher used a series of central questions and a few sub-questions to gather more in-depth information from the interviewees (Creswell, 2013).

The coding of the participant responses after the interviews allowed me to see the patterns emerge (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). The questions were designed in alignment with various culturally responsive leadership frameworks as well as social-emotional frameworks. An example of one of the interview protocol questions is as follows: “How do you prepare yourself mentally and emotionally for the work you do daily?” (see Appendix A), This question falls in the categories of Self-Awareness and Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors.

Data Analysis

All interviews were manually coded using hard copies of the 10 transcripts. The participants reviewed their interview transcripts for any errors. Creswell (2007) defined coding as a way to break the information down into smaller categories of data. The 10 individual interviews were transcribed and analyzed using the codes that were attached to the interview protocol questions; color coding was used to identify theme categories that emerged after several readings of the transcripts. After initial individual interviews were coded for emphasis in responses, I conducted a second analysis, coding for comparisons

in perspective and responses to allow for the composite narrative approach. These data prompted the extension questions that were asked in the focus group. The focus group interview was then transcribed and analyzed based on the codes that emerged. Those data from the focus group interview were also included in the composite cases. The original set of codes came from the major research question and two SEL and CRSL frameworks.

These category themes were:

- Behaviors and Values: Self Awareness, Self-Care, Self-Management, and Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors
- Beliefs and Practices: Building Relationships, Engaging Students, Parent and Indigenous Contexts
- Beliefs and Practices: Social Awareness, Promotes Culturally Responsive/ Inclusive School Environments
- Practices: Responsible Decision Making

For the purposes of protected anonymity, individual interviewees were then grouped into composite narratives. Profiles of the composite narratives were created using direct details from the interviewees in each composite group. The interviewees were grouped into one of three composite narratives based on the prevalence of leadership style themes across their responses: Principal Angela King: High Expectations with Nurturing; Principal Whitney Lewis: Community Focus/Relationship Building; and Principal Ellis Davis: Advocacy and Care (see Table 2). After the coding, those responses with the most relationships to interviewee responses led to an additional analysis which allowed themes to emerge and new categories/codes to be identified based on interviewee responses and prevalent themes across participants. The interviewee responses were then

grouped into the following codes which became the major themes: The Students, The Community, The Urban School District, and The Self.

The collective case study analysis uses an approach that Creswell and Poth (2018) described based on the research of Stake (1995) and Yin (2002) that details a process beginning with each of the cases being detailed in addition to any themes that emerged within each case; this is called a “within-case analysis.” The next step in the collective case study analysis, as Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, includes a “thematic analysis across the cases, called a cross-case analysis, as well as assertions or/and interpretation of the meaning of the cases” (p. 100). Creswell (2013) suggested a three-step outline for effectively analyzing qualitative data that includes organizing, reviewing, and coding the data collected. Akinyode and Khan (2018) noted that “coding helps to separate data into categories or themes so that data from different sources can be easily organized and compared” (pp. 166-167). The main research question guided the overarching patterns: “What are the social and emotionally centered practices of Black school leaders in the K-8 predominantly Black urban context in an urban school district in New York City?” Participant responses were categorized by question using manual coding, which allowed for frequent analysis of overarching themes. As the cross-case analysis requires, I looked for patterns and themes that emerged in the individual question responses. Manual precoding and coding were used as a process to best analyze the responses carefully. According to Saldaña (2009), manual coding allows the researcher an opportunity to manipulate qualitative data in a way that “gives you more control over and ownership of the work” (p. 26). Miles and Huberman (1994) advocated an initial list of codes that

come from the research questions. The process for coding and compiling the composite narratives included:

1. coding all interviews to surface major themes across interviews;
2. grouping the participants in terms of their dominant perspectives and priorities within the major themes;
3. creating each composite based on the perspective group and consolidating 3-4 transcripts and verbatim quotations from individual participants arranged into major themes while determining additional similarities between the members of the composite groups; all perspectives, opinions, and experiences are derived directly from the interviewees and their responses.

Theme headings based on the interview protocol are categorized as principals' beliefs, values, and practices as related to SEL. The common experiences of the principals allowed for new knowledge on what practices they shared. The question themes of principal beliefs, values, and practices were analyzed against two conceptual frameworks: the CASEL Core SEL Competencies Framework (see Figure 4) and the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework (see Figure 6). These frameworks provided research-based understandings of the necessary components of effective social-emotional and culturally responsive approaches. Questions were categorized into Beliefs, Values, and Practices, with subheadings from the frameworks that included Self-Management; Critical Self-Reflection on Leadership Behaviors; Student, Parent, and Indigenous Context Engagement; Social Awareness; Self-Awareness; Building Relationships; and Promoting a Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environment. The questions were categorized and any outlying themes that were relevant

were examined and analyzed in relation to the individual principal's experiences, beliefs, and values. The triangulation of data strengthened the internal reliability of the data. The reporting of the composite case study included "lessons learned" and, as Creswell and Poth (2018) described, a "reflective process" (p. 101).

Description of the Resulting Composite Narratives

Composite narratives "allow research to be presented in a way which acknowledges the complexities of individual motivations and outlooks whilst drawing out more generalized learning and understanding" (Willis, 2018, p. 476). The three composite narratives were created from nine individual interview and the focus group transcripts (see Table 2). The principals serving in the same district with similar demographics, racial and ethnic identities, school communities, mandates, and community concerns had similar experiences and could have been grouped in a variety of ways. However, across question responses from single participants, their strongly held beliefs and values came through, as referenced in their responses (see Table 2). All participants held familial connections with their beliefs regarding their leadership of and hopes for Black children. All of the principals shared beliefs, values, and practices in all three major perspective categories; however, individual emphasis across responses was evident that allowed for the composite narrative grouping. Two of the principals had overlap in the areas of community and relationship building and advocacy. As an additional measure when there was overlap, years of service was used as a final deciding grouping factor.

Table 2. *Composite Organization*

Composite Case	Composite Description	Examples from the Data
<p>Principal Whitney Lewis (pseudonyms) Principal Rachel Amin Principal Eliza Gaines Principal Richard Hanley Principal Alice Desmond *</p>	<p>20+ years of experience working in the same district. One of the principals worked for 25 years in the same district but spent part of that time working in a preschool setting, serving the same population of families.</p> <p>Whitney is focused on knowing the community well, being a member of the community, and having a priority to build relationships with students and families as an integral part of her core beliefs and values as a leader of Black children. Whitney self-reflects on the impact of her emotions on her school community and pays careful attention to listening to the members of her school community. Whitney is also acutely aware of the social justice issues that impact her children and families. She devotes time to her families as a priority.</p>	<p>Relationship Building and Community Focus</p> <p>“It makes me cry, no one should have to live in substandard conditions. The city and the state have a responsibility to provide decent housing. I saw the injustices with housing and the lack of respect that people have to live with day in and day out just to get things fixed. I mean all these things jumped out at me and I couldn’t wrap my head around...why aren’t the resources here?”</p>
<p>Principal Ellis Davis (pseudonyms) Principals David Barnes Principal Alice Desmond * Principal Barbara Frederick</p>	<p>This group of principals has 5-8 years of experience working in the same district. Ellis’s leadership beliefs and values reflect advocacy and care. Surfacing and confronting perceptions, practices, and policies that marginalize his community are priorities for Ellis in his leadership of Black children. Ellis self-reflects on the impact of his emotions on his school community but sees his emotions as a tool for transparency with his school community. He is passionate about what he believes his students deserve and additionally holds himself and all members of the school community accountable. He advocates for his students when funding or programming is not “fair” or “adequate.” Ellis is aware of the social inequities that face his school community and communicates those inequities when making requests for the school community.</p>	<p>Advocacy and Care</p> <p>“It’s a way that you talk to a child that is more growth mindset related rather than punishment. We are a restorative practice school. I will say before restorative practices was a thing...the operating law in my discipline code or how I wanted to approach discipline was that we restore at all costs. We build, maintain and we restore.”</p>

Table 2 (continued)

Composite Case	Composite Description	Examples from the Data
Principal Angela King (pseudonyms) Principal Lisa Charles Principal Gina Evans Principal Myra Issac Principal William James	This group of principals ranged between less than 1 to 9 years serving as principal. Angela is focused on the responsibility she feels she needs to be a role model for her school community. She believes in high expectations for her students, teachers, and families as well as for herself. She is focused on what is happening in classrooms to best prepare children for success. She is concerned with making sure she is transparent with her school community, but also displays “calmness” and wants to “inspire.”	High Expectations and Nurturing “I really think that just because it’s a free education, doesn’t mean it has to be low quality. I try to make sure we...I really do believe in a world-class education. I think you know we provide that to our children every single day. And that’s what motivates me with an attitude that we can do this. We can push them hard.”

Research and Access

This qualitative composite case study allowed for a deeper understanding of the perspectives of elementary and middle urban, public school Black principals, their leadership styles and motivations, and how their beliefs, values, and practices may reflect culturally responsive practices and social and emotional learning in their leadership.

For this study, the interviews were bound by a time of 1 hour (Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). Verbal consent was collected from the participants in the group for the interviews. To protect and preserve confidentiality, I used pseudonyms for the participants (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). The composite case study additionally protects the anonymity of the participants.

Limitations and Delimitations

One of the delimitations of the study was the sample size. A challenge of the collective case study, according to Creswell and Poth (2018), is ensuring that there is enough information on each of the cases to “present an in-depth picture of the case”; lack of adequate information on each case “limits the value of some case studies” (p. 102). There was a limitation of 1 hour within the timeframe allowed for each interview.

Role of the Researcher

In terms of positionality, as a Black urban principal of a predominantly Black school, I functioned as an insider to the study being conducted. As a researcher, I was a colleague of the participants and shared similar experiences with each of the participants. The researcher bias in this study may have affected what the principals shared in their qualitative responses and additionally may affect the interpretation of the findings. Through this qualitative study, I served as the primary instrument for collecting the data compiled in the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). Another validity method was researcher reflexivity, whereby the researcher shares his or her own beliefs, values, and perceptions in relation to the topic being studied. Creswell and Miller (2000) explained:

It is particularly important for researchers to acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions, and then to bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds. This validity procedure uses the lens of the researcher but is clearly positioned within the critical paradigm where individuals reflect on the social, cultural, and historical forces that shape their interpretation. (p. 127)

As an insider to this particular study of research, I am also a Black urban school principal. I am a proponent of social-emotional learning through a culturally responsive frame and I employ both practices in my current position as principal. In the leadership of

my own school, I have utilized the research of scholars in the field of SEL and culturally responsive leadership practices to design my approach to learning and leadership. The importance of social-emotional learning and how principals ground that work in culturally responsive practices is a key factor in my leadership. The practices employed at my school are considered model practices and I have served as a model principal in this work, sharing best practices with colleagues within and outside of the NYC area. In my use of the composite case study, it is not a “simple retelling,” but an “interpretation by the researcher in several important ways: through her knowledge of the literature regarding the phenomenon under enquiry, through listening and hearing the stories told by the informants, and through her own reflexivity during the process” (p. 5882).

Conclusion

The research study was a composite case study design. The interview protocol centered on how Black principals lead in their current context, what are the specific social and emotional needs their students exhibit, and how they address the needs of those students based on their own experiences and perspectives as Black school leaders. Coding was done to highlight key words and phrases that reflected the co-constructed themes such as community, care, nurture, and high expectations, for example. Key phrases regarding values and beliefs were coded and highlighted after several readings of principal interview transcripts. The major themes that emerged in the responses of principals were High Expectations and Nurturing, Community and Relationship Building, and Advocacy and Care. The next chapter presents the findings through composite case studies based on the interviews done with 10 principals.

Chapter IV

FINDINGS

The findings respond to the research question, “What are the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district?” Through a composite case study approach, three principal profiles were created that reflect groups of principals based on their similar beliefs, values, and practices, derived from the coding of the direct quotes from principals in interview transcripts (see Table 2 in the previous chapter). The composites also reflect similar years of service in the composite groups. One of the pre-composite principals, Principal Desmond, overlapped into two composite cases. The three composite profiles that were created are as follows:

Principal Angela King represents a composite of four interviewees. This group of principals ranged between less than 1 to 9 years serving as principal. Angela is focused on the responsibility she feels she needs to be a role model for her school community. She believes in high expectations for her students, teachers, and families as well as for herself. She is focused on what is happening in classrooms to best prepare children for success. She is concerned with making sure she is transparent with her school community, but also displays “calmness” and wants to “inspire.”

Principal Whitney Lewis is a composite of four interviewees. This group of principals has 20+ years of experience working in the same district. One of the principals worked for 25 years in the same district, but spent part of that time

working in a preschool setting, serving the same population of families.

Whitney's leadership is focused on knowing the community well, being a member of the community, and having a priority to build relationships with students and families as an integral part of her core beliefs and values as a leader of Black children. Like Angela, Whitney self-reflects on the impact of her emotions on her school community and pays careful attention to listening to the members of her school community. Whitney, in contrast to Angela, has worked in the same community for many years and developed a level of comfortability with the community; she is also acutely aware of the social justice issues that impact her children and families. She devotes time to her families as a priority.

Principal Ellis Davis is a composite of four interviewees. This group of principals has 5-8 years of experience working in the same district. Ellis's leadership beliefs and values reflect advocacy and care. Surfacing and confronting perceptions, practices, and policies that marginalize his community is a priority for Ellis in his leadership of Black children. In contrast to Angela and Whitney, Ellis self-reflects on the impact of his emotions on his school community but sees his emotions as a tool for transparency with his school community. He is passionate about what he believes his students deserve and additionally holds himself and all members of the school community accountable. He advocates for his students when funding or programming is not "fair" or "adequate." Ellis has built his leadership on advocating for children and disrupting the system through his voice and advocacy. Ellis is aware of the social inequities that face his school

community and communicates those inequities when making requests for the school community.

Major Themes

Several major themes from the interview protocol and frameworks were common to the three narratives and were constructed as most prevalent in the transcripts: the students, the community, urban school district, and the self. Several subthemes under each major theme are listed below.

- **Caring for Students**
 - High Expectations
 - Resisting Deficit Images
 - Handling Discipline
 - Challenging Exclusionary Practices
 - Evidence of Student Success
- **Caring for Community**
 - Community and Building Relationships
 - Nurturing, Caring, and Compassion
- **The Urban School District**
 - Top-down Mandates, New Initiatives (SEL, CRSE)
 - Lack of Principal PD and Support
 - Concerns about preparation, implementation and sustainability
- **Caring for Self**
 - Calling and Motivation

- Childhood Experiences and Influences
- Self-Awareness, Self-Care, and Self-Management

Summary of the Findings

Caring for Students

High expectations. Principal Whitney who represents a composite of principals with 20+ years of experience and has a Community and Relationship Building focus remembered as a child having images of Black leaders such as Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson, who were “held up” in front of the children to give them the “strong sense that this went on before them.” She said it gave her the sense as a child that she could achieve and she has brought that sense to her students.

You can do it and you have to do it, and take it to a whole other level. So all of the values of the family, the value of having respect for your elders, the value of having a sense of church in the sense that you have something over top of your head.

When asked about what was most important to Whitney in her leadership of Black children, she emphasized the challenges that her children and families face and overcoming adversity as a focus.

What’s important to me in my leadership of Black children is to let them know that they can succeed in anything they want to do by putting in the hard work and the labor entailed. That despite the fact and this is a very important part that I think we miss sometimes in working with our children, despite the fact that mama and daddy might not be together, despite the fact that you might have seen a fight the night before, despite the fact that your oldest sister is pregnant, despite the fact that your brother is on drugs.... Despite all of that, you can still make it and you can still succeed. That those problems unfortunately are going to be there, you have no control over those problems, but you do have control over what happens for you in school. Act like you have some sense, do your work, move. I think what happens with so many of our children is they see all this adversity in their homes, in their community and they don’t see hope. They don’t see options. They don’t see the possibilities. So we have a responsibility.

Angela talked about wanting the best for Black children. Through self-esteem building and high-quality instruction, children have a right to access success.

I really think that just because it's a free education, doesn't mean it has to be low quality. I try to make sure we...I really do believe in a world-class education. I think you know we provide that to our children every single day. And that's what motivates me with an attitude that we can do this. We can push them hard. And that's what I try to breathe into my children, that belief. That there is something better. There is more out there. We must make sure we create opportunities for them every day. They are worth it. They matter. They have people who support them. The world needs them. Our kids need to hear that. Especially the ones that may be in an environment that doesn't open doors for them, doesn't let them know that. Or a society that devalues them. I want them to know that they matter.

Principal Ellis prioritized instructional leadership and what happens in the classroom as his top priority in holding high expectations. The capacity and ability of the teachers are paramount. The majority of his time is spent in classrooms, observing instruction. He is concerned with how his staff views his support and wants to also serve as a model for staff with regards to his commitment and beliefs.

Their capacity and content, when educating our children, for me, is the part that I live and breathe and really push and you know...and do a lot of work around. And so, for me, attending to their academic needs and their sense of safety. My teachers knowing how much I value their expertise, their professionalism is very, very important to me. It's about their work as educators—and they know for me, that is where I put my utmost, I spend a lot of time in their classrooms.

Resisting deficit images. All of the principals spoke at length about the regular experience of resisting deficit images of their students and families. According to the principals, many of the deficit images they have to resist come from inside the school. The exclusionary practices are primarily systemwide and center on policy and compliance; however, the on-the-ground experience of racism in the school is evident in certain perceptions of students through a deficit lens. These deficit images impact

relationships and the ways that students are taught and socialized in school. Angela and Whitney contrasted in their views of the implicit bias training that is being done across the city as a mandate for school staff. The current chancellor has mandated implicit bias training for school staff throughout the school system. For some districts, the training has been mandated, while for others, it is optional.

Principal Angela saw the training as a tool for having the discussion around deficit mindsets and considered professional development and training as a route to correcting these perceptions.

And they start with, “Oh, these kids can’t learn.” Sometimes I put them in another environment so they can see that those same children can learn with a different teacher. To show them that those students have the capacity to learn. Well, we do have implicit bias training. And through that, I mean, I think that speaks for itself...because you are exposed to different mental models and perhaps different biases that people have. But if I see an injustice, I immediately address it, because that’s that. To let that person know in case they didn’t, that, that’s not going to fly here. That’s a non-negotiable for me. So I’m very clear about that, when they say, “those kids” or these generalized statements about parents which aren’t even true, I let them know that it’s inappropriate. And if I hear it again, I’ll hold them accountable. And so, that kind of stops, and then those people end up leaving.... I don’t feel like I let it fester.

Whitney saw the need for the implicit bias training but felt it was forced:

So that’s something.... With implicit bias being forced down our throats...it’s a necessary evil. But it’s a hard fix. I feel like that’s an issue that never goes away, that always has to be addressed. And again in education, letting people know that all kids can learn. All kids have the capacity of developing their social skills. And informing them with research-based information, with practices, with models. Changing is the hard task. Changing the mindset and it doesn’t always happen. But you really have to stand behind the research and stand behind how you feel kids learn best.

Principal Whitney, like Principal Angela, experienced the challenges of co-location with a charter school. The district where the principals work has a high number of charter schools. Almost all of the schools in the district are co-located with charter schools. As

with most of the co-location situations in the district—the staff of the charter being primarily White teachers and the district school staff having more Black and Brown staff—the relationship beyond school philosophy differences was also racially tense.

When I moved into my school, there were two schools in the building. I had older African American teachers and the other staff was young White teachers. It was a very tense situation. There were situations several times where White teachers would say to Black educators, “This is not your bathroom.” And several times where I would hear the way they talked to some of the children in an inappropriate way. When you refer to children as animals, it can be construed as racist. It can have a malicious intent. Some had a “hero” complex where they were coming to save us. It was incumbent upon them to let me know they felt they were doing us a favor.

Principal Whitney and Principal Ellis recalled incidents with parents in the same school who held deficit views of one another, some based on race and some based on socioeconomic status. Ellis also recalled incidents with Black teachers holding deficit models of parents and families of lower socioeconomic status.

And it wasn't the teachers that you would think it would have been saying, “Oh, I'm better than these people, because I have a job,” or whatever. It was an eye-opening experience for many of our staff because they weren't realizing that this is an attitude that they carried towards our children. I had a parent (not Black), she was on the phone and she was upset about something. And she said, “I would have never sent my son to a Black school if...” and I said “What?” Instead of getting upset, I said, “What do you mean by that? So let's talk about that, because you said that for a reason.” She said sorry, but I said, “Well, I'm not looking for an apology, I'm looking for a response.” The way you can say sorry is by telling me why you said that. Because you would never have said that to Principal O'Hannigan. I'm a man of color and I think sometimes that's taken for granted. Then people use it as a way to talk to me or through me...in a way that they would never, if I was a White principal.

Handling discipline. The district has historically been identified as high-needs, not just in terms of academic achievement but also in terms of students in crisis, suspensions, and high levels of incidents. More recently, there have been mandates towards increased social-emotional work and restorative practices across the city. The

principals are reporting more incidents than perhaps other schools because of the higher rate of students with emotional disturbances, crisis paraprofessionals, students with special needs, students with trauma, and so on. The more incidents the principal reports, the more the persistently dangerous index increases, and school can be designated as a persistently dangerous school (PSD). This information is publicized and families use these data when selecting schools. The city, district, and state also factor in these data when determining whether a school is in good standing or failing. Principals are also penalized for not reporting incidents as they occur. Principal Angela discussed the challenges with this designation.

We're not a dangerous school. That's discrimination too because it should be more fair and equitable because the smaller the population, the higher the index. The children are not the same. The weight shouldn't be as great. The index was killing us, the index to the student population ratio, it was just unfair. For discipline, we try to do more counseling than punitive discipline. You have to change the behavior, so you can do that through guidance and counseling, that's the route we went.

Principal Angela continued to talk about restorative practices as a tool that was used when incidents occur. With lunchtime as a particular time where most incidents were occurring, it was important to Principal Angela that her teachers stop and find out what was happening with the children before proceeding through the lesson as a preventative measure.

Get to know them really well. Get to know what is happening with them all, with them emotionally or socially. I think that opens doors to the students feeling safer. We have several guidance counselors.

Principal Ellis worried about the issue of safety in the classroom when teachers are unprepared to manage the behaviors of students who have experienced trauma. New teachers need support with creating the classroom cultures where everyone is safe. As

students get older, the physical reaction to trauma can become evident and at times aggressive. How are new teachers being prepared to create safe environments when handling behaviors is proactive and not reactive?

And I was a Teach For America person so I'm not here bashing nobody. What I'm saying is that there needs to be at a system level some way to allow teachers to experience classrooms prior to them being in front of our children in a safer way. Because part of this becomes not safe for adults. When I'm twenty-two and you throw me in here and I'm a grown Black man and an eleven-year-old looks me up and down and says, "Nigga, get out my face," we got to figure out how to do the student teaching thing better. How do I navigate the feeling of I want to put my hands on somebody's child? All right? I'd rather quit than to do that, right? I haven't been around long enough, but we got to figure out how to do the student teaching thing better.

Principal Whitney shared her approach to handling discipline in a school with students who experienced neighborhood violence.

First of all, I have a philosophy that discipline is not about punishing, it's about rehabilitating. So when I say that I want to be clear that if you did A, B, or C at school, you had a price to pay for it. But I didn't approach it from the point of view that, for example, I mean if I had to suspend a student, a student had to do something really bad. I had very few suspensions. And part of it was my presence in the community, my relationship with the parents was so strong. There was a discipline plan in place, but it really came from all of us informally.

Principal Ellis shared a variety of social-emotional learning programmings done at the school from Second Steps, to Calm Classroom, to Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) Steps, all meant to help students manage themselves emotionally. He also did a book study with staff using the book *Teaching Kids with Love and Logic*. This reinforced the use of positive praise and choices and consequences.

It's a way that you talk to a child that is more growth mindset related rather than punishment. We are a restorative practice school. I will say before restorative practices was a thing...the operating law in my discipline code or how I wanted to approach discipline was that we restore at all costs. We build, maintain and we restore. And that is about me setting clear expectations. Because I'm going to maintain my expectation for who they are, right? So then the process of restoration is through a way of atonements. So like, how do I atone for this

situation? Atoning is not saying you're sorry, right? We can get those things mixed up. It's not the same thing.

Challenging exclusionary practices. Principals explained having to confront and challenge school district and policy practices that excluded or marginalized specific groups of students, such as students of color, students with special needs and Black boys. Principal Angela did not feel comfortable challenging exclusionary practices openly. Also, being a part of a school that struggles academically, she was sensitive to the expectations of the district and city. She saw the curriculum pushed by the city as exclusionary. She discussed her belief that students should experience a more Afrocentric curriculum that might enhance their self-esteem and ultimately their increased engagement with school. Being forced to follow a city or district prescribed curriculum not centered in cultural responsiveness as a struggling school limited her flexibility with the curriculum.

Why can't they learn about themselves?... Why can't our social studies curriculum be about the contributions of Blacks in this country and even going back to Africa? Everything is such a whitewashed version of who they are. That's the biggest thing to me.

Principal Whitney saw the exclusionary practices as marginalizing her special needs population. With close to half of her population as special needs students, she noticed that exclusionary practices are not only policy-based but are also coming from within the school.

It could be some of our school partners who provide enrichment, not wanting to participate with students with special needs. It has come down to our afterschool not wanting to include our students with autism. So, it is definitely a challenge. But just being clear on your expectations with everyone in the school community and just making them understand that like it's a non-negotiable to exclude. It can be a challenge because sometimes policy and procedure dictate your actions and your moves and some things are out of your control. So, while

we don't support it, sometimes there are certain things we can't do. Or we can't affect immediate change. There needs to be change on a policy level.

Outside of the school, neighborhood and gang violence can impact the school community, families, and children in life-altering ways. The community policing that disregards or disrespects the members of the community has a negative impact either way. Principal Whitney recalled the loss of families due to the lack of safety in the neighborhood community she serves.

Over the twenty-one years, I buried about fifteen children. You know, some of which a whole family was taken out. It was drug-related. I mean, I remember we had two incidents, we had one incident where the whole family was murdered. There were five of them. And then we had another one where it was the whole family, there were three of them. It was drug-related. The systematic racism in this country...I see that it exists and it is reinforced.

With a deep connection to the community, Principal Whitney regularly communicated with families about their challenges, visited homes, and connected with the struggles they experienced on a daily basis. Public housing emerged as another exclusionary, racist system that her children and families endured. Having worked in a more affluent district prior to her time in this district, she recalled the supports that were available even for the families who experienced poverty in those more affluent school communities.

It makes me cry, no one should have to live in substandard conditions. The city and the state have a responsibility to provide decent housing. I saw the injustices with housing and the lack of respect that people have to live with day in and day out just to get things fixed. I mean all these things jumped out at me and I couldn't wrap my head around...why aren't the resources here? But the truth of the matter is that in our great country here...racism is systemic and it's deeply rooted. And with this present administration that we're in now, we see that he just pulled the cover back to show us that it's still very much alive and well, you know?

Principal Ellis, leading a school with a mission focused on the needs of Black and Brown children, makes a daily connection to challenging exclusionary practices as a

mantra. Looking at assessment data for the students and the gaps present, he reflected on the expectation for achievement and success and the disparity in funding. Principal Ellis referred to Virginia Congressman Bobby Scott's report (2012), which reflected a hearing done with the committee on the Judiciary United States Senate, One Hundred Twelfth Congress, Second Session entitled "Ending the School to Prison Pipeline."

That was like in my face, right? My school was built off of the Scott report around the prison pipeline. I feel like we are in a school where we get to name that outright. But we've never been fully funded, you know the Campaign for Fiscal Equity. I'm in a school that needs more targeted supports and interventions. Funding and resources are needed to meet the needs of my children. So for example, they will tell me I can't afford a teacher that I need. I'm like, "You find me the money." Sometimes the exclusionary practice will come into play when I'm owing money, I'm in the red one hundred sixty some-odd thousand dollars and then they try to take away more funding. At this point, I choose what's important for my children and what's not. Before I was afraid about it...this is compliance, you have to do it.... If it's not going to benefit my children.... Thank you.... Next...that's how I am now.

Principal Ellis challenges exclusionary practices by providing opportunities through partnerships for fathers in the school community, such as offering job training, working with the legal system to assist fathers with criminal records in job opportunities, and obtaining Metrocards for dads trying to get back and forth to training programs.

We're trying to figure out ways to get our parents, especially our fathers, feeling more efficacy in terms of them being, you know, providers for their families and their children. That's one aspect we are tackling.

Principal Angela discussed classroom practices and lack of quality in terms of teacher practice and teacher preparation in low-income urban communities. Thus, retention rate was an issue that affected the district as a whole.

If I had the magic wand, for me the equity has always been about the practice. And that how are we ensuring that every adult that stands in front of Black children has effective pedagogical practices that allow that child to self-actualize and become their very best self? There's something to be said in any school about good teaching. And how are we really ensuring as a system that we have the right

candidates that stand in front of our children. And unfortunately, when we find out we don't... We get people that are sometimes looking to get a Boy Scout or Girl Scout badge while they're well intended to try to help the community. And guess who loses out—the child.

Evidence of student success. An additional theme emerged in which all of the principals reflected on stories of students who were able to make progress due to their various supports. Each of the principals had stories of students whom they recalled as “success stories.” They were all students who struggled to succeed for one reason or another, but showed progress based on high expectations, nurturing, compassion, and advocacy.

Principal Angela recalled two students with special needs: Victor (pseudonym) and Anna (pseudonym):

Victor was a special education student. When I first came here, I think he was in second grade and he would curse the teachers out and I would just call him over and I would say something encouraging to him. I had some students that would say inappropriate things. And then when they would report to me, I would say, “Oh no. Oh Victor, well, not my Victor. My Victor wouldn't do that.” They would say, “Oh, he just punched somebody.” And no, not Victor. Victor wouldn't do this. So he just started to become what I would say. I would say, “Oh no. Victor stays in class. Victor does his work.” Victor was quite honest. And if he felt the teacher didn't like him, he would say so. But that's how Victor was. But he loved the violin and he was just excellent while playing in the violin. So even when the teachers would try to take the violin away from him, I would take him to his violin class. So, he got better over the years. He didn't graduate a perfect student, but he graduated a lot better than he was.

Anna came to me three years ago and did not want to stay in school. Anna would tell her mother off. Now Anna is like the principal of the school. Again, and the social-emotional piece is what has supported Anna. And the mother cannot stop thanking us because the child has come out of her shell. She wants to come to school. The grandmother died last week and she wanted us to plan the funeral. And plan how to prepare her to attend a funeral. And yeah, that's the true reason why we do this job. Right.

Principal Whitney remembered Eldridge (pseudonym), a student with a traumatic home life situation:

So I have this one particular kid, Eldridge, and he's in fifth grade now. When his mother came walking in my school six years ago, I had her first set of kids in daycare. They all are twenties, thirties. And so I'm like, "Oh man." But I got to help my community. So her son who is cursing me out since day one, since he was six, he fights his mother. Beat her up in the hallway one day. I always try to get kids out of self-contained by the time they get to fifth grade because I feel a lot of our Black boys, they are there because of their behavior. Some people really need it, but some of them you can begin to self-regulate. He's always been a runner. I held him back once. Always been aggressive. I used to have to smuggle them out the back door because the gang warfare, one project versus another project. So, it's been a lot with the family. The mom, she'll come high and curse us out and everything. And just over the years I was thinking about the resources that we have been providing. He still gives me a tough time. They tried to put him out the program, I said no. He's been unwell for the school year because he's leaving. His mother's doing better because she would usually fight in a parent meeting but she's doing well too. And so the other day he had a situation. And I took him, I got on him or whatever and then the next day he came to me. I came to his class not to see him, he came to the door, he shook my hand. He said, "Good morning," he was looking in my eyes. "Today is another day," he said.

Principal Ellis recalled Louis, a student who struggled academically:

And in many cases, I use Louis as an example because Louis was a kid that was complying. I'm not talking about the kid who was buck wild losing their mind and now they are calm. I'm talking about a kid who did what was expected but in some environments would have never been seen. Right? So Louis somehow through the work of just our community huddling around his family, around him and his brother, we really push ourselves to think about how do we show up for them. How do we show up for their family? That kid fast forward through just the nurturing work, through being resilient or our pursuit. And I use him because I think sometimes we look at that kid that took up a lot of space, but there's so many kids in this district that don't take up space. They don't take up space. They come to school, they go home but they're not performing. And we're so busy trying to get X kid to just sit down somewhere that we don't see that kid. And so that's my success story. That's one of the many of the village, Louis. His name is Louis and he is attending college in the Fall.

Caring for the Community

In order to support students effectively, the parents and the community have to be engaged and supported. The ultimate success of students is dependent on their home/life situation and, therefore, collaboration with families is key. The effects of the outer

community on the school can be seen in the school culture and climate. The challenges that students and parents face in terms of urban settings and poverty can impact their learning and engagement in school. The school leader's relationship with the parents and community is part of the holistic support of the child.

Community and building relationships. Principal Whitney valued her relationship with the community. Her longevity in the district has allowed her to see families “evolve over time.” Priding herself on living in the community, she has recognized that over the years she has seen the community change. She explained that without her active participation in the community forums, there would be many things she would not know.

I know the families. I know all of their situations. I know the kids. I spend time with everybody. I make sure I purposefully ask questions that will give me more information. I sit with the kids. I get to know their soul, so I can relate to them when I need to have a serious conversation. I spend time in the classroom so I can know what kind of learners they are. I stand outside all the time talking to parents. Just wanting to know from the parents what's happening positively and also things that are impacting them from the community, whether it's immigration, housing, employment. It's things that other people may take for granted. It helps me to support them in a better way. I've been working with the same families probably for over twenty-five years in different capacities.

Principal Whitney recognizes the life circumstances of the families in her care and considers the ways she can provide a safe haven, a hub for the families to feel support and connection as they navigate the challenges of poverty. Her goal is to build positive relationships with the families.

I became a part of the community. I know all the churches and the senior citizens. I know them. I feel very fortunate. I want my staff to know I appreciate their hard work, their dedication. I think one of the biggest needs that children have in our school is that many of their parents love them, adore them, and want them. But they have such big challenges. They are always struggling behind the eight ball to settle themselves. Housing is always a problem. They were sometimes just barely making it to get food on the table and the bare necessities.

Principal Whitney and her team often found ways to support families in positive ways while honoring them as parents who loved their children. She recognized that it was not that parents on the whole were negligent, but often they had other life challenges and basic needs that became priorities over their child's education.

I mean we were constantly having dinners for one thing or the other, any reason to celebrate and to bring the families out and have dinner and some sense of entertainment. I think that the arts played a very big part in that. I think when the children were in music or art or dance, even the parent that many had many, many challenges, but they made it out to see their little child on the stage.

The wider community issues can sometimes impact the school. With young elementary students who were being courted by gangs, Principal Angela described how she brought local police officers into the school to help develop more positive relationships between the children and the police officers during a difficult time in the community with anti-police sentiment and gang violence.

That was years ago when we had all those cases of police brutality on the news, remember? We had Sargeant _____, that was his name. He came by for some business, I don't remember what it was. But I said to him, "Listen, you need to...you and your officers need to drop in when the kids are having lunch in the cafeteria so they can get used to seeing you...and they can see you as friends." And that's what they started doing, not all the time, but enough that the kids didn't see them as threats. Because you know, those will be the very people that may have to save you.

Principal Angela also recalled a need for community pride building when she began as principal in a building that was shared with a charter, and the relationship was contentious.

There was some conflict with the charter school because over the years they had been given carte blanche to just rule and what not. And the staff morale was low that first year. So, instead of walking with their heads high, their heads were hung. We formed a school pride committee. We invited people to come in and speak to the entire school community. We had a school song, we were singing. It was crazy (laughs) but we did that so we could lift the spirits.

Principal Whitney talked about supports for families of students who were in crisis and the ways that she enlisted the community to support the children beyond academic needs:

I have a person that comes every Friday, he cuts the boys' hair. I have somebody who comes to wash the clothes for us. We have a lot of things for the families. One particular thing we have is this program, it started this year and they do workshops every Saturday with these fifteen boys that I picked. They give them financial literacy classes. They teach them how to iron their clothes and wash clothes. They fit them for a tailored suit. And just different things. Etiquette, how do you shake a hand? Look in people's eyes, how you interact with people. They do community service a couple of the days. So, they just had their crowning ceremony where they give them their tailored suit and a crown.

Nurturing, caring, and compassion. Angela holds a core belief around nurture and care that makes this a central part of her leadership. The nurturing centers around not only the emotions of students, parents, and staff, but also the physical needs of students. She sees the needs of her children holistically.

It's not just about checking in with how you are feeling, what I learned is that there are strategies to deal with it. So, we can't just dump emotions and the burdens. We can come together and support each other to say, "Wow, I hear that you are feeling really anxious about all these deadlines that are coming up." And when you do that, some of my teachers, you know, can take a deep breath. Maybe some of us can help you with that. It takes time to be comfortable with yourself to be able to do it. I do believe we have to be strategic in how we share emotions. We have to empower them, emotions do matter, it's okay to feel frustrated, but model for them how you work through those frustrations. Like Principal Whitney and Principal Angela, Principal Ellis talked about the support for students being also centered on not only mental health and emotional needs but also physical needs. In order for students to engage in learning, he believed their basic needs should be prioritized.

The mental health clinic in the building. So my student support team we watch our children. So you don't have a pair of socks, someone has socks, or underwear, or uniforms, sweaters. We don't need to call the parent, I'm just giving it to you. If a child comes in the dead of winter not dressed appropriately, you're going

home dressed appropriately. So the poverty part, that's hard for me. Especially if the parents have a lot of pride. I still make sure...hunger...I will.... You will eat.... We will make sure you have whatever you need.

In contrast to Principal Ellis, Principal Angela wanted to be sure to communicate with the parent when providing clothing for the children so as not to “offend” or “insult” the parent:

You know, we are a Title 1 school with ninety percent or better of our population. That was one thing, but you wouldn't know it because the children were loved. The parents loved them. We would buy things for the children. On this particular day it was dead cold. The boy had on a little hoodie over his head. I called him over, “Where's your coat?” “Oh I didn't wear it.” “Oh okay, you do have a winter coat, right?” and he said, “Oh well, my mother forgot to buy it.” So I said okay and let him go. We knew what we had to do. I spoke to the guidance counselor and we put our little money together, and she went and bought him a coat. But I told her, we always ask the parent's permission because you don't want to insult anybody. When he came down at the end of the day, he didn't know what was coming. I gave it to him and his eyes lit up. He hugged that coat like it was Christmas. Yeah, so you know, those things...poverty.

Principal Whitney as a community leader thought often of the lives of her school community and the conditions in which her families were living. She is observant and considers their moods, emotions, and physical state to determine how she can best support and interact with them.

I think that I had to remember, number one, that many of the children that were in our school came with some major challenges, I mean things, to the point where it was a major feat for them to get to school, much less get to school and do well. But I think you had to keep that lens on because I have seen people sometimes get highly emotional and upset with children. But I would think that overall, it was important for me to keep myself steady because you never know what a child is going through. I could look in their eyes and tell when no one really got them up and sent them off on a positive note. You can look at a child's eyes and tell then they are heavy-laden. And I'm not saying it in any way to denigrate our parents because I think many of our parents have their own challenges just existing, whether it's work or housing, et cetera.

The Urban School District

The principals in the study all confirmed that they have not received any such common support and instead have sought out their own support and programs through connections with outside organizations who write grants for them. The principals reflected on the high need in their communities for SEL support and what supports they have received.

Principal Whitney shared the pressures of the mandates around SEL without guidance or support. Principal Whitney's school is designated as a school in danger of being taken over by the state due to low academic achievement. The high poverty, high trauma, homelessness, higher than average special needs, transient population, and lack of support she has received leave her struggling to get her community to meet the academic expectations.

Expectations are outlined but it's not, "Okay. So what do we need to do to get to that?" As a CSI school we are expected to make social-emotional goals. And we have timelines, we have to do progress monitoring. But there's never funding or how to get it. This is what you need to do. This is when you need to do it. You have to figure out what, when, where. So the support is very little.

Principal Angela talked about how funding was allocated toward professional development for leaders. In addition, even though there is a strong push and expectation for all schools to engage in SEL and CRSL work, the money is not being allocated for these needs.

And now what? I mean, and I think that's what you're talking about. There's no real impetus on the people that are our leaders to lead in this work. And we all know that what you value is what you put time and money to. And because there's no time or money being devoted...you really don't care about it. Or that's the way I make sense of it. And so if there is this awareness around what's happening in the district.... How are the district-level staff forming relationships with these colleges and universities to support some of their goals around social-emotional learning? It's something where we have to go out there and do the

dance. Always begging for money, “Can you please help me?” I mean it shouldn’t be that way.

Lack of principal PD and support in SEL. The principals felt as if they had not received adequate supports from the district or city, despite the recent push for SEL in schools. In our focus group dialogue, the principals shared the resources they needed and lacked. The passion and frustration in the voices of the principals became more evident when they responded to this question. Principal Angela expressed:

So from the department of education I received nothing. And what I mean by that is that they will talk about social emotional learning but that was it. It was an expectation of like what you need to create, right? But there was nothing really tangible that you could really rely on as a resource or an individual that you could contact that could support you in this journey. It was only when the school joined the School Collaboration Project (pseudonym) and I work with another principal and she introduced me to emotionally responsive practice. The Department of Education really gave me nothing.

Principal Ellis added on:

Too many times people put academics first. And I shared with you before, if that mental health situation is not addressed with my three-year-olds or my four-year-olds or my parents, we cannot address academics. So I’ve always made that my forefront.

Principal Whitney followed up with:

So why is it that I have to go on a link to find a PD to help me with social-emotional? And then when I send my teachers there, they say, “Oh, this is not for your district.” So it’s almost separate but not equal. If I’m not in a program, I don’t have access to that unless I asked my colleagues on my own. And it’s hard for me because I come from corporate America and we always have a model for if you need a resource, this is the person you go to and this is how you get it. As a school identified as in need, we are expected to make social-emotional goals. And we have timelines, we have to do progress monitoring. But there’s never funding or how to get it. This is what you need to do. This is when you need to do it. You have to figure out what, when, where. So the support is very little.

Concerns about preparation, implementation, and sustainability. Principal

Ellis explained the difficulties with implementation that are not effective and the challenge of sustainability.

So it's interesting. I see it almost in terms of support, we get a lot of band-aid support for something that requires some real like some antibiotics. Those band-aids come in the form of money and the random organization. And while we have a bunch of well-intentioned folks, there just hasn't been a priority being put around about how do we then combine our efforts? And because our kids are so transient, I may be in one school that has this really amazing social work program, almost shepherdlike. And then next thing that kid gets in a fight. Now he's at the school down the street that doesn't have that program at all. So I mean, I echo a lot of what people said because it's true. It's true. It's almost an overabundance of nothing. There's just so much stuff and yet it doesn't seem to be impacting or changing the way kids show up. Or the way we're able to show up for kids.

Principal Angela mentioned having a Restorative Practices Coordinator coming in from the district to work with teachers in support of the restorative circles she started doing:

She has been coming in and working with my teachers because like I said, they [the teachers] show up angry. So we have circles maybe once a month. We have circles with the teachers. She's setting up something to go to Ramapo [behavior management program] on one weekend just so to bring us closer together and so that they can deal with their hurt. Because I mean, I understand that you showed up with your issues before you even came to our school.

Principal Ellis also mentioned the high turnover of teachers in the community and the impact it has on the children who are already experiencing trauma.

That lack of consistency doesn't do right by our kids. So if we know abandonment and lack of consistency is a major issue for our kids, how do we support people and becoming more consistent and showing up? Right? In a more consistent way instructionally but socially as well. We got to think about how do we foster folks that really want to be in the game but just don't know how to play, right? Because at the end of the day with everything else going on, principals are being charged to now you got to have the capacity or build the capacity to get people to build their capacity. I'm still trying to build my capacity. So you asking me to build everybody else's capacity and the gift I get from that is you leave. The return I get on growing a teacher is that they leave. Right? Because they got their stripes. And so if they could work in this district, they can work anywhere.

Principal Whitney shared that she felt isolated in the search for support for herself and for her community.

I'm going to equate it to be a parent looking to get into a charter school. Everything is like lottery for me. If you don't get into programs, you fall through the cracks and if you're not doing the leg work, as you said, you may not get it. When I go and meet with my constituents in different districts, I always wonder why does this support look different than my support? And even though the demographics are different, the problems and the social-emotional needs are still the same.

Principal Ellis talked about the challenge with new teachers who have not received enough training prior to teaching full-time. He mentioned wanting to offer the new teachers more opportunity to experience the classroom prior to starting so they have a fuller context.

I think at a system level, this is about thinking about how we ask teachers to show up and we can transplant the need for teachers to understand blackness and a bunch of different kids. In my Latino kids, in my gay students. We got to figure this out. And Teach For America and a lot of these programs, this concept of, well, we'll just throw people into spaces or we'll allow people to show up by virtue of a state certification, it's clearly no longer enough.

Principal Angela talked about hearing the expectations with regards to SEL without receiving any specific information on what to do or how.

They will talk about social-emotional learning but that was it. It was an expectation of like what you need to create, right? But there was nothing really tangible that you could really rely on as a resource or an individual that you could contact that could support you in this journey.

Principal Ellis lamented over the internal struggle he faced when trying to work through obstacles that seem insurmountable. For example, not only are there deficits in student learning, but also deficits in parents thinking about their own children because of the hopelessness and helplessness they feel as victims of racial trauma and poverty while facing life challenges without support or tools.

How are we as a school supposed to do all that? What happens when I get the ninth grader that can't read? What are you really asking me to do? And he gets in fights and he steals. I'm like, "What?" And his mother says something like, "He ain't shit. That nigga ain't shit." What am I supposed to do when that parent says that in my office to their child? And yet he's supposed to get past all these reading exams. So I mean, I echo a lot of what people said because it's true. It's true. It's almost an overabundance of nothing. There's just so much stuff and yet it doesn't seem to be impacting or changing the way kids show up. Or the way we're able to show up for kids.

Caring for Self

The lack of district and citywide support for principals working in urban communities with increased challenges and high poverty rates regarding SEL and CRSL can leave the principals feeling burnout and stress. The regulation of emotions and the self-management of the leader are central to the stability of the school community. Principals often have to seek out connections between colleagues and friends to find time to decompress and strategize on handling challenging situations relating to SEL in their communities. The self-care piece is essential to the health and wellness of the principal; however, there is not often time or opportunity for principals to engage in self-care. The emotional demand and strain on school leaders when managing situations with student, staff, and family social, emotional, and mental health while also managing high accountability expectations is intense. Principals must find ways on their own to motivate themselves, sustain themselves, de-stress, decompress, become self-aware, self-manage their emotions, and care for their own physical, emotional, and mental wellness often in high-stress situations.

Calling and motivation. The job of school leader is a challenge regardless of where the school is located. However, Black principals working in urban contexts experience a variety of challenges, including managing the leadership of children in crisis

and supporting children who are experiencing trauma and systematic racism in policies and practices. In addition to those challenges, Black school leaders have to manage their own experiences with racist perceptions of their leadership. This requires Black school leaders to have a sense of a calling, a motivation that drives them to persevere in the face of challenges.

As a Black male principal, Principal Ellis was aware of the importance of a male presence in a field dominated by women, as well as a community with many single-parent homes where fathers may not be present for a variety of reasons. The idea of “seeing” students and acknowledging their identity is also a value he holds.

So what’s most important for me is that Black children see their blackness... through multiple lenses. And that particularly for my school that the males identify or see masculinity, manhood in a lot of different ways. It’s not expressed in the same way by everybody. And that’s okay. What’s the most important for me is that they see themselves. I push adults to see children. The worse thing a kid can tell me is, “You just see right through me.” That you don’t like acknowledge my existence. That’s the most critical feedback I can get from a kid. If they can’t see themselves in what we are teaching...what are we really doing?

Principal Whitney saw herself as a role model and her school as a “sanctuary.” She considered her role as an opportunity and a responsibility towards her people in the way adults in her life have supported her success. With her focus on community and building relationships, Principal Whitney feels a need to provide for her students and families as a way to combat the challenges they face.

I am motivated by the work every day because I know that we are our children’s only hope. We are their sanctuary, we are their hope, we are the institution that would be between them and incarceration, between them and not going to school, between them and not succeeding. I am motivated because we have this opportunity. When we got into the work, I knew we were doing something right. I know that I have a responsibility to teach children and get them from A to B to C.

Principal Angela feels a calling towards leadership. Her faith sustains her through the daily challenges that can be draining. She talked about being depleted after all of the nurturing and care she gives to the school community. As a school leader who is not receiving sufficient care and nurturing for herself, she feels the emotional weight of caring for others and needs to find ways to restore herself.

I'm motivated to do this work because I just feel that I'm called to lead. Sometimes, you know I'll go home and I'll just be done. Done. There's like nothing. You're numb. Numb. But knowing the next day's a new day and praying. The first thing I do when I wake up is just pray, thanking the Lord that He gave me another breath. I pray in the shower, I pray on the way to work, to get there safely. And just pray that I don't lose another child. There are a lot of mental health issues that are not being addressed. So you have to be strong.

Childhood experiences and influences. Regardless of the question asked, there were several instances when the principals talked about their upbringing and way they were raised and how this influenced their current perspectives on leadership.

Principal Angela recalled the discrimination she experienced going to school and one teacher who exposed her to culturally responsive curriculum. Earlier, she discussed the desire to teach students about themselves the way this teacher did when Principal Angela was younger.

So for myself, growing up in the Seventies, in a predominantly White neighborhood, I used to explain to my parents the racism that I was facing but they really didn't understand because they grew up in another country that was predominantly Black. Some of the experiences I had in school in a neighborhood in Queens, with some Whites and barely any Blacks. They were highly racist. There was one teacher who explained to us the contributions of Blacks. I understood the accomplishments that Black people had. I think a part of our problem with our children is they don't know where they come from. The accomplishments, that we were kings and queens. If they understood who they were, they would transform this world.

Principal Whitney's value around the community showed up in her discussion about her childhood. As a student who was educated and grew up in the district, her knowledge of the community and value system shows up in her leadership.

I am a product of this district. I grew up here. I'm one of these kids, I'm a troubled kid. I went to one of those programs for troubled teens where they save you or whatever. I always wanted to be a teacher growing up. I was told, "You're not going to make no money." So accounting was my first career, but I always had a love for teaching. I'm a Black kid who was educated in this district. And a lot of the same problems, that were around or the same issues or the same inequalities, from when I was a student is still prevalent in my school as a principal. So I always think to myself and I always see...look at my kids and I see myself. I ask everybody, "Do you see yourself in the kids? Do you see them having the same capacity and ability to make it in this world? Not just to survive but to be productive in this world?" I feel like I have a responsibility to give them what they need to be productive. Going back to when I was a child, there were adults who impacted me. Made me want to teach. I can again return the favor.

Principal Ellis reflected on growing up in a neighborhood similar to the one where he works—predominantly Black and with community values. The collective mission of the community in his upbringing would later become a value in his leadership.

My parents planted a seed. My parents and my grandparents, everybody was important and that taught you to treat everyone with the highest amount of respect. Where I grew up, it was a poor community, it was a Black community like _____. Everyone wanted you to succeed. I mean, the drunk on the corner, the lady of the evening, the crossing guard, Miss Edna, the next-door neighbor. Miss Pearl, two doors up. Everyone wanted you to succeed, even if they had differences amongst themselves. Those values, I constantly drew on. For my teachers and my principals, they invested in me, it wasn't just a job, it was a ministry.

Principal Angela connected with the historically Black schools pre-*Brown v. Board* and the ideals of educators. She reflected on what she aspires to in her leadership:

So I think about the old times and Black history when Black people were very successful in school. And a lot of it happened before schools were integrated. And when you examine what were the conditions that allowed Black children to be so successful, there were just certain things that they did then that we could do now. The first thing was that there was a shared expectation from the teacher on what you can and will and must do to be successful. There was a shared expectation

from the community, your neighbor. “You better get home or I’m telling your mom.” There was a mosque, there was a church. Everyone recognized that the school did something that was really important to uplift the community. And something has happened to fracture that. So I think that would be a part of the work on how do you build those relationships again where you have that shared expectation. I think very specifically on how you support Black children.

Self-awareness, self-care, and self-management. There were trends in how the principals described the way they prepared themselves emotionally and mentally for the work each day. Each of the principals had a process for self-awareness, with responses ranging from more introspective, to a focus on external motivations, to specific practices, routines, and rituals they engaged in each day.

Overall, the consensus was that the emotions of the leader matter and have an impact on the community. The participants noted a need to regulate their own emotions in order to manage the effect they have on others. In terms of self-management, Principal Angela described the daily rituals that she uses to prepare herself:

I run. So every morning before I start my day, I run six miles and a minimum three miles. And in that moment, I just close my eyes, I’m on the treadmill and I just focus on goals. I have to have conversations if I have to give a speech, I try it out during that time. I pray while I’m at home. I read the Bible at home. And then when I get to the school building, I close my door, pull down the shade, and I pray again. And I’m just beginning to proclaim what I want the day to be. Sometimes I have to say affirmations for myself, but that’s my space to be with myself.

Principal Whitney also discussed her practices each day to prepare herself for the stresses of the role. She noted the need to have a strategy in order to prepare herself for the stress she was sure she would encounter each day. She emphasized her faith as an important part of her daily routine.

For me, I pray every morning in the building before I open my door for anybody and I read my Bible for ten minutes and just see how I could make some type of application throughout the day. Just to help me keep my composure and also to help me keep my balance for myself.

Principal Ellis also reflected on his faith and the need to center himself before starting the day as a practice he has used during all of the years he has served as principal. He also shared his practices around managing the work physically and mentally. The demands of the job being an unspoken 24-hour expectation, he described the need to find time to disconnect.

Gospel music is my friend. I'm a music person. I listen to music by myself and respect the time I need to be by myself. And what I've done for these past ___ years is really pushed myself to leave it at work. And so I don't answer emails on weekends. I don't take phone calls on weekends. And I have stayed true to that. And that's really just for my own sanity to be able to be like...I get that everyone thinks the job was twenty-four hours, but I need some of those hours for me. So that's what I do.

Principal Angela added that she also has a routine to decompress at the end of each week, like Ellis, not wanting to bring the stress of the work home. She talked fondly about a weekly debriefing phone call she has with a friend who is also a school leader and understands the journey and the daily expectation:

Well, a friend of mine, we were teachers together, coaches together, principals together. So, every Friday we call each other on the drive. And we take turns. We almost have a protocol. She just shares a tale and I share a tale. And then we just started talking about just day-to-day stuff and joking around and stuff. But that's our way of getting it out on Fridays because we've both been practicing on not taking all of our anxiety home to our families. And it helps for my weekends.

In terms of self-awareness, Principal Angela talked about her desire to regulate and, at the same time, to be transparent with her emotions in a strategic way with the community. She pays attention to how she is perceived, including her body language, and is mindful of the emotional response others can have to her composure or lack thereof.

I mean, I think when you're the leader of the school you have to be very aware of your emotions. And you have to be aware of how you wear your emotions. You have to be aware of your body language. You have to be aware of what you stress verbally and nonverbally. I think that I'm very strategic in how I show my emotions, meaning, I understand that my emotions matter...in leading the school.

And I truly believe that leadership is supposed to inspire. So, even if I'm really upset, I try to turn it around, so that I can use it, to just motivate me to do something, but I try to present it in a positive light. When my emotions are negative, I think it's okay to show that as well. You just have to be thoughtful in how you show it. I've learned that it's okay to share that with your staff. But when you share it, then you have to wrap it up nicely so that you can also inspire.

Principal Angela added that she has concerns with spending too much time focusing on the emotions of others. She worries about too strong of a focus on emotions that takes away from the responsibility towards the work and the expectations for the students. She wants to create a safe and caring environment, but does not want staff to think that their emotions come before student needs. However, she appreciates the care the staff has for her well-being.

I probably feel I give off too much emotional stuff. Because I think I create a space where people always want to come in and talk and engage. And like, "You're going to take care of me emotionally." And sometimes that becomes the focus and the real work isn't really addressed because we're attending to people's emotional needs. But I think that also speaks to how I'm also able to create an environment where people continue to feel inspired because they think that I really do value them first as a person outside of you just being my employee. I think that my staff is very cognizant when they recognize that I'm having a difficult day. And they organize themselves and they come in, "What can I do to take this off of you?"

Principal Whitney reflected on the impact of her emotions on a community where many students and parents experience daily crises. She considers the effects of trauma on her school community and understands that she serves as a model of comfort, consistency, and stability that they need to feel safe:

I'm good at keeping my emotions in check. But also, being transparent about my feelings. If that makes sense. I am known for being calm in all situations. I do have to deal with a lot of parents who are in crisis. And they are looking for... they need somebody who is calm. They react to the way I react to things. So if I'm not calm, they respond in kind. One of the things I have learned, I guess through practice, is that you cannot really react impulsively. And physically, I just have to take a step back and say, this has nothing to do with me. So just doing

that, allowing the adult to say what is on their mind and then once they have released all of that, then we can really sit down and discuss, how can I help?

Principal Ellis discussed the need to start the morning off on a positive note, setting the tone for the building. He talked about the need for sleep and for physical comfort, such as wearing the right clothing. He noted the need to be regulated for students who may be dysregulated emotionally.

My ride to work has to be peaceful. I need to be clear. I need clarity so I can be present for my students, my staff, and my parents. If I'm not set up to be mentally ready, it's not a good look. I'm always calm, I'm always very professional. If my children are upset, and very emotional...I'll say, "Are you ready to talk?" I give them the space to, you know, express themselves and then I keep checking in. The self-awareness piece is when I'm like acknowledging and knowing at the end of the day, every word I say has an impact in some way or even the words I don't say. The absence of things [is] also the evidence of something.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings through a composite case study analysis that connected back to the major research question, "What are the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district?"

The four themes resulting from the study summarize the beliefs and values that inform the practices of the Black principals working in the same urban, predominantly Black school district: The Students, The Community, The Urban School System, and The Self. The analysis of the principals' responses identified that the individual leaders held beliefs showing a dominance in one or two domains of each of the frameworks. This dominance in their strongly held beliefs and values around their leadership impacted their practices. All of the principals—with their common experiences in the district through

the common school system, demographics, and environmental needs—still reflected individuality that was impacted by their beliefs and values. Their individual experience in the position and their childhood upbringing further impacted their perceptions, beliefs, values, and practices, and, ultimately, the learning environments for their students.

Chapter V next includes a summary of the analysis, a discussion of the four major themes, and recommendations.

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this research was to investigate how the beliefs and values of Black principals informed the ways they meet the holistic needs of Black students in low-income, predominantly Black, urban public schools. This chapter includes a discussion of the findings relating to the perspectives of Black principals. The rich discussion shared by the principals provided valuable insights into the beliefs, values, experiences, and practices of Black principals in their leadership as they face challenges and experience successes in a high-needs district. Their motivations and influences are also a source of inspiration that impact the ways in which they lead their schools, their leadership styles, their priorities, and the learning environments they create. The chapter concludes with a discussion of areas for future research and recommendations for practice.

This chapter's discussion and recommendations for future research help to answer the following research question:

What are the beliefs and values that inform the leadership practices of Black principals as they meet the holistic needs of Black students in an urban school district?

This major research question sought to understand the perspectives and practices of Black principals and the ways in which they meet the social, cultural, and emotional needs of

Black students. How do they employ a holistic approach to the needs of their children? How do they view social-emotional learning and how do they see their roles in the work? There is a current expectation in New York City public schools for principals to employ practices that focus around social-emotional learning (SEL). The current mayor, in collaboration with the city's school Chancellor and teachers' union, is collaborating on an expansion of social-emotional programming in city schools. Thus, this research question wanted to understand how Black principals currently work to meet the needs of their students and how they define SEL in their individual communities. Black students in urban school communities experience additional life factors that impact their social and emotional development and well-being. This major research question and interview protocol sought to understand how Black principals consider the unique social and emotional needs of Black students while navigating the current climate of accountability, state testing, school violence, anti-Black racism, and poverty.

The beliefs, values, and practices of the Black principals in the predominantly Black urban school communities showed dominance in four major themes that resulted from the study: The Students, The Community, The Urban School System, and The Self.

Using the CASEL Framework for Social-Emotional Learning and Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis's Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) Framework as the two main frameworks to center the beliefs, values, and practices of the school leaders, the analysis of the principals' responses identified that the individual leaders held beliefs that showed a dominance in two or three domains of each frameworks. The values of the principals fell into one of three categories, which allowed for the composite case study approach. The following leadership styles emerged from the beliefs and values of the

principals: (Leadership Style 1) High Expectations and Nurturing, (Leadership Style 2) Community and Relationship Building, and (Leadership Style 3) Advocacy and Care. This dominance in their strongly held beliefs and values around their leadership impacted their practices. For example, Principal Whitney represented the principals whose primary leadership style was focused around (2) Community and Relationship Building. Principal Whitney's beliefs and values are the result of her childhood experiences growing up in the community, experiences with challenge relating to the community itself, and years in service. Her leadership style then impacted her approach to leadership and, ultimately, the school community values she emphasizes. The findings reflected that the beliefs, values, and experiences of the leaders deeply impact their practices and, therefore, the learning environment they create for their school communities.

Interpretation of the Findings

The Leaders

Although the individual experiences, beliefs, values, and practices of the principals reflected a variety within each individual, the leadership style themes that emerged for each leader were prominent in their motivations, values, and leadership styles. Through their voices, they expressed strongly held beliefs that directly impacted the ways in which they led students, staff, and families; responded to the needs of the community; managed stress; and created priorities in their schools. The leadership styles and the corresponding themes that emerged in each composite case are detailed in the following sections.

Principal Angela King. Principal Angela’s perspective and leadership style fall within the category of “High Expectations with Nurturing,” similar to the concept of care and a push, and as a “warm demander,” which Delpit (2012) described as a leader who encourages students to push through challenges with support via the high expectations the leader holds for students and a strong belief in their ability. Principal Angela challenges deficit images of her children through professional development opportunities for teachers. She recalled her childhood experiences of discrimination and racism in her schooling and thus prioritized a counter-narrative for her students. She aspires to provide a curriculum focused around Black culture. Principal Angela questioned the current curriculum options and saw them as “whitewashed.” She cares about the emotions of her students, staff, and families. Seeing herself as a role model, she is careful about how she shares her emotions with her staff. She pays careful attention to preparing herself mentally, emotionally, and physically each day. She wants to create an environment where learning matters and all members of the community are working collaboratively to support students. Principal Angela is conscious of the feelings of her students and families and takes them into account even when supporting them in situations of poverty and trauma. The parents and children are respected. Principal Angela holds herself to a high expectation and believes that the students should be “pushed” to their potential. The CASEL Framework for Social-Emotional Learning centers SEL around including three leadership style themes that are of emphasis in Principal Angela’s profile, and presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *CASEL SEL Competencies: Principal Angela's Profile*

Social Awareness	Self-Management	Responsible Decision Making
Perspective Taking Empathy Appreciating Diversity Respect for Others	Impulse Control Stress Management Self-Discipline Self-Motivation	Identifying Problems Analyzing Situations Reflecting Solving Problems Ethical Responsibility

Ladson-Billings's (1995) Framework for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy detailed "cultural competence," where an "asset-based approach to families and community" is used, not a "deficit" model. The framework also notes that in cultural competence, educators "value and respect" students' "social identities." Angela held these perspectives as important parts of her leadership of Black children. Khalifa et al. (2016), in their Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework, reflected three of Angela's stronger leadership practices, as presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *CRSL Competencies: Principal Angela's Profile*

Promotes a Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment	Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts
Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010) Building Relationships; reducing anxiety among students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Acknowledges, values, and uses indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2012)	Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school: displays self-reflection (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2007) Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011)	Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2007; Flessa, 2009) Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information (Gooden, 2005; Madlangobe & Gordon, 2012) Connecting directly with students (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)

Principal Whitney Lewis. Principal Whitney's perspective and leadership style fall within the category of "Community Focus/Relationship Building." Khalifa (2012), in his description of principal as community leader, noted that, based on research, "a strong relationship between students' school and home environments was one of the most valuable assets utilized by early Black school leaders in segregated communities" (Horsford, 2009; Morris, 2008, 2009; Siddle Walker, 1993, 2000, 2009). Khalifa (2012) connected the ability of the school leader to exhibiting a caring community presence to culturally responsive leadership practices. Principal Whitney is a community relationship-focused leader. Regardless of the context or topic, Principal Whitney consistently carries the context of the community she serves, its challenges and needs, and her strategies to best support and address these needs. Principal Whitney knows her students and parents well and is aware of the community challenges that face them daily. Principal Whitney grew up and went to school in the same community where she serves as principal. She noted that she sees some of the same challenges as principal as were present when she was a child attending school in the same district. Principal Whitney's school community is more challenging than most, with a higher percentage of poverty, trauma, neighborhood violence, homelessness, and students with disabilities than Principal Angela's community, even though the latter also experiences all of the same challenges but to a slightly less degree. Principal Whitney has served the same community for 20+ years. Her value system as a leader reflects the importance she places on building relationships with her students and families. Like Principal Angela, she challenges deficit images of her children within and outside of the school. Principal Whitney made note of the lack of support she receives regarding the extreme challenges

her students face. Principal Whitney also recognizes that policies in place at times prevent her from “effecting the change” she wants to see in her community. Many of the challenges she faces as a leader come from the circumstances of her community, outside of the school environment, but she seeks to support them not only in academic learning but also in addressing some of their basic needs. Principal Whitney was cognizant of her emotions and the effect they have on the community of students and families often in crisis. She emphasized the need for her to be “calm in all situations” and prepares herself each day to face the challenges through prayer and reflection. She observes and reads the emotions of others through interactions and body language, and tries to respond by modeling the emotion regulation she wants to see in her community. Her population is transient and, because of trauma, at times unpredictable, but she sees herself as a steady emotional force for them. Given the stressful nature of managing trauma daily, Principal Whitney has a process to decompress so as not to bring the trauma home with her. The CASEL Framework for Social-Emotional Learning centers SEL within several components, including three that are of emphasis in Principal Whitney’s profile, as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. *CASEL SEL Competencies: Principal Whitney’s Profile*

Social Awareness	Self-Management	Relationship Skills
Perspective Taking Empathy Appreciating Diversity Respect for Others	Impulse Control Stress Management Self-Discipline Self-Motivation	Communication Social Engagement Relationship building Teamwork

Ladson-Billings's (1995) Framework for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy details "cultural competence," where "connections to knowledge of families and communities" are fostered and "students' social identities and lived realities are valued and respected." Principal Whitney holds these perspectives as important parts of her leadership of Black children. Khalifa et al. (2016), in their CRSL Framework, reflects two of Principal Whitney's stronger leadership practices, as presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *CRSL Competencies: Principal Whitney's Profile*

Promotes a Culturally Responsive/ Inclusive School Environment	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts
<p>Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010)</p> <p>Building Relationships; reducing anxiety among students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)</p> <p>Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2007; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007)</p> <p>Acknowledges, values, and uses indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2012)</p>	<p>Developing meaningful, positive relationships with community (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001)</p> <p>Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and other roles (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2007)</p> <p>Finding overlapping spaces for school and community (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012)</p> <p>Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006)</p> <p>Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2007; Flessa, 2009)</p> <p>Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information (Gooden, 2005; Madlangobe & Gordon, 2012)</p> <p>Connecting directly with students (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)</p>

Principal Ellis Davis. Principal Ellis's perspective and leadership style fall within the category of "Advocacy and Care." Tillman (2008) stated that Asa Hilliard "argued that school leaders must be culturally proficient" serving "as advocates for Black children and their communities and use their cultural perspectives to guide their work as instructional leaders" (p. 603). Principal Ellis also challenges exclusionary practices that impact his children, whether they come from within or outside of the school; he confronts those practices and sets "non-negotiables" around exclusion of populations of children. Like Principal Angela and Principal Whitney, he challenges deficit images of his children within and outside of the school. As a Black male principal, he holds a sense of responsibility in a school community that has minimal male presence and acknowledged that his students also need positive male figures in their lives. Principal Ellis sees his work as advocacy and has built his school mission around the social justice issues affecting Black and Brown students. He advocates for his children and challenges authority vocally, sharing his need to provide for his school community. Principal Ellis also notes a lack of support regarding the social-emotional development his students' need, but he advocates for the resources he requires to provide what he can to meet the needs of his students. Principal Ellis is strong-willed in his leadership, confronts inequities, and challenges exclusionary practices. He recognized that as a Black male principal, he is subject to the perceptions of others and reflected that if he were a White principal, he would not experience the effect of those perceptions. He is a tenured but newer principal, as compared to Principal Whitney, but he has made connections to the community a part of his leadership. Principal Ellis is self-reflective and pays attention to

the mental preparation he needs to lead daily. He expresses care for his school community by focusing on life supports and advocacy for his children. He prioritizes the needs of students living in poverty and meeting their basic life needs as a way to nurture. He understands that emotions matter and critically self-reflects on his own emotions and how he supports the community in expressing their emotions in regulated ways.

The CASEL Framework for Social-Emotional Learning centers SEL within several components, including three that are of emphasis in Ellis’s profile, as presented in Table 7.

Table 7. *CASEL SEL Competencies: Principal Ellis’s Profile*

Social Awareness	Responsible Decision Making	Relationship Skills
Perspective Taking Empathy Appreciating Diversity Respect for Others	Identifying Problems Analyzing Situations Reflecting Solving Problems Ethical Responsibility	Communication Social Engagement Relationship Building Teamwork

Ladson-Billings’s (1995) Framework for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy details “cultural competence,” where “connections to knowledge of families and communities” are fostered “students’ social identities and lived realities are valued and respected” needed “supports are provided,” and leaders “utilize students’ cultures as a vehicle for learning.” Principal Ellis holds these perspectives as important parts of his leadership of Black children. Khalifa et al.’s (2016), in their CRSL Framework, reflects the elements of Principal Ellis’s strongest leadership practices, as presented in Table 8.

Table 8. *CRSL Competencies: Principal Ellis's Profile*

Promotes a Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment	Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers	Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts
<p>Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010)</p> <p>Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2007; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007)</p> <p>If need be, challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)</p> <p>Acknowledges, values, and uses indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2012)</p>	<p>Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004)</p> <p>Engaging/reforming the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002)</p>	<p>Serving as advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2012)</p> <p>Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families (Gardiner & Enimoto, 2006)</p> <p>Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2007; Flessa, 2009)</p>

Caring for Students

High expectations. A common thread that emerged was the belief the principals held in the potential and possibilities of the students' achievement as well as the need for the students to believe in themselves and the possibilities of their success. Lomotey and Lowery (2014) noted that successful Black principals believe in high expectations for students and work to create environments that approach students' individual needs; however, they are aware that "academic success is not enough" (p. 397). Principal Ellis discussed the need to examine the achievement of students but noted that the focus could

not be on academics alone. The high expectations for students in his leadership included having students build an awareness of themselves as well as an awareness of their cultures; additionally, staff would “see” students and acknowledge and celebrate their identities. Recognizing the feelings and emotions of students and families and allowing them opportunities to express them in Principal Ellis’s community were part of the school culture, which then allowed the trust needed to push students to their potential. Principal Angela’s school community focused on the quality of teachers in the classroom and ensuring that teachers were adequately prepared and motivated to teach Black children to the best of their abilities. Ward Randolph and Robinson (2017) noted that the narratives of Black educators and leaders pre-*Brown* showed how they “employed a cadre of overeducated Black professionals who actively sought to be shepherds of the Black community establishing an unintended benefit of high expectations and achievement” (p. 24). Tillman (2008) cited Asa Hilliard’s research on the Zion School, which held high expectations for students and created a safe and caring environment that placed students in the center. Principal Whitney’s approach to high expectations included reminding students that they could overcome adversity and, despite circumstances, show students that they can succeed despite challenges. As with the other principals, Principal Whitney recalled the high expectations that family and community had for them in their own upbringing and felt a responsibility and a need to “give back” that same sense of high community expectation for the children they are serving.

Challenging exclusionary practices and resisting deficit images. According to Tillman (2008), pre- and post-*Brown* Black principals “resisted deficit ideologies and individuals who sought to deny Black children an equitable and excellent education”

(p. 594). Principal Ellis's leadership focused on a mission to challenge deficit images of children, challenge exclusionary practices, and disrupt the school-to-prison pipeline. A source of pride was the ability to name that as a mission based on the premise of the school he created. Tillman (2004) also described pre-*Brown* Black principals as "committed to the education of Black children" and working to educate Black children in "the face of resistance" (p. 101). Black principals have always had to challenge practices that further marginalize students and resist deficit images. All of the principals in the study discussed the ways in which they approached resisting deficit images, either through professional development, implicit bias training, book studies, confronting attitudes about students and families, and self-reflection. The deficit images the principals faced within the school included not only Black students in general, but disproportionate numbers of Black boys in special education, students with autism, students and families living in poverty; these perceptions came from White teachers, Black teachers, and parents. As Principal Ellis operates as an advocate in his dominant leadership stance, Black principals must often challenge racism within the community as well as in policies that impact and further marginalize students from outside of the school. Principal Ellis discussed the perceptions of his own leadership as a Black male principal and shared that people spoke to him and, sometimes, "through him" in a way that he felt they would not if he were a White male principal.

Handling discipline. Morris (1999) explained that Black students in schools are "marginalized, de-culturized, academically tracked and disproportionately disciplined" (p. 318). Scott et al. noted the need for community-based policing programs to also "integrate with school restorative and transformative justice initiatives to shift the

emphasis from discipline and punishment towards capacity building and positive behavioral interventions and supports” (p. 4). Principal Angela enlisted local officers to help restore the relationship between the children and local police officers during a time of police brutality and anti-police sentiment in the neighborhood. Principal Angela, Principal Whitney, and Principal Ellis all employ a restorative approach model, where discipline efforts are seen more as an opportunity to restore, guide, or have students atone for behaviors through ways they might give back to the community through service. Khalifa et al. (2016) described how the discipline gap is “characterized by racialized disparities in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and court citations—[it] is a direct indication that school cultures are hostile toward minoritized students” (p. 8).

Scott et al. (2017) in their policy brief on discipline and policing noted that policy should require funds be redirected from the use of increased school policing to increased funding for counselors and SEL support structures and systems for students. Principal Angela discussed having several guidance counselors and, although it was a financial strain to provide them, it was a need for the students and worth the cost.

Black students, particularly Black males, are suspended at a higher rate, as compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Urban school leaders therefore must be mindful of the disparity in suspensions as they relate to race in order to provide a restorative approach to discipline in their schools. All of the principals expressed having low suspension rates after employing a more restorative approach. Principal Whitney noted that she made an effort to move Black boys out of self-contained classes because she recognized that many of them were there for behavioral reasons. All of the principals talked about training staff in restorative practices. Principal Ellis

discussed “atonements” and wanting to “restore at all costs” as a way to disrupt the prison pipeline. Principal Whitney talked about seeing discipline as a way to rehabilitate and change behaviors. Suspensions and punishments were seen by the principals as counteractive to changing behavior and should only be used in the severest of situations, not in “minor offenses.”

Caring for the Community

Community and building relationships. A strong common thread that was evident through the study was the need for the Black school leaders to engage the community and build relationships. Principal Whitney and Principal Ellis emphasized their connections to the surrounding community. Similar to the Black principals’ pre-*Brown* who, according to Tillman (2008), were “establishing the Black school as the cultural symbol of the Black community,” they sought to create a hub or sanctuary for their community in the school (p. 102). Principal Whitney’s connection to the community in which she grew up and eventually came to serve reflected the ethno-humanist role, where there is a common bond and shared experience among Black principals and Black students that allow for a unique connection. Mitchell (1992) explained this bond as a “kinship” and noted “African American students may learn better and achieve more when they have the opportunity to operate within the type of kinship system which has nurtured them in their lives outside of the school” (p. 24). Principal Whitney’s connection to her families and students allowed them an opportunity to learn in the midst of the trauma they may experience outside of school. Through the nurturing not only of their emotions but also of the physical needs of students and families, Principals Whitney, Ellis, and Angela all worked to create cultures of care in their unique ways; this ties into Siddle-

Walker's (2004) idea that "care means liberating others from their state of need and actively promoting their welfare" (p. 4). King (2006) held the position that "providing education that engages community-mindfulness and rebuilding the community, physically, spiritually and culturally is one of the strongest recommendations that emerged" in her research (p. 34). The Black leader in this study operates with the community in mind and considers the community as a whole when making responsible decisions for the school. For example, Principal Whitney understood through connecting and communicating with her families that housing was a consistent issue and a source of frustration for the families. Those living in housing projects often take a "fatalistic attitude towards life" because of the unstable nature of the neighborhoods in which they live (Dreier, Mollenkopf, & Swanstrom, 2004, p. 67). Therefore, Principal Whitney sought to provide opportunities to have families come into the school often for celebrations, dinners, and events in order to provide a home away from home for the families and a reprieve from some of the conditions in which they were living.

Caring for Self

Calling and motivation. In a study of Black female principals, Moorosi, Fuller, and Reilly (2018) highlighted the "self-drive and self-determination that the women espoused" in relation to the "structures of oppression in their own childhoods" (p. 156). The principals in the study, both female and male, identified with a calling, a determination, and a sense of responsibility to "give back" what they had received in terms of support from family and community. The principals felt a sense of kinship with their community, which was reflected in the terms "we," "my children," and "my community." Principal Whitney described herself as "I am this Black child"; she talked

about seeing herself in the children and wondered if her staff also saw themselves in the children and, therefore, saw their potential. Lomotey (1993) created the phrase *ethno-humanist* to describe the role of Black principals consisting of a “commitment to the education of all students, confidence in the ability of all students to do well, and compassion for, and understanding of, all students and the communities in which they live” (p. 396). In his study of a successful Black principal of a predominantly Black school community, Gooden (2005) observed that the leader held the ethno-humanist role, in that he had a “compassion for African American children and the confidence in their abilities” that kept “the leader engaged as he or she struggle[d] to transform a situation of despair and hopelessness into one of infinite possibilities” (p. 156). Principal Ellis talked about the community where he was raised as being a collective unit towards his success and his desire to create the same community support to lift his students towards their success in his own school community.

Self-awareness, self-care, and self-management. Across environments, including school and workplace environments, research has shown that those with higher emotional intelligence have higher functioning and effectiveness (Cherniss, Extein, Goleman, & Weissberg, 2006). The principals shared the self-awareness of their emotions and their awareness of the impact of their emotions on their school communities. They all felt the need to provide a sense of “calm” for their students, teachers, and families. Salovey and Mayer (1990a, 1990b) coined the term *Emotional Intelligence* (EI), describing it as “a form of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one’s own and other’s feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one’s thinking and action” (p. 5). In order to provide the

stability of calmness for their community, they each had practices, rituals, and routines to engage in as a way to prepare themselves for their daily work. Physical exercise, prayer, affirmations, and setting positive intentions were some of the practices used. There was also a need for the principals to be transparent about their emotions in a way that built relationships and trust, while also being mindful of maintaining a sense of stability to inspire the community to push forward. The principals also acknowledged the toll that they experienced in navigating the challenges and emotions of others and the need to decompress so as not to carry the stresses of the job home with them. They needed to be intentional about managing the stress levels of leading in challenging environments. The attention the principals paid to their own self-awareness and self-management of their emotions was a direct attempt to practice self-care, but also a measure to support their communities by making sure they remain mentally prepared and present. According to Goleman (2007), “People who are emotionally adapt—who know and manage their feelings well, and who read and deal effectively with other people’s feelings—are at an advantage in any domain in life” (p. 36).

Implications for Practice

Gordon (1990) indicated that as the population of students of color continues to grow in public schools, Black children continue to see less success in school as compared to White students, and the blame continues to fall on the victims. Black students who are living in urban communities often experience the challenges of poverty, failing schools, neighborhood violence, single-parent homes, and a lack of social and emotional outlets (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). These children often come to school

disengaged and are disproportionately disciplined (Sparks & Klein, 2018). Gordon (1990) explained that “reclaiming one’s culture (cultural history and knowledge) is an essential aspect of an authentic being” (p. 97). Black principals as leaders in predominantly Black urban schools work to navigate the challenges their students face, while managing the expectations towards students’ academic success. The Black principals in the study all felt a kinship with the community and needed to engage in their own self-awareness, self-care, and self-management practices to prepare themselves for the challenge of the work. The life circumstances of the students entered the school experience in such a way that a focus on academics alone was not an effective approach. Navigating discriminatory practices that marginalized students, whether within or beyond their control, was an obstacle to the change they wanted to effect for their children. Delpit (2012) concluded that the only way we can create the excellence that students in urban classrooms need and deserve is to “provide children with the emotional ego strength to challenge racist societal views of their own competence and worthiness and that of their families and communities” (p. xix). The Black principals in this study all prioritized the holistic view of the child, including their emotional, social, and physical health, as a way to prepare them to navigate the societal oppressions that would hamper their success.

The results of this study proved that the lens of Black leadership and the leadership of Black children in urban communities is multifaceted and requires a need to prioritize the social, emotional, and physical needs of students and families with increased poverty, crisis, and trauma, in combination with a culturally responsive approach. The leadership approach needed to create student success must include a prioritizing of supports for principals in balancing community, building relationships

with students and families, support for teachers, advocacy, and the development of academic programs that engage the culture of the students as well as their social and emotional needs. All of the principals in this study discussed the lack of support available specifically in meeting the social and emotional needs of students who experience higher levels of poverty and trauma. All of the principals either successfully or unsuccessfully sought assistance outside of the school community and felt as if they were on their own to create these supports, find them, or cultivate them. Many of the principals talked about supporting one another or finding support within the school community. This was reflected in the theme that emerged around the need for SEL supports for principals.

This research is valuable for the rich discussion that surfaced from a group whose voice is largely underrepresented. This study sheds light through insightful conversations from Black urban school principals on the beliefs, values, and practices they employ and the ways they lean on the community and their own experiences (despite not having adequate support) to help them navigate the unique challenges they face in a predominantly Black school district. They work in a school system where perceptions and policies further marginalize students, their families, and at times the leaders themselves. This study examined the ways in which Black principals perceive and practice their individual approaches to social-emotional work through a whole child approach that requires culturally responsive leadership. Tillman (2008) noted that “Hilliard argued that teachers and leaders must create and sustain educational environments that are characterized by positive interpersonal relationships—they must be caring and just for all students” (p. 601).

The question presented earlier was “Can social-emotional learning in schools meet the needs of Black children and might there be benefit to incorporating SEL with culturally responsive and relevant approaches?” Based on the beliefs, values, and practices of the principals in the study, there is no “one size fits all” with regard to social-emotional learning. The needs and specific challenges of a community require an individual approach. For predominantly Black urban school communities that experience higher percentages of poverty and trauma, a culturally responsive approach to their learning and attention to their physical needs must be given priority in order to develop a trusting relationship that can support social-emotional learning. Historically, Black principals pre- and post-*Brown v. Board* sought to work against deficit-minded thinking and practices that have denied Black children an excellent education (Tillman, 2004). These Black leaders and educators have stood in opposition to inequity, risking their jobs and making sacrifices in order to provide the highest quality education possible for their children, despite inadequate resources. Today, Black school leaders continue to stand against inequitable policies and practices that marginalize their students. This research sheds light on the ways these leaders continue the focus on the whole child, while connecting SEL and culturally responsive leadership practices in a climate where inequities still persist. Additional questions that remain as implications for practice are:

- How are districts supporting and nurturing those who support and lead school communities?
- What is the role of mindfulness and self-care practices as a way for leaders to sustain themselves in the work of providing emotional support for a whole community?

- What is happening with regards to equitable SEL funding for schools with increased levels of poverty and trauma?
- What is the correlation between SEL, CRSL, and the academic achievement of Black students?

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Little research is available on the connections between SEL and culturally responsive approaches. Although both seek to provide a positive learning environment for students in urban settings, they are seen in isolation of one another. More research is needed on the concrete ways these approaches can be combined and overlap. What does a social-emotional approach rooted in cultural responsiveness look like and sound like? The barriers and challenges that the principals face in terms of cultural norms, deficit mindsets, funding disparities, poverty, trauma, and conflicting punitive discipline perspectives inhibit their full immersion in the work. Further research is needed on supports for principals in implementing social-emotional work combined with culturally responsive practices in ways that lead to student academic success. What is the role of the district and city in supporting not only the building of awareness around SEL and CRSL, but also the implementation of such practices? A research case study of successful school leaders leading highly successful school communities with similar demographics could be useful in providing guidance to design support for school leaders. With the current roll-out of implicit bias training, and the isolation of culturally responsive pedagogy from social-emotional learning under the umbrella of equity, what are the ways in which the city can move from an awareness level to an implementation level? What are the ways

the city and district can support school leaders so they can begin to implement concrete practices that allow them to create equitable environments for their children in their individual circumstances and meet the needs of their unique communities? What does equitable funding look like in communities with diverse needs? How can school leaders be supported through this challenging work as leaders and visionaries in the process?

Recommendations for principal practices include:

- Choose SEL programs rooted in cultural responsiveness that meet the needs of the individual community and, if needed, should work with school teams to adapt approaches to best meet the needs of the community.
- Attend to the holistic needs of students and families, not only addressing social-emotional needs but also attending to the physical needs of students within a classroom.
- Understand the life circumstances of students and families within the community context.
- Seek coaches and professional development supports in both SEL and CRSL.
- Practice self-care and self-awareness of their own emotions in order to best support the communities they serve.

The rich discussion surfaced through this research unveiled the ways that these Black, urban school principals—in many cases, on their own without adequate supports—foster a culturally responsive, social-emotional approach to learning that supports whole-child, positive academic, and social-emotional outcomes for Black students.

Proposed New Framework

The proposed framework centers the school leaders' self-awareness, self-care, and self-management practices and the leadership practices that surround the school leader and their ability to sustain themselves (see Figure 7). The commitment to culturally responsive leadership, the beliefs and values that inform their nurturing for students and families; high expectations for themselves and the school community; the emphasis on community and relationship building; and the focus on advocacy and care for students, staff, and families are all central to the framework. These elements are cyclical and occur within and outside of one another. The "heart" of the framework is the leader's need for self-care, self-awareness, and self-management; without care for the caregiver, the leader cannot sustain the work.

Recommendations for City and District Leadership Support

I write these recommendations in an unprecedented time and a changing world. My recommendations reflect what is now and the possibilities moving forward. How much of this support can occur in person and virtually is reflected in these recommendations. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the entire NYC school system to transition to remote/distance learning. With that, all learning and professional development occur virtually. Without an immediate end in sight, it is unknown how long remote/distance learning will continue. It is evident that once we re-enter our schools, this pandemic may forever alter what school and learning looks like in NYC and cities across the world.

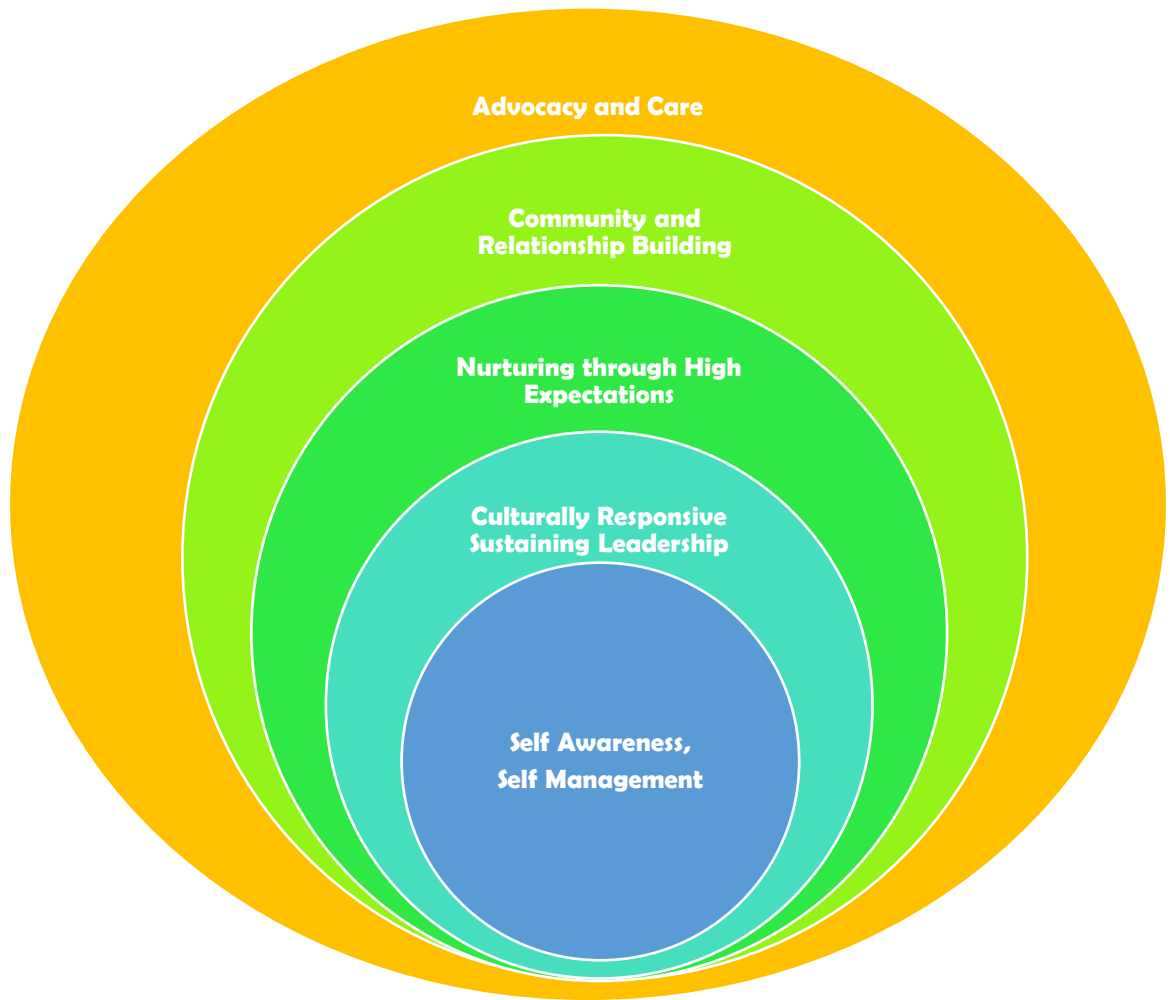


Figure 7. Culturally responsive social-emotional leadership framework



Figure 7 (continued)

As the principals in the study shared their concerns about lack of consistent support in leadership and the implementation of SEL and CRSL practices, research-based best practices should guide the city and district support of school leaders. Currently, often only an overview of SEL and CRSL professional development is provided to school leaders. The leaders shared the need to build their own capacity while being asked to build the capacity of others. Having the leaders learn in a cohort model, either in person or virtually, that includes leaders in a leadership cohort along with their school teams would be an ideal model that would sustain the support. The following recommendations are based on the study findings, professional practice, urban leadership experience, and the CASEL and CRSL Frameworks that guided this study.

One-Two Year-Long Awareness and Implementation Support Plan for School Leaders

Engage school leaders in racial autobiography work. In my own leadership development through the Urban Leaders Education Program at Teachers College, I engaged in Racial Autobiography work and, with the support of Dr. Mark Gooden, also engaged my staff in the work. Through this exploration, aligned with the goal of this work, I was able to examine my first experiences with race and identified, as many of my cohort colleagues did, that my first experience with race happened in school. This highlighted for me as a leader the need for us to ensure that the experiences of our children in school build self-awareness and awareness of others, and are self-affirming and eye-opening. I was able to examine the ways in which my racial identity, experiences, and perspectives positively impact the way I lead and the ways that they can be barriers to my effective leadership. This critical self-reflection allowed me to make

changes in my leadership practices and to continue to learn, examine my actions, and make adjustments when needed to best benefit my school community.

Using as a resource the Gooden and O’Doherty (2015) article “Do You See What I See? Fostering Aspiring Leaders’ Racial Awareness” and the accompanying resource “Building a Community of Trust Through Racial Awareness,” school leaders should engage in a self-exploratory process of examining their own racial and ethnic identity and the impact of race and their own perceptions and experiences on their leadership, decision making, and support of school communities. Leaders should be supported, in person or virtually, as I was, in sharing their racial autobiographies with their school teams and should plan to engage their lead school teams in the same or similar practices.

Professional development in utilizing research-based practices. In supporting school leaders as they work to care for students, school leaders should be engaged in in-person or virtual reading groups and learning circles, conducting article studies and case studies grounded in research-based best practices. These article studies should be collaborative using discussion protocols. The research articles from leading scholars in the fields of SEL and CRSL, as referenced in this dissertation, should provide concrete examples of both practices as they are implemented in schools. This practice should be repeated with school leaders and their leadership teams. During these learning circles, leaders and their teams can create their own case studies, highlighting their journey in the work of implementing SEL and CRSL, and its successes, hurdles, and challenges in order to contribute to knowledge in this practice and support others in the work.

Creation of SEL/CRSL school leadership teams. In-person or virtual leadership teams should include lead teachers who will serve as leads and lab sites for planning and

in-person or virtual intervisitations. Leadership teams can also include participation from parents, grandparents, students, and community-based partners. These lead teams will serve as the Lead SEL/CRSL Implementation Teams. Practices to be examined should include building self-awareness and self-management in students, staff, and families; building emotional intelligence and emotional regulation abilities in students, staff, and families through mindfulness practice; incorporating learner and diverse identities in curriculum and daily learning experiences; and incorporating compassion, critical consciousness, and social justice as related to real-world experiences of learners and diverse communities. Members of the school team should be elected to or nominated by the school community and should agree to serve on the team for 3 years. Upon exiting the team, members should create their recommendations for future members.

School leadership teams' reflective SEL and CRSE data analysis. School leaders and their lead teams should be supported one on one or in small groups, depending on the need of the school, in a critical reflective analysis of their school through an audit of relevant data, including academic data; data on minoritized groups of students; school climate surveys; student, teacher, and parent school culture surveys; and suspension and incident data. School leaders and their leadership teams should be supported either in person or virtually in using a protocol to surface gaps and develop action plans to address those gaps using the research-based practices studied. Action plans will be created and should include a timebound accountable implementation plan. Problems of practice focus areas can be utilized to best analyze and track the effectiveness of the individual schoolwork.

School teams intervisitation series to schools with effective SEL and CRSL practices. Through a series of in-person or virtual intervisitations to schools with effective practices in SEL and CRSL, school leaders and lead teams can observe hands-on practices in action with students, see models of effective SEL and CRSL practices, and gather low-inference notes to debrief and include in their implementation plans. Wherever relevant, specific SEL programs and CRSL practices that fit the need of the school should be researched for adaptability into school communities. Schools sharing best practices should create virtual tours of their schools and practices that include SEL and CRSE in order to share those practices with other schools in the event in-person intervisitations are not possible.

Implementation planning, coaching, and support for school leaders and lead teachers. School leaders and their lead teams should receive at least a year of virtual or in-person consistent coaching in the planning and implementation of the chosen SEL and CRSL research-based practices. School teams should meet collaboratively with other school teams either in person or virtually to share successes and challenges and to collaborate on solutions around their problems of practice. School teams should serve as critical friends and accountability partners in the work throughout and beyond the year-long implementation support planning period.

Professional development for student leaders and parent leaders. An important component of both SEL and CRSL is the inclusion of student voice and community engagement in the implementation of the practices. A team of student leaders and a team of parent/grandparent leaders should receive professional development either

in person or virtually on the chosen program/approach that will be implemented. The student and parent leader voice should be included in the implementation plan.

Self-care plan for school leaders. School leaders should be supported either in person or virtually in creating a self-care plan that they will utilize throughout the implementation cycle, supported by coaches and one another in a cohort design. The self-care cohort model will allow for an accountability/sustainability group once the implementation cycle and coaching cycles are over. A proposed method is the Inner Resilience model created by Linda Lantieri after the 9/11 tragedy in response to the trauma experienced by children, families, and educators that focused on the SEL development of adults. In addition to combatting the effects of trauma on educators and school leaders, the model sought to address heavy workloads, feelings of isolation, and accountability stresses along with the effects of stress on health. Through contemplative and mindfulness practices, inner exploration, care, compassion, and emotional regulation, school leaders engaged in a series of practices. The program included residential retreats, stress reduction days, and monthly nurturing series of workshops, all intending to address the physical, emotional, psychological, and spiritual well-being of the school leaders.

As part of the self-care plan, school leaders must choose a focus area to work on and commit to that addresses either their emotional, physical, psychological, or spiritual well-being. The mission of the Inner Resilience model sought to “help individuals make deeper connections between their inner life of mind and spirit and their outer life of action and service” (Lantieri, Nambiar, Harnett, & Kyse, 2016, p. 122). Given the current pandemic and thousands of deaths, with NYC as the current epicenter of mortalities as related to COVID-19, there will undoubtedly be trauma and stress to address once school

resumes. In my current experience, the isolation that school leaders often experience has been compounded during this remote/distance learning time. The self-care of school leaders will be essential as they prepare to support the healing of their school communities in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

NYC Department of Education webpage focused on SEL and CRSL implementation. This proposed webpage can serve as a hub of support for school leaders, educators, and their school communities, providing resources, narratives, case studies, data, and analysis conducted by the schools implementing the practices. Schools seeking to learn about the practices and obtain resources can use the webpage as a source of professional development and support. The webpage should include all of the practices recommended in the year-long implementation support plan as well as the voices of school leaders, their implementation teams, parents, and students. Here is a proposed outline of the webpage components:

- Racial Autobiography Storytelling and Sharing (videos of individuals sharing their racial autobiographies and vignettes along with the processes in turnkeying the practice to staff).
- Links to articles, case studies and texts suggested for SEL and CRSL Literature Circles and suggested discussion protocols.
- SEL/CRSL school implementation leadership team data analysis and action plan document sharing.
- Links to suggested SEL programs and coaching supports.
- Professional development resources for parents and student leaders.

- Self-care narratives, vignettes, and videos of school leaders and educators engaging in the practices and their impact on their lives and work.
- Self-care resources relating to health and wellness, mindfulness, yoga, brain breaks, and contemplative reflective practices to access.

Conclusion

There is an important connection to be made between SEL and CRSL because social-emotional awareness can surface differently in contexts that are unique to the cultural characteristics of the students. There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach with SEL. The challenge is great and the opportunity gap is still evident. The life circumstance factors that impact Black students in urban communities cannot be erased or ignored as part of their learning experience. Families must be honored and also engaged in the process. The four major themes that resulted from the study summarized the beliefs, values, and practices of Black principals working in the same urban, predominantly Black school district: The Students, The Community, The Urban School System, and The Self.

The findings reflected that the experiences, beliefs, and values of the leaders deeply impact their practices and, therefore, the learning environment they create for their school communities. All of the principals, with their common experiences in the district through the common school system, demographics, and environmental needs, still reflected individuality that was impacted by their beliefs and values. Their individual experience in the position and their childhood upbringing further impacted their perceptions, beliefs, values, and practices, and, ultimately, the learning environments for their students.

Leaders cannot work in silos; they must engage the school community and outer community if they want to provide needed supports for students. Addressing academic achievement is paramount in order to provide children with what they will need to be successful, but this cannot happen in isolation. Bringing in the identity of the students is a vital tool in engaging them in their learning. Addressing the social-emotional needs of the children provides them with the emotional intelligence they will need to navigate the obstacles they face, not only because of where they are but also because of who they are and how they are perceived in a racist society. School leaders need ongoing support in this work. The demand on the leader to manage all of the factors involved is great.

Tillman (2008) shared Hilliard's argument that concluded:

When teachers, leaders, parents, and communities decide that African American children will receive an education that facilitates academic and social excellence, the teaching and learning paradigm changes in fundamental ways. In a paradigm that promotes, academic and social excellence, educational goals are pursued and achieved by “gap closers”—teachers and leaders who demonstrate their capability to move student from low achievers to high achievers. (p. 598)

We cannot maintain a narrow focus on accountability, excellence, and achievement, yet ignore what children are experiencing emotionally and socially and expect to increase academic success and performance in our schools. A focus on the “whole child” expands beyond a limiting approach focused on accountability alone.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol:

1. How do you prepare yourself mentally and emotionally for the work you do daily? (Self-Awareness/Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors)
2. How do you think your emotions and behaviors impact the students, staff and families in your school community? (Self-Awareness/Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors)
3. How do you manage the stresses and challenges of your role emotionally and physically? (Self-Management)
4. How do you motivate yourself or what motivates you to do the work? (Self-Management)
5. What are your strengths as a school leader? (Self-Awareness/Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors)
6. How do you build positive, meaningful relationships within the school community? (Building Relationships/Engaging Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts)
7. How do you build positive and meaningful relationships with families? (Building Relationships/Engaging Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts)
8. What social skill-building needs do your students have? (Social Awareness Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
9. What emotional needs do your students have? (Social Awareness/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
10. What are some of the life challenges your students and families experience? (Social Awareness/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
11. How do you nurture and care for your students' social, emotional and cultural needs? (Social Awareness/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)

12. In what ways are you responsive to the challenges your students have? (Social Awareness/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
13. In what ways are you critically conscious or aware of the social justice issues that impact your students and families? (Social Awareness/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
14. How do you challenge exclusionary practices that impact your students, whether they come from district, citywide and state policies or perceptions of students? (Social Awareness/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
15. How do you challenge deficit images of your students? (Social Awareness/Critically Self Reflects on Leadership Behaviors/Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
16. How do you make responsible decisions for students who experience the effects of racism, poverty and trauma? Specifically, identifying problems and analyzing situations that affect them. (Responsible Decision Making, Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment)
17. How is discipline handled at your school? (Responsible Decision Making/Critical Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors)
18. What is most important to you in your leadership of Black children? (Social Awareness, Critical Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors)