

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District: How Teachers Make Sense of Their Cultural Proficiency

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BOSTON COLLEGE
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ENHANCING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PRACTICE IN A DISTRICT:
HOW TEACHERS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

Dissertation
by

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with Daniel S. Anderson,
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by
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Abstract

While the U.S. student body is increasingly racially, ethnically, culturally, and linguistically diverse, the teaching population itself, however, does not mirror this same diversity. As such, there is an urgent need for teachers who can adequately meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Sleeter, 2001). Some teachers are undeniably more successful at the task of educating diverse student populations than others. How then - are these teachers in particular - successfully able to effectively teach students across various lines of difference? The purpose of this qualitative individual study is to explore teachers' views on how they have developed their cultural proficiency. How do teachers who have been identified by school leaders as particularly effective at teaching diverse student populations develop their culturally responsive practice, and more pointedly - their capacity to effectively teach students from historically marginalized groups (i.e. students from racially minoritized groups or socio-economically disadvantaged groups)? Utilizing a sense-making framework, and gathering information using methods including semi-structured interviews, teacher questionnaires, and reflective journaling, this study uncovers emergent themes and trends in how individual teachers within a diverse Massachusetts school district make sense of the process by which they developed their culturally responsive teaching capacities and practice. If educational leaders form a better understanding of how teachers effectively develop their cultural competencies, then principals and district leaders will

be able to use this information to more effectively design professional development programs that sustain teachers' cultural proficiency and better equip them to successfully serve the increasingly diverse student population.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my family, friends, and teachers whose shoulders I stand upon. I think of my parents, Brian and Dorian, my siblings, Damond and Timothy, my niece, Deja, and my grandparents, Jessie and James Greenwood, who I know are watching over me. You were always my biggest cheerleaders, and I hope I've made you proud.

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CHAPTER ONE¹

Introduction

The National Center of Education Statistics found that in 2017 more than half of all U.S. public school students who identify as Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islander attended schools whose enrollments were 75% or more students of color (de Brey et al., 2019). These same data also show that the school-aged population is becoming more racially diverse, with the population of White students dropping from 62% in 2000 to 51% in 2017.

The shifting demographic is important given the research showing the relationship between student achievement and the racial isolation of historically marginalized student populations. For example, Berends and Peñaloza (2010) used a national dataset to discover that between the years of 1972 and 2004 Black and Latino students attended schools whose student populations became increasingly racially isolated and that such isolation corresponded significantly to the increase in the achievement gap experienced by these groups during this time period. Similarly, a quasi-experimental study of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District found that the racial achievement gap in high school math scores increased after a court order prevented the district from continuing its desegregation busing program (Billings, Deming, & Rockoff, 2014). This racial achievement gap has been persistent in U.S. K-12 schools despite numerous policy efforts that have aimed to create equitable outcomes for all students (Lee, 2004; Ferguson, 2007; Hanushek et al., 2019).

Given the persistent disparities between racial groups in academic achievement as measured by assessments, the growing population of students of color, and the increased racial isolation of these students in school, districts face a compelling need to develop, support, and

¹ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Daniel S. Anderson, James J. Greenwood, Sarah L. McLaughlin, Jason W. Medeiros, Tina C. Rogers.

communicate an intentional strategy to support the learning of historically marginalized students. Supporting and sustaining culturally responsive practice is one such strategy.

Gay (2018) points out two facts that demonstrate the need for culturally responsive teaching. She shows that there are consistent levels of student achievement over time for various racial and ethnic groups, but at the same time, there is a wide variation of individual performances within each group. She points out that:

Achievement patterns among ethnic groups in the United States are too persistent to be attributed only to individual limitations. The fault lies as well within the institutional structures, procedures, assumptions, and operational styles of schools, classrooms, and the society at large. (p. xxii)

In order to confront the inequities that Gay describes, districts require a coordinated, thorough approach to organizational learning in order to alter the institutional and individual dispositions and practices that contribute to these gaps. Coffin and Leithwood (2000) argue for a systemic approach that involves distributing learning throughout individuals in a district, strengthening the relationships and interactions of these individuals, and enhancing the tools and structures that support adult learning. Understanding how school districts respond to the need for their organizations to be culturally responsive is critical to reducing achievement disparities. As such, this research seeks to identify how educators throughout a school district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice. The specific research questions that we addressed are:

1. How do district administrators, school leaders, and teachers make sense of what it means to be a culturally responsive practitioner?
2. What do those educators do in their roles to enact their understanding of culturally responsive practice?

Each member of our research team examined a unique facet of school district practice that has the potential to influence how educators understand the expectation to be culturally responsive (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Individual Research Topic and Level of Analysis

Daniel S. Anderson	Influencing educator CRP	District Administrators, Educators
James J. Greenwood	Understanding how educators develop CRP	School Leaders, Teachers
Sarah L. McLaughlin	Engaging families with CRP	District Administrators, School Leaders, Educators
Jason W. Medeiros	Understanding CRP through supervision & evaluation	School Leaders, Teachers
Tina C. Rogers	Supporting principals' CRLP	District Administrators, Principals

An abstract for each of the individual studies can be found in Appendices A-D.

A Note on Language

It is important to note that this paper moves between terms for asset-based and affirming practices such as culturally relevant teaching, culturally responsive teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, and culturally responsive leadership, as well as other terms. Often related and overlapping, these terms build on one another even when using slightly varying language and concepts. We use the term “culturally responsive practice” (CRP) as an umbrella to encompass discrete elements of practice, such as culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018), culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018), culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 2009), and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2017).

When we refer to the work of specific scholars, we use their terminology, with the understanding that it fits into this broader frame. The literature review will discuss these pedagogies and literature further.

Furthermore, we feel it is important to clarify our use of certain terminology - specifically, “historically marginalized students.” As Gay (2010) explains, diversity, identity, and positionality are significant and multifaceted:

It is also important for authors and teachers to declare how they understand and engage with diversity. My priorities are race, culture, and ethnicity as they relate to underachieving students of color and marginalized groups in K-12 schools. Other authors may focus instead on gender, sexual orientation, social class, or linguistic diversity as specific contexts for actualizing general principles of culturally responsive teaching. It is not that one set of priorities is right or wrong, or that all proponents of culturally responsive teaching should endorse the same constituencies. (p. 52)

Following Gay’s example, we want to clarify that our focus is on students from racially minoritized groups (i.e., students of color), students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and linguistically minoritized students. We further detail these groupings - and how we operationalized them - within the methods section. We turn now to synthesize the literature pertinent to the research questions.

Literature Review

This study seeks to understand how educators throughout a district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice (CRP). There is a growing body of literature that explores the skills, strategies, knowledge, and mindsets that classroom educators and leaders require to serve effectively in schools whose populations consist predominantly of historically

marginalized students. In the subsequent literature review, we first describe the work defining CRP. This includes exploring literature on culturally responsive teaching, the centrality of race in culturally responsive practice, characteristics of culturally relevant pedagogy, how educators develop their CRP, culturally responsive leadership practices, and literature on culturally sustaining practice as subsidiary elements therein. We then turn to examine the literature on how districts influence changes in school practice generally. Finally, we explore literature related to our conceptual framework of sensemaking.

Culturally Responsive Practice

Culturally responsive practice exists within the larger framework and scholarship of multicultural education as originally theorized by Banks (1994) and further expanded upon over the years by Banks and several others including Banks et al. (2001), Gay (2002), and Nieto (1996). Multicultural education is a set of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students must develop in order to interact positively with people from diverse backgrounds (Banks et al., 2001). Relatedly, the theory of culturally relevant practice is grounded in three distinct propositions for outcomes: producing students who can achieve academically, producing students who demonstrate cultural competence, and developing students who can both understand and critique the existing social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p.474). In her study of teachers who successfully demonstrate cultural responsiveness, Ladson-Billings concluded that “the common feature they shared was a classroom practice grounded in what they believe about the educability of the students” (p. 484). Culturally responsive practitioners believe that all students, regardless of racial and cultural backgrounds, can be educated. Gay (2013) pointed out that this disposition is fundamentally different from the way that educational programs and practices have historically been designed for students of color.

According to Gay (2010), “Culturally responsive teaching is the behavioral expression of knowledge, beliefs, and values that recognizes the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning” (p. 31). Gay (2002) goes on to further describe culturally responsive pedagogy as:

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

She emphasized the impact on student academic outcomes, explaining that, “...academic achievement of ethnically diverse students will improve when they are taught through their own cultural and experiential filters” (p. 106). In essence, culturally proficient and culturally responsive teachers must actively draw from and engage their students’ cultural backgrounds in order to effectively teach them. This involves a tacit understanding of their students’ backgrounds, a recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of these cultures, and active resistance to deficit model thinking by working against negative stereotypes and bias. This is especially important as Gay (2013) noted that “Culturally responsive teaching requires replacing pathological and deficient perceptions of students and communities of color with more positive ones” (p.54).

Not all teachers engage in CRP - even though they themselves might self-identify as culturally responsive practitioners. As Warren (2013) found in his research on teachers’ culturally responsive interactions with Black students, it may sometimes be that “teachers who identify themselves as culturally responsive are either not clear about what it means to be culturally responsive...[or] maintain deficit perspectives of diverse youth” (p.175). It is therefore

critically important to aid educators in developing a clearer understanding of what CRP is, the characteristics of culturally responsive practitioners, and how they develop such practice.

The argument for CRP is further supported and reinforced by the changing demographics of U.S. public schools, particularly in light of the predominately White teaching body. As stated by Howard (2003), “The increasing degree of racial homogeneity among teachers and heterogeneity among students carries important implications for all educators” (p. 196). This disconnect between the racial identity of teachers (predominantly White educators) and an increasingly racially diverse student body (predominantly students of color) can result in cultural disconnects or racial mismatches that can impede successful CRP practice and further contribute to racial achievement gaps (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012). As such, the importance of racial identity in education must be considered.

Centrality of Race in Culturally Responsive Practice

The importance of considering race, particularly teachers examining their own racial identity as well as those of their students, is a key tenet of CRP. In their work applying a critical race perspective to culturally responsive teaching, Hayes and Juarez (2012) posited that culturally responsive pedagogy must talk about race and “address the sociopolitical context of White supremacy within education and society” (p. 4). Work by Milner (2017) argued that expanding conceptualizations of CRP since Ladson-Billings’ initial work have tended to downplay the significance of race. While lauding the expanded definitions’ attempts to encapsulate culture and ethnicity, he believes race must remain central stating, “Clearly, culture is not only about race; however, race is a central dimension of culture, and for some racial and ethnic groups, race is the most salient feature of their cultural identity” (p.5). His adherence to the centrality of race in CRP aligns with the findings of several related educational studies.

In another study on the role of race in education, McGrady and Reynolds (2012) analyzed the relationship between teachers' race and their perceptions of students of varying races. In an analytic sample of around 9,000 students of English teachers, and around 9,500 students of math teachers, they found that the effects of racial mismatch (when teacher and students racial identities differed) were significant and often depended on the racial/ethnic statuses of both the teacher and the student. Their findings show that, "Among students with white teachers, Asian students are usually viewed more positively than white students, while black students are perceived more negatively." (p.3). Their results demonstrate that even when controlling for differences in students' test scores, family socioeconomic status, and other school characteristics, Black students evaluated by White teachers often receive more negative ratings than White students evaluated by White teachers. The study concluded that "White teachers' ratings of students' academic ability and behaviors in the classroom appear susceptible to the racial stereotypes that depict Black and Hispanic youth as having lower academic potential and Asian youth as model students" (p.14). Given the disparate evaluation by White educators, coupled with the fact that most teachers are White, White teachers especially must examine how race impacts education and their work with students. As Boucher (2016) stated in his study of White teachers working with African American students: "if we are to close the gap in achievement between white and black students, we must focus on the people who are currently teaching those students, and the vast majority of them are white" (p.88). To be clear, this is not to suggest that White teachers are incapable of successfully teaching students of color. In his work examining White teachers in urban classrooms, Goldenberg (2014) stated, "I am not inferring that racial mismatch itself is inherently a problem...However, to be a successful White teacher in a non-

White classroom, White teachers must recognize students' nondominant culture and learn how to engage with it" (p. 113).

There are frameworks like universal design for learning (UDL) which are designed to help teachers differentiate their teaching practices to reach diverse learners. However, Kieran and Anderson (2019) caution that teachers who employ frameworks like UDL, but fail to recognize the significance of factors like race and culture when doing so, run the risk of reinforcing and exacerbating disparities in achievement between students of different races.

In his work examining how White teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies, Picower (2009) contended that, "...teachers' life experiences socialize them into particular understandings of race and difference" (p 197). Supporting this notion further, Howard (2006) stated in his reflective work on White teachers in multicultural schools,

...teachers must know about themselves before they can ever become transformative educators for diverse students...an unexamined life on the part of a White teacher [any teacher] is a danger to every student and the more I have examined my own stuff related to race, culture, and differences, the less likely it is that I will consciously or unconsciously expose students to my own assumptions of rightness...or my blind perpetuation of the legacy of White privilege. (p. 127)

In related work on the importance of race in teaching, Howard (2003) concurred stating that, "To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either positive or negative ways" (p.197). He expounded that race and culture are important concepts in teaching and learning and therefore, teachers must, "...reflect on their own racial and cultural identities and...recognize how these identities coexist with the cultural compositions of their students" (p.

196). That is to say, education involves the interactions that occur in that interplay between teacher identity and student identity. Howard continued that, “The racial and cultural incongruence between teachers and students merits ongoing discussion, reflection, and analysis of racial identities on behalf of teachers, and is critical in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners” (p.196). Having defined CRP, and detailed the importance of race therein, we now outline characteristics of what culturally responsive teaching looks like in practice.

Characteristics of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

Although using slightly different terminology from the previously described culturally responsive practice, Ladson-Billings provided a set of insights about culturally relevant pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (2009) identified and outlined several initial overarching characteristics of culturally relevant teachers. They “have high self-esteem and a high regard for others” (p. 37). They “see themselves as part of the community, see teaching as giving back to the community, and encourage their students to do the same” (p. 41). These teachers “see teaching as an art and themselves as artists” (p. 45). They “believe that all students can succeed” (p. 48), “help students make connections between their community, national, and global identities” (p. 52), and “see teaching as 'digging knowledge out' of students” (p. 56).

She goes on to offer several tenets of culturally relevant practice. First, in their classrooms, “Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in the classroom” (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 126). Second, “Students are apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way” (p. 127). Third, “Students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the ‘official’ curriculum” (p. 127). Fourth, “Teachers and students

participate in a broad conception of literacy that incorporates both literature and oratory” (p. 127). Fifth, “Teachers and students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo” (p. 127). And sixth, “Teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings” (p. 128). These observed characteristics exemplify the disposition toward practice required for students’ learning and empowerment.

Gay (2018) described several dimensions of different learning styles of students to which culturally relevant teachers attend: “procedural,” “communicative,” “substantive,” “environmental,” “organizational,” “perceptual,” “relational,” and “organizational” (p. 207-208). She argued that for teachers to effectively instruct students, they must be mindful of the individual differences and variations in each of these areas.

Hammond (2015) further distilled the elements of culturally relevant teaching and frames them in the context of brain science, outlining the profile of a “warm demander” (p. 97). She used this term to describe a teacher with both the disposition of deep belief in student potential and high expectations, as well as the effective pedagogical practices that enable all students to succeed. They thus both possess high “personal warmth” and demonstrate “active demandingness” (p. 99).

Hammond (2015) offered specific examples of how teachers accomplish such dispositions and actions. She noted that in building relationships, a warm demanding teacher explicitly demonstrates a “focus on building rapport and trust. Expresses warmth through non-verbal ways like smiling, touch, warm or firm tone of voice, and good-natured teasing” (p. 99). Along with demonstrating “personal regard for students by inquiring about important people and events in their lives” the teacher thus “[e]arns the right to demand engagement and effort” from the student (p. 99).

Meanwhile, on the instructional side, such a teacher maintains “high standards and offers emotional support and instructional scaffolding to dependent learners for reaching the standards” (p. 99). This enables the teacher to guide students to “productive struggle” (p. 99) necessary for learning. Hammond characterized the warm demander teacher who exhibits these dispositions and skills, saying they are: “Viewed by students as caring because of personal regard and ‘tough love’ stance” (p. 99). Having established the various traits that culturally responsive practitioners possess, we now turn to examine the research on developing such capacity.

How Teachers Develop Culturally Responsive Practice

In an early work on multicultural education, Campbell and Farrell (1985) identified five overarching categories of multicultural education. These categories were: “environmental/affective setting,” “subject competency,” “assessment,” “reporting progress and referrals,” and “learning strategy and materials” (p.139). While their study identified the various competencies in each category from a sampling of 54 teachers in the Dade County school district, they paid little attention to how these teachers developed these competencies. Subsequent studies over the ensuing years have attempted to examine the ways that teachers develop their cultural competency, many focusing on teacher education programs and how they address multicultural education with pre-service teachers (Sleeter, 2001; Garmon, 2004; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Garmon, 2005; Siwatu, 2007; Sandell & Tupy, 2015). Reviews of these programs, however, demonstrate varying levels of success. Existing literature shows that teacher education programs have struggled to effectively equip teachers with the necessary skills to effectively teach increasingly diverse student populations (Sleeter, 2001; Allen et al., 2017). Indeed, in an examination of the nearly 1,200 teacher education programs nationwide, Cross (2005) found that very few of them are truly grounded in a social justice framework that

forwards CRP. Moreover, as Ukpokodu (2011) noted in her work examining the development of teachers' cultural competence in teacher education programs, despite the quantity of research and scholarship on teaching and learning, teachers continued to struggle to teach diverse groups of students. She asserted:

Even as the scholarship on multicultural education has become pervasive and diversity standards are required, many candidates are graduating from teacher education programs without developing the cultural competence needed to be successful teachers in today's classrooms. (p.433)

Given the struggle to develop CRP in pre-service teachers, the role of principals in developing these practices becomes even more critical.

Culturally Responsive Leadership Practice of Principals

The way principals lead a school has major effects on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2004). Most critical is the way they shape a school culture that focuses on student learning and stimulates educator improvement (Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011). Furthermore, establishing a culture that is built on strong relationships with students, families, community members, and staff positively impacts students' success (Khalifa, 2013; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Given this information and the opportunity gap that exists for historically marginalized students, Khalifa (2018) argued that principals are "best positioned to ensure that aspects of schooling [...] become culturally responsive" (p. 53). It is for this reason that principals' culturally responsive leadership practice is critical.

Johnson (2006) furthered Ladson-Billings's CRP research to demonstrate the need for culturally responsive leaders who consider various historical, social, and political contexts when responding to the needs of their historically marginalized student populations. Culturally

responsive leaders lead in a way that ensures equitable opportunities to learn and in doing so think “about culture differently beyond celebrating and embracing diversity, to see culture as an active force of change politically, socially, and economically” (Lopez, 2015, p. 172).

Culturally responsive principals lead with an equity lens and intentionally challenge dominant epistemologies. Khalifa (2018) described culturally responsive leadership as a set of behaviors that promotes an inclusive school community that positively impacts historically marginalized students and families. He specifically identified four behaviors: “(a) being critically self-reflective; (b) developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula; (c) promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts; and (d) engaging students’ Indigenous (or local neighborhood) community contexts” (p. 13).

This research suggests the importance for leaders of majority-minority schools to understand how to support students, families, and teachers whose dominant culture differs from their own. Though this literature focuses on culturally responsive leadership, it is worthy to note its relation to social justice leadership. Theoharis (2007) defined social justice leadership as “principals mak[ing] issues of race, class, gender, disability, sexual orientation, and other historically marginalized conditions in the United States central to their advocacy, leadership, practice and vision” (p. 223). Culturally responsive and social justice leaders make intentional decisions to eliminate oppressive behaviors and structures in schools. Several empirical studies demonstrate how culturally responsive and social justice leaders establish an inclusive culture that challenges past inequities and supports the learning and growth of others.

Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies and Concluding Reflection

Because we examined various aspects of cultural responsiveness, from teaching to leading, and drawing on the ideas of various thinkers, we use the term culturally responsive

practice (CRP) to incorporate all of the threads above. As Paris and Alim (2017) noted, culturally sustaining pedagogy builds on previous “asset pedagogies” to further reject the “deficit approaches” of the past which “viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling” (p. 4).

Throughout the literature referenced above, a consistent theme was that culturally responsive educators have the capacity to reject deficit mindsets linked to the languages, cultures, and abilities of historically marginalized students, their families, and the communities in which they live. These educators embrace an inherent belief in the educability of all students, a willingness to challenge the status quo, and a willingness to reflect on how one’s identity informs practice. In addition to beliefs, the literature outlines the pedagogical skills required in the classroom. These include the ability to set high expectations while offering high levels of support, the ability to scaffold instruction, and the ability to bridge students’ lived experiences into classroom learning experiences.

While this literature offers valuable insight into the beliefs and skills required for closing racial achievement gaps, the focus of most of this research is at the classroom or school level. Building-level leaders and educators who have access to this knowledge base have the potential to shift school-level practice in meaningful ways, but there is little offered as to how districts can sustain this work throughout the school system. The next section describes research conducted on the ways school districts generally influence school-level practices.

District Administrators’ Influence on School Practice

Districts and district leaders are responsible for building the capacity of individuals and the district, writ large (Honig, 2008). Leithwood et al., (2000) synthesized results from three

qualitative multi-case study designed to identify the conditions that support (or fail to support) professional learning at various levels across school districts. They concluded that district and school leadership were most influential in fostering both individual and collective learning when districts' missions and visions prioritized continuous professional growth.

Whenever districts take on new initiatives, they benefit from building a learning infrastructure. For example, Florian et al., (2000) examined 15 districts from 13 states to evaluate the practices that contribute to successful policy implementation. The study explored both state-level and district-level strategies. They found that districts that emphasized eight specific strategies experienced a successful implementation process. Among them were practices similar to those found by Leithwood et al., (2000). These included placing an emphasis on building instructional capacity, supporting collaboration among teachers, evaluating the new practices being implemented, and aligning district finances to their goals.

A number of studies discovered similar results. Rorrer et al., (2008) further support the role districts can have in building teacher capacity throughout their organization. This study used a six-stage iterative narrative synthesis to propose a theory for districts to engage in systematic change that advances equity. They found, in part, that districts must intentionally build capacity. They noted three strategies as fundamental to building capacity: (a) communication, planning, and collaboration; (b) monitoring goals, instruction, and efforts through the use of data and accountability, and (c) acquiring and aligning resources. Similarly, Leithwood and Azah (2017) conducted a literature review and compiled a list of district characteristics linked to contributing to student achievement. They then measured the extent to which these characteristics influenced achievement in a sample of school districts in Ontario, Canada. The characteristics with the

strongest effects on student achievement were having a learning-oriented improvement process, having a clear mission, and using evidence to adjust practice.

The research above consistently highlights how districts can build capacity through a clear mission, strategic use of resources, and institution of a collaborative learning-oriented process for implementing new strategies. At the same time, some authors caution that this model of district leadership may not transfer easily into every context. For example, Rorrer and Skrla (2005) described successful leaders as policy mediators whose skill set should include relationship building, culture building (specifically, a culture of achievement), and flexibility (an ability to adapt policy to fit a local context). Trujillo (2016) extended this emphasis on the local context by warning how most district research ignores the systemic variables within communities that contribute to school outcomes: “Without also acknowledging the predictive power of contextual factors related to poverty, race, or distinctive historical realities...some of these studies shift attention away from...inequities that shape districts’ capacity” (p. 37). Most of the studies referenced above focused on enacting policies and practices that implement new standards (e.g., curriculum standards, student assessment standards, and accountability standards) that arise from federal or state mandates. These policies are often broad and fail to take into consideration the unique cultural, political, and socio-economic landscape in which a school district operates.

CRP acknowledges these local identities and aims to reframe them as assets to be nurtured as contributing agents to student learning. Our study sought to understand how such practices are enacted throughout a district. There is little research, however, exploring how to enhance high-leverage CRP throughout a school district.

Additionally, the research focused on supporting the CRP of building-level faculty and administration is lagging. In a review of empirical studies measuring the effects of in-service interventions that promote culturally responsive teaching, Bottiani et al., (2018) found only 10 studies that met their methodological criteria and thus were unable to make conclusions regarding patterns around the efficacy of such interventions. In addition to these challenges of measurement, there is little research that examines how school districts pursue a coherent and consistent application of CRP throughout their operations. Much of the literature focuses on school-level actors alone or in the context of teacher education programs.

Despite the broad array of literature on individual classroom and leadership implementation of CRP, research has not addressed how a district acts to strengthen CRP throughout its schools and classrooms. This gap in understanding how educators successfully develop their capacity, how school leaders support and evaluate CRP, and how districts broadly enact support of CRP comprehensively motivated the individual portions of our study.

Conceptual Framework

As the student population of public schools grows increasingly more diverse and increasingly different from the culture of school staff, it is critical for district and school leaders to understand how educators make sense of their responsibility to improve student outcomes for these students. As noted above, adopting a culturally responsive approach requires developing certain understandings and skills about how historically marginalized students learn and succeed. Sensemaking offers a frame through which we can examine how such understanding and skills develop within a district.

Sensemaking can be applied to a variety of sectors and organizations. It is frequently applied when analyzing an organization's experience in times of unpredictability, shifting

conditions, and emerging challenges (Weick, 1995). As school districts enroll growing populations of historically marginalized students, there are changing conditions and new challenges that educators must address in order to best serve their students. How individuals understand, interpret, and respond to changes in the situated context of their school setting plays a critical role in how educators implement reform efforts (Spillane et al., 2002). The social interactions that occur as a result of these changes also inform individual sensemaking (Weick, 1995; Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991; Maitlis; 2005; Coburn, 2006). In addition to how one's own positionality impacts their understanding and beliefs of race and culture, a change in the school's demography will alter how educators perceive the context in which they work.

Weick (1995) presented "sensemaking" as a means to understand the process of how individuals and organizations assign meaning to events. Weick's research focused largely on organizational disasters that initiate the process of people trying to make sense of unexpected events. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) examined a broad set of sensemaking literature to clarify the types of triggers that can prompt sensemaking, including "cues--such as issues, events, or situations--for which the meaning is ambiguous and/or outcomes uncertain." Such cues "interrupt people's ongoing flow, disrupting their understanding of the world and creating uncertainty about how to act" (p. 70). Weick, as well as Ancona (2012), argued that sensemaking consists of a continuous process that may be linear or nonlinear. Sensemaking "involves coming up with plausible understandings and meanings; testing them with others and via action; and then refining our understanding or abandoning them in favor of new ones that better explain a shifting reality" (Ancona, 2012, p. 5). In this sense, sensemaking presents a cycle of understanding, enacting one's understanding, and refining that understanding through interaction with others.

Organizational actors do not simply consume and interpret new information in one static exchange. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) used one university's implementation of a strategic plan to map out the iterative process by which leaders and stakeholders live through a dynamic change process. They explained how leaders provide information and guidance to key constituents (sensegiving), which is consumed and interpreted by their audience (sensemaking), who, in turn, communicate signals back to leadership corresponding to their levels of understanding, agreement, and capacity (sensegiving). As a result, the organization enters a cycle of sensegiving and sensemaking that allows for the mutual exchange of information, the refinement of strategy, and the targeted allocation of resources.

Similarly, in her study of three British symphony orchestras, Maitlis (2005) examined the social processes of organizational sensemaking. Her framework centers on the reciprocal and dynamic process of sensemaking and sensegiving to influence others' understanding of a situation. Building on the work of Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991), Maitlis concluded that organizational sensemaking is a fundamental social process where "organization members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively" (p. 21). She further asserted organizational sensemaking is informed by two distinct process characteristics: control and animation. These characteristics describe how heterogeneous groups interact throughout the sensemaking process. The amount of leader sensegiving is directly related to the degree of control exerted with the process. As such, when leaders use structured and consistent opportunities (e.g., performance evaluation, staff meetings, professional development) they can exert a high degree of control over the sensemaking process for stakeholders. Simultaneously, the level of stakeholder sensegiving animates the sensemaking process by signaling to leaders

how they understand the targeted concept. An animated stakeholder group increases the flow of information and the frequency of interactions pertaining to the targeted behavior.

Maitlis posited that the variance in both control and animation leads to four distinct forms of organizational sensemaking: guided, fragmented, restricted, and minimal. No one form of sensemaking is preferred; instead, she argues that the form rightly depends on the type of outcome sought. For instance, she described how guided organizational sensemaking is “particularly valuable in situations that require the development of a rich, multifaceted account that can be used as a resource for ongoing and spontaneous actions, such as establishing an organization’s core values” (p.47). Her quadrant framework offers a structure to examine the intersection of leader and stakeholder sensegiving within a sensemaking process.

Such a lens is important for our aim at understanding how educators understand and enact culturally responsive practice, because it demands a paradigmatic shift in their professional practice. The reciprocal and countless interactions between teachers, building leaders, and district leaders are central to sensemaking. The complexities of these interactions often lead to differences in the way individuals understand and interpret information. Similarly, CRP emphasizes the need for teachers and leaders to reflect on their own cultural experiences and perspectives to understand how their bias impacts and influences others. Therefore, sensemaking provides this research team with a systematic process to evaluate how district leaders, building leaders, and teachers make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice. We now turn to Chapter Two and a full description of our research design and methods.

CHAPTER TWO²

Research Design, Methodology and Limitations

This chapter presents the research design and methodology for the group study. To understand how educators throughout a district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice (CRP), we engaged in a qualitative case study. This chapter begins by outlining the study design. The site selection follows and includes a description of the process and parameters we used to identify the Massachusetts school district. Next, the data collection section details the specific information that was relevant to consider to support the research purpose. The chapter concludes by detailing the data analysis the team of researchers used.

The methodology explained here relates to the overarching group research. Specific methods for individual studies are detailed in Chapter Three.

Study Design and Site Selection

This study utilized a single site case study design in one Massachusetts school district as a bounded system (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This structure is particularly appropriate as the “boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident” (Yin, 2014, p. 16). As a bounded system, this district provided the context for examining the implementation of culturally responsive practice within a specific context. Specific site-selection and data-collection procedures will be detailed next.

We sought a mid-sized Massachusetts school district serving students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 for our research. Students in this state score high when compared to other U.S. states on many of the standardized testing measures used to identify domestic and international achievement gaps, like the National Assessments of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the

² This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Daniel S. Anderson, James J. Greenwood, Sarah L. McLaughlin, Jason W. Medeiros, Tina C. Rogers.

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). For example, Massachusetts students would score first among 35 participating nations on the PISA if it registered as an independent country, but the disaggregated scores of its Black and Latino students would leave it in the bottom quarter of this same sample (Massachusetts Education Equity Partnership, 2018). This tension between overall high achievement and persistent achievement gaps makes Massachusetts an ideal site for such exploration.

We initially narrowed our site search by prioritizing districts whose student population included at least 50% of students representing a historically marginalized population. We considered three dimensions of diversity: race/ethnicity, socio-economic status, and second language learning status. We operationalized these dimensions of diversity through standardized, publicly available demographic data collected by all districts and published by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Racial, socio-economic, and linguistic definitions and indicators are defined by the state.

Further vetting of potential sites included considerations of district size (total enrollment), avoidance of potential bias, and geographic location. We sought a district with a total enrollment between 2,000 and 16,000 students to provide the critical mass to have a sufficient number of district-level administrators and likely more than one elementary school. Additionally, a district of this size allowed researchers to examine various school-level practices. To minimize bias, any districts where members of the research team currently work or had direct experience were removed from consideration. Lastly, with all five members of our team being situated in Boston or the Greater Boston area, districts were eliminated from consideration based on practical concerns.

The initial analysis and filtering process yielded 18 potential districts. We removed districts with active superintendent searches. The team then reviewed the websites of these districts to gain insight into how, if at all, CRP had been implemented or prioritized. Districts with no references to culturally responsive practice were removed, resulting in seven possible district sites. We continued vetting the finalist sites and sought the willingness of district and school leadership to participate in the study. We settled upon a mid-sized Massachusetts school district, referred to by the pseudonym Sunnyside. We turn now to detail our data collection process.

Data Collection

As qualitative researchers, we collected narrative and visual data (Mills & Gay, 2019). Being “the primary instrument” for data collection, we bring subjectivity and bias that influences this work (p. 16). Therefore, to establish validity and credibility of the study, the team of researchers “practice[d] triangulation to compare a variety of data sources and different methods with one another in order to cross-check data” (p. 560). The research team relied primarily on four data sources: documents, interviews, a survey, and observations. Individual studies used different combinations of these data sources, further detailed in Chapter Three.

Data collection began with introductory meetings with district staff to familiarize ourselves with the site and its context. We also used that opportunity to seek documents and to schedule further data collection through interviews and observations.

The team established an audit trail in the form of a process log to ensure the dependability of the data collected (Mills & Gay, 2019). The process log was maintained in a shared document. Here we created an explicit record to track our research progress. For example,

we date-stamped each entry, logged the data source, location of the work, researcher, and specific observations or reflections.

Document Review

The research team began with a document review in order to examine how the district described its efforts regarding culturally responsive school practice. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) explained how documents have the ability to serve a number of purposes. Most pertinent to our study are documents' ability to "furnish descriptive information," "offer historical understanding," and "track change and development" (p. 182). This initial document review provided us with a descriptive backdrop of how the district positioned its public stance on CRP.

We developed a protocol (Appendix E) that enabled us to identify and code documents that met our criteria for promoting a shared understanding of CRP. The team began by first reviewing district public websites and documents hosted there, and by requesting three years of district improvement plans, district professional development plans, and school-site plans. Specifically, we sought documents that included language referring to CRP. This included language referring to "cultural competency," "cultural proficiency," "diversity," "multi-cultural practice" or similar or related terminology. We asked the district to provide any such documents that articulated the district's stance on CRP. The team used results from this review to further the document review by requesting materials from district trainings, district-wide community meetings, school-based trainings, or school-based community meetings. Additionally, following a specific request, we received a sample of de-identified teacher evaluation documents. If the above-referenced documents did not explicitly reference CRP (or similar terms), the team asked district and school-based leaders about the existence and availability of such documents. These documents provided insight into district understanding and context of CRP, and informed

preparation and protocols for interviews as well. Individual team members sought out additional documents unique to their area of focus.

Interviews

We conducted 34 semi-structured interviews. Table 2.1 displays the list of interview respondents. Semi-structured interviews provided the team with the flexibility of the wording of interview and probing questions which enabled us to respond to interviewees (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 2.1

Participants Interviewed

Level of Organization	# of Respondents	School Level (Elementary)	School Level (Secondary)
District Staff	7	N/A	N/A
School Leader	8	5	3
Teacher	19	13	6
Total	34	18	9

We used nonprobability sampling, specifically purposeful sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019) to identify interview participants. Specifically, we aimed to interview district-level administrators, including, but not limited to: superintendent, assistant superintendents, and directors or coordinators who work with building administrators and/or teachers. We ultimately included all schools across the district that were richly diverse across four criteria: racial, cultural, economic, and linguistic. We interviewed building leaders and teachers from each school.

We then employed snowball sampling (Mills & Gay, 2019) to identify teachers who were identified by principals and district leaders as exhibiting CRP. In snowball sampling, “...the process begins by asking well-situated people: ‘Who knows a lot about _____? Who should I talk to?’” (Patton, 1990, p.176). Specifically, we engaged building leaders first, asking them to identify teachers who they perceived to be especially competent and effective in working with diverse student populations and then requested that those participants identify further teachers. We also asked principals to send their faculty a weblink to a brief screener survey that introduced our research study and offered teachers an opportunity to connect with us directly. This approach yielded three interviews. This survey can be found in Appendix F.

The research team developed three interview protocols. We created one each for district leaders, school leaders, and teachers. To guide the semi-structured interviews, all researchers used protocols tailored to the purpose of the individual studies and to the interviewee's role. To establish a relationship with interviewees (Weiss, 1995), researchers began by introducing themselves and asking general questions about the interviewee's role and prior experience. Subsequent questions were designed to elicit participant perspectives that pertained to research questions. Protocols appear in Appendices G-I.

To refine the validity of interview questions and ensure questions elicited responses that aligned with the study's purpose, the research team used cognitive interviews (Desimone & Carlson Le Floch, 2004). We piloted the protocols with educators from other school districts. We then asked probing questions to explore the interviewee's understanding of the question's intent. This process allowed us to improve the interview protocols so that they better realized the research questions.

Prior to beginning each interview, researchers explained the purpose of the study and then asked participants to sign an IRB approved statement of informed consent (see Appendix J). To increase participants' comfort levels, administrator interviews were conducted in their offices (or other appropriate space) and teacher interviews were held in a private location in their respective buildings. While the interview duration varied slightly, most interviews spanned 30-45 minutes. Each interview was audio recorded (unless consent to record was not granted) and later transcribed. We took notes during interviews when we were not granted consent to record.

Online Survey

Educators in the district were also offered the opportunity to respond to questions offered via an online survey. This survey allowed our team to cast a wider net and reach a larger number of educators than would be possible through conducting interviews exclusively. The survey was constructed in the program *Qualtrics* and was administered to district and building leaders during a district leadership meeting. Subsequently, building leaders were asked to administer the survey to teachers in their respective buildings by distributing a link to the survey via email. Table 2.2 presents the list of respondents.

The survey focused on educator understanding and enactment of CRP. Questions included likert scale types as well as “check all that apply” questions. The survey protocol is Appendix K.

Table 2.2

Survey Respondents

Level of Organization	# of Respondents	School Level (Elementary)	School Level (Secondary)
District Staff	8	N/A	N/A

School Leader	6	4	2
Teacher	19	18	1
Total	33	22	3

Observations

The team observed district-based or school-based professional development related to CRP during the time of the research project. According to Maxwell (2009), observations can help rule out “spurious associations” drawn from interview data and provide varied data that rely less on inferences from “researcher prejudices and expectations” (p. 244). We further requested to observe two leadership meetings to examine how district leaders support principal learning. Highly descriptive field notes were collected during observations with a focus on noting early impressions, key remarks, phrases, and interactions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Observations specific to individual studies will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three. Appendix L contains the general observation protocol.

For professional development sessions, researchers functioned as observers rather than as participants, knowing that “The researcher’s observer activities are known to the group; participation in the group is definitely secondary to the role of information gatherer” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 145). Depending on the format of observed community meetings, the team adopted the role of participant-observer if we deemed the context as one that would help us “gain insights and develop relationships with participants that would not be possible” if we otherwise did not engage in the program (Mills & Gay, 2019, p. 549).

Data Analysis

For the purpose of this qualitative case study, we drew on constructivist epistemology to explore how participants make sense of a common phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Constructive, or interpretive research, “assumes that reality is socially constructed; that is, there is no single, observable reality (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 9). Specifically, we used sensemaking theory to understand how educators and administrators within a racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse Massachusetts school district make sense of and enact CRP.

The research team employed a coding regime for all data. We considered a code to be “a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (Saldaña, 2013, p. 3). Coding encompassed data from all sources: document review, interviews, survey, observations, and field notes, so that patterns or contradictions were identifiable regardless of the data source.

The research team began the coding process by generating a list of codes prior to data collection. This initial process offered the opportunity for the team to begin to articulate what the sensemaking process might entail for a district’s CRP. Strauss (as referenced by Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 58) suggests four categories of codes to start with: “conditions,” “interactions among actors,” “strategies and tactics,” and “consequences.” Each of these categories informed our application of the conceptual framework. For example, how actors understood the local context of the district informed the sensemaking process in the district. These variables fell under the category of “conditions,” and initial codes included “change in district leadership” or “student demographic change.”

Once we began to collect data, we culled a subset of the data, and team members coded discrete units of data individually. Individuals compiled initial codebooks that evolved over time. As more data was collected, more codes emerged that caused us to reflect on our established codes. Patterns emerged that allowed us to group codes into categories. We used criteria from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to guide and check our process of categorization. Our categories

were “responsive,” “exhaustive,” “mutually exclusive,” “sensitizing,” and “conceptually congruent” (p. 212-213). These reminders served to make the process systematic and organized.

Throughout this iterative process, individuals ensured that their codebook maintained a structure. This structure was informed by our sensemaking framework as well as the relative magnitude and frequency of the codes and categories themselves. The codes were recorded in a consistent format, defining for each code: code name, description, inclusion criteria, exclusion criteria, and typical and atypical exemplars (Saldaña, 2013). We used analytic memos as tools when we conducted fieldwork and then coded them when appropriate.

We utilized several CAQDAS packages for qualitative research and coding. This provided infrastructure as well as analytic approaches such as code frequency analysis. Some coding was done by hand before entry into the database. The analysis adhered to strict ethical standards. We coded all participant data and refrained from drawing conclusions from incomplete analysis.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. As the case study focused on one specific district in Massachusetts, results may not be entirely generalizable. However, given the number of mid-sized districts within the state with substantial populations of marginalized students, we view our findings as both relevant and timely. The qualitative design of the study was subjective and bias potentially affects research findings. To minimize bias, researchers triangulated findings to ensure validity and reliability. Finally, the timeframe of our doctoral program limited the scope of our research. We maintained a deep commitment to the process, to the opportunity for learning, and to providing the selected district with useful findings.

The topic of CRP can be perceived as sensitive as it encompasses issues of race, culture, and diversity. As our interviews collected self-reported information, it is critical to consider the social desirability effect on answers provided. While the topic can be sensitive, no educator interviewed expressed or displayed discomfort with the questions.

This study faced a few limitations that arose during data collection. First, in terms of sampling, some groups had more complete and representative participation than others. While all district administrators with relevant experience and all instructional coaches were participants in the study, not all secondary department heads were interviewed. Additionally, the teacher sample was sizable, but had a particularly high concentration of educators whose content area is English as a Second Language. While their views are important, it is possible that a teacher sample that included interviews with a more proportional representation of content areas would have been different. However, none of the patterns identified in these findings emerged only from ESL teachers or with ESL teachers providing the preponderance of the evidence, so the conclusions appear not to have been skewed by their active participation.

The reciprocal and ongoing nature of sensemaking presents a challenge of researching it over a relatively short period of time. In her intensive study, Maitlis (2005) embedded herself as a researcher for a period of two years. Conversely, our research was bounded by several months and the limited availability of data collection time. The small number of observations conducted potentially limited our ability to capture the fluid and ongoing nature of sensemaking. Future research would be well served to include more observations of opportunities for sensemaking and sensegiving.

The understanding and enactment of culturally responsive practice by educators in Sunnyside, holds applicability to other districts. Beyond Sunnyside, there are 102 other districts

in the state within the 2,000 to 5,000 enrollment size range. However, the profound population shift to a majority of marginalized students over the past 20 years could be a limiting factor as few other districts have experienced this degree and pace of change. Moving forward, given the national demographic shifts occurring throughout the United States, more districts could be faced with this phenomenon that was a predominant trigger for educator sensemaking in Sunnyside.

CHAPTER THREE³

HOW TEACHERS MAKE SENSE OF THEIR CULTURAL PROFICIENCY

The importance of culturally responsive teaching has been well-documented as a key component in effectively teaching in U.S. public schools (Banks, 2001). This goal is made more challenging by the ever-changing racial demographics of public schools. Enrollment in U.S. public schools shifted from 64.8% white in 1995 to 51.7% white in 2011 and the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) projected that by 2021 the proportion of students of color will exceed 55% of K-12 public school enrollments (NCES 2017) and are already the majority groups in some districts (Chen, 2020). While the U.S. student body is increasingly racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse, the teaching population does not mirror this same diversity. As a whole, K-12 teachers are still overwhelmingly white and predominantly female (Howard, 2003). According to recent NCES figures, in 2015-16, 80% of U.S. public school teachers identified as white and 77% of teachers identified as female (NCES, 2017). Many teachers, therefore, are working with students who do not share their same racial, cultural or ethnic backgrounds.

The racial mismatch between teacher and student backgrounds can result in cultural miscommunications which impede the academic success of marginalized students (McGrady & Reynolds, 2012). Many teachers enter public school classrooms unprepared to successfully teach students of color (Blanchett, 2006, p. 27). There is an urgent need for teachers who can adequately meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population (Sleeter, 2001). Some teachers are undeniably more successful at the task of educating diverse student populations than others. How are these teachers in particular able to effectively teach students across various lines of difference?

³ This chapter was individually written by James J. Greenwood

This group project sought to explore how educators and administrators within a racially and culturally diverse Massachusetts school district learn about, implement, and assess culturally responsive practice. In this context, the purpose of this individual study is to explore teachers' views on how they have developed their cultural proficiency. I was interested in how teachers developed their culturally responsive practices (CRP), and more specifically, their capacity to effectively teach students from historically marginalized groups (i.e. students from racially minoritized groups or socioeconomically disadvantaged groups). Was this capacity something certain teachers had innate disposition for, or was it learned behavior that others could develop over time. More pointedly, this individual study sought to understand the question - how do teachers *make sense* of the process by which they developed their own culturally responsive practice?

In a research study on teacher preparation, McAllister and Irvine (2000) pointed out an inattention to how teachers develop intercultural competence. This study addresses gaps in understanding and literature by interrogating both how teachers develop their own cultural proficiency and culturally responsive practices and how teacher-leaders might anticipate teacher perspectives when designing professional development and pre-service programs.

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

This literature review will focus on two particular bodies of knowledge: 1) literature on culturally responsive practices and 2) literature centering on the selected conceptual framework of sensemaking.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching exists within the larger framework of multicultural education as originally defined by Banks (1994) and further expanded upon over the years by

Banks et.al (2001). Multicultural education is a set of knowledge, attitudes, and skills that students must develop in order to interact positively with people from diverse backgrounds (Banks et. al, 2001). This is directly connected to theories of cultural or intercultural competence. Relatedly, the theory of culturally relevant pedagogy is grounded in three distinct propositions for student outcomes: 1) producing students who can achieve academically, 2) producing students who demonstrate cultural competence, and 3) developing students who can both understand and critique the existing social order (Ladson-Billings, 1995). In identifying the prerequisite conditions for culturally responsive teaching, Gay (2010) noted that “[s]tudents *must* [emphasis added] experience academic success, develop and/or maintain contact and competence with their primary cultural heritages, and learn how to critique, challenge, and transform inequities, injustices, oppressions, exploitations, power, and privilege.” (p.51).

In her study of teachers who successfully demonstrate cultural responsiveness, Ladson-Billings (1995) concluded that “the common feature they shared was a classroom practice grounded in what they believe about the educability of the students.” (p.484). The crux of CRP is a deeply-held belief that all students, regardless of racial and cultural backgrounds, can be educated (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Gay (2013) noted this disposition is fundamentally different from the way that educational programs and practices have historically been designed for students of color. Embedded in this sentiment are *culturally responsive interactions* between students and teachers that similarly acknowledge the dignity and value of students’ cultures. According to Warren (2013), “culturally responsive interactions...can be viewed as student-teacher interactions that directly cater to the social and cultural needs, norms, realities, experiences, and preferences of racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students.” (p.176).

In work on multicultural education, *The Identification of Competencies from Multicultural Teacher Education*, Campbell and Farrell (1985) identified five overarching categories of competencies for multicultural education: environmental/affective setting, subject competency, assessment, reporting progress and referrals, and learning strategy and materials (p.139). While their study identified the competencies in each area from a sampling of 54 teachers in the Dade County school district, little attention was paid to how these teachers developed these competencies. Were these competencies innate, or were they acquired? This again points to the research gap that I explored in this individual study.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

For the purpose of this study, I used Gay's (2002) definition of culturally responsive pedagogy:

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

Essentially, culturally proficient teachers must actively engage their students' cultural backgrounds in order to successfully teach them. This involves forming an understanding of their students' backgrounds and actively resisting deficit-model thinking by working against negative stereotypes and bias. This is especially important as Gay (2010) noted that “[c]ulturally responsive teaching requires replacing pathological and deficient perceptions of students and communities of color with more positive ones” (p.54). Again, this emphasis on academic outcomes is what distinguishes culturally responsive teaching. As Gay (2010) succinctly stated,

rather than focusing on problems, “culturally responsive teaching is more about finding solutions to achievement disparities” (p.54).

Despite best intentions, not all teachers engage in culturally responsive practices, even when they might self-identify as culturally responsive practitioners. As Warren (2013) found in his research, it may sometimes be that, “teachers who identify themselves as culturally responsive are either not clear about what it means to be culturally responsive and/or still “maintain deficit perspectives of diverse youth” (p.175). The need for culturally responsive practice is critical in light of changing demographics of schools and the lack of racial diversity in teaching staff. As stated by Howard (2003), “The increasing degree of racial homogeneity among teachers and heterogeneity among students carries important implications for all educators” (p. 196). As such we must ask whether teacher cultural competency can be increased, and how? I turn next to what the literature says about changing teacher cultural competency and capacity.

Developing Teachers Culturally Responsive Practice

Having established the necessity of CRP, it is crucial to better understand how teachers develop and grow these practices. In their study measuring change in intercultural competence among K-12 teachers, DeJaeghere and Cao (2009) utilized the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to assess changes in teacher intercultural capacity as a result of a district professional development. Their findings suggested that “...not only can intercultural development positively change among educators who participate in guided professional development, but it can change considerably.” (p.444). Moreover, they found that “...this professional development need not be an intercultural immersion experience outside of one’s own cultural community; schools can create developmentally appropriate training that provides

new knowledge, skills, and experiences.” (p. 446). Change is possible, and it is important to consider what types of PD experiences result in changes and what critical components make these experiences successful.

Centrality of Race in Teacher Reflection. Culturally responsive practice draws on critical race theory in that it requires an understanding of race and its ongoing significance in U.S. society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p.48). Warren (2013) stated “Teachers who employ culturally responsive practices in their work comprehend the influence of race and ethnicity for shaping how students define and express culture...” (p.176). Further, Howard (2003) expanded, “To become culturally relevant, teachers need to engage in honest, critical reflection that challenges them to see how their positionality influences their students in either positive or negative ways” (p.197). White teachers especially must reflect on their white racial identity. More than just reflection, Boucher (2016) argues that white teachers must interrogate their whiteness through the understanding of privilege and actively move towards a place of antiracist behaviors (Boucher, 2016,p.89). Boucher (2016) expanded, “This process of interrogating whiteness begins with acknowledgment of White privilege and examining the history of race in America.” (p.89). Again, with the majority of K-12 teachers being white, it is crucial that they explore their racial identity and life experiences.

Picower (2009) contended that teachers’ life experiences shape their understanding of race and difference (p 197). And Howard (2003) expounded that race and culture are important concepts in teaching and learning and therefore, teachers must “...reflect on their own racial and cultural identities and...recognize how these identities coexist with the cultural compositions of their students” (p. 196). Education involves the interactions that occur in that interplay between teacher identity and student identity. Howard (2003) continued that, “The racial and cultural

incongruence between teachers and students merits ongoing discussion, reflection, and analysis of racial identities on behalf of teachers, and is critical in developing a culturally relevant pedagogy for diverse learners.” (p.196). This self-reflection dovetails nicely with one of the key aspects of the sensemaking framework, further supporting its use as the framework for this study.

Unfortunately, not all teachers have the necessary skills, capacity, and proficiency to effectively teach the increasingly diverse students in K-12 public schools. Fortunately, research demonstrated that it is possible to grow teachers’ cultural proficiency, it is important to understand how educators who are particularly successful at teaching diverse populations developed their practice. Especially in developing teacher CRP, there must be an acknowledgment of the centrality and impact of race in U.S. education. Teachers themselves can offer insights into the optimal conditions for this professional growth, and how they make sense of their growth can inform ways to help others become culturally proficient educators who serve all students. I now turn to an examination of the literature on sensemaking theory.

Sensemaking

Sensemaking theory contends with how individuals make meaning of their experiences. Sensemaking involves taking in information from multiple sources of data, selecting frameworks and interpretations, and reflecting on both old and new information to offer plausible explanations for phenomena (Ancona, 2012). A final step is how circumstances are comprehended and then turned into action affecting decisions moving forward. Sensemaking is intricately linked to identity as individuals struggle to make meaning of the world and integrate this meaning into how they see themselves and their contexts. Moreover, “[s]ensemaking is distinct...in that it is concerned with making retrospective meanings of experiences” (Irby, 2018,

p.6). Sensemaking allows people to look backward to make meaning of past experiences in light of present-day interpretations.

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) observed that “efforts at sensemaking tend to occur when the current state of the world is perceived to be different from the expected state of the world...” (p.409). In education, well-documented research attests the ways that historically marginalized groups experience less academic success than their white middle-class peers. As Sleeter (2001) stated, “Education in many communities of color, as well as many poor White communities, is in a state of crisis. Students are learning far too little, becoming disengaged, and dropping out at high rates.” (p.94). Given this, one could infer that the current status of education, particularly for marginalized populations, is not as educators would hope it would be. This disconnect between the current state of education and an ideal one draws a direct connection and justification for using sensemaking as a framework for this study.

Additionally, Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) stated, “Sensemaking involves the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing” (p. 409). In the case of this study, the *what* under review is culturally responsive practices. The focus of this study, then, is *how* teachers make sense of it. As Ancona (2012) explained, “Sensemaking involves coming up with a plausible understanding—a map—of a shifting world...” (p.3). Through interviews and introspection, I asked teachers to create a proverbial map - a plausible understanding - of how they became culturally responsive teachers.

Bertrand and Marsh (2015) contended that “...teachers’ sensemaking in the present may influence their beliefs and how they understand the past, including past student outcomes” (p.866). By asking teachers to participate in a reflective process, we allowed them to employ their own framework and offer their own perspectives and insights rather than those imposed by

researchers. Moreover, by asking them to reflect on their experiences, specifically within districts serving historically marginalized students, we challenged teachers to better understand their role and agency in student outcomes. This reflection can help teachers to abandon deficit model thinking, removing culpability from marginalized students and their communities for their academic struggles and achievement gaps. I now turn to the methodologies used to address the questions in my individual study, including how I approached, analyzed, and collected data.

Methods

This individual study utilized a qualitative methodology to address its research questions of how teachers developed their CRP. Qualitative methods are well-suited to the study of dynamic processes, especially where these processes are constituted of individuals' interpretations (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Hinings, 1997, as cited in Maitlis, 2005 p. 23). Because qualitative research typically examines issues from the perspective of the participant (rather than from that of the researcher), it is especially appropriate, and therefore frequently used, in the study of organization members' constructions and accounts (e.g., Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Isabella, 1990, as cited in Maitlis, 2005 p. 24). I solicited information using semi-structured interviews, a teacher survey, and reflective journaling to gather data.

Site Selection

I conducted a qualitative case study of 7 schools within a particular Massachusetts school district, referred to by the pseudonym, Sunnyside. (See Chapter Two for details on district and school selection process). In terms of the adult population, we sought a population of teachers that represented the demographic norm within Massachusetts. For my specific component, I initially sought to focus primarily (though not exclusively) on teachers who identified as white racially and/or teachers (regardless of their race) who were identified by teacher-leaders and/or

by their peers as especially skilled at working with racially diverse student populations. The Sunnyside district staffing by race is 75.6% white teachers and 24.2% teachers of color.

Initial Communication

This study involved communicating with school and district leaders via email, a survey questionnaire, and in-person meetings. As I was interested in working with a particular subset of teachers, *purposive sampling* was an appropriate selection method. According to Patton (1990) “The purpose of purposive sampling is to select information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study.” (p.169). I utilized a combination of purposive sampling methodology including intensity sampling, snowball sampling, and criterion sampling. Intensity sampling involves information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon of interest intensely (but not extremely). In this study, the information-rich cases and criterion were specific teachers who were deemed effective culturally responsive teachers. To collect this purposive sampling, I utilized elements of criterion sampling and snowball sampling techniques. In criterion sampling, “[t]he logic...is to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance.” (Patton, 1990, p.176). In snowball sampling, “...the process begins by asking well-situated people: “Who knows a lot about ____? Who should I talk to?” (Patton, 1990, p.176). I surveyed principals and district leaders, asking them to identify teachers they perceived to be effective in teaching diverse student populations. In each communication, I asked principals to identify teachers they believed to be particularly strong multicultural practitioners. According to Patton (1990) “[t]hose people or events recommended as valuable by a number of different informants take on special importance.” (p.176). I then sought to interview identified teachers via face-to-face meetings or over the phone in semi-structured, recorded interviews. These teachers also identified other teachers. A total of 25 interviews (16 teachers and 9 school leaders) were

conducted from throughout the Sunnyside district. While the primary focus of this study was on how *teachers* developed their culturally responsive practice, interviews for this study were also conducted with the superintendent and school leaders in the district. However, as it relates to the superintendent and school leaders shaping and implementing the priorities in the district on CRP, it is worth noting their experiences with and impressions on the development of their culturally responsive practice. Moreover, the superintendent and these school administrators all began their careers as teachers and continue to draw heavily upon those early career experiences. As such, I share sentiments from their interviews alongside interviews from teachers on their sensemaking around CRP. These comments are embedded alongside the teachers comments in the findings section and not highlighted unless specifically noted. Distinctions between teacher and leader responses in the online survey results are also noted.

Interviews

This next qualitative aspect of the study involved conducting interviews where identified educators recounted their educational journeys and identified aspects of their professional training they believed crucial in developing their CRP. To further explore this question, I asked teachers and educational leaders to reflect on their backgrounds and how their undergraduate, graduate and/or pre-service education prepared them to effectively teach diverse students. Teachers were asked to recount any professional development experiences provided by school or district leaders that supported this development.

Interviews were especially helpful in gathering direct qualitative data from respondents to answer research questions (Weiss, 1994). As sensemaking calls teachers to reflect, their perspectives on their own educational journeys were important. As stated by Weiss (1994), "... [the interviewer] will want the respondent to provide concrete descriptions of something he or

she has witnessed. This includes both things and events external to the respondent and the respondents' own thoughts and feelings.” (p.66). The specific events I sought concrete descriptions of were those that the respondents felt contributed to their CRP development.

To ensure consistency across interviews, our team utilized common interview protocols. Given the protocol's semi-structured nature, there were some questions asked of some sampling members that were not asked of others. The protocols included questions developed and refined by our research team. Sample questions from the protocol included: What does culturally responsive teaching mean? Can you give an example of CRP from your practice? How did you develop your CRP? A comprehensive list of interview questions can be found in Appendix I.

I conducted initial rounds of interviews that focused on each teacher's professional journey narrative and offered respondents an opportunity following their interviews to follow up in writing (reflective journaling) with any additional items they wished to share and expand upon. Recognizing that some educators might prefer written expression to oral interviews, I offered this narrative journaling opportunity as a tool for provoking sensemaking introspection and collecting teacher narrative. As Irby (2018) noted: “Sensemaking processes ground action by enabling organizational members to achieve comprehension through turning circumstance into words and texts.” (p.6).

Online Survey

Educators were offered the opportunity to respond to questions via an online survey as detailed further in Chapter Two. A total of 35 respondents completed the survey. Whereas respondents in interviews were selected via snowball sampling, the survey was open to all educators in the district. Though survey respondents were not exclusively from my study's target

audience of teachers with strong CRP, these comments provide a valuable backdrop and point of comparison for general teacher sentiment in the district.

Data Analysis

After collectively conducting the 25 interviews (9 leaders and 16 teachers), I examined the interview data by employing an open coding process to uncover emergent themes across the different narratives and utilizing a priori codes. I used my research questions and conceptual framework to identify categorical codes for this. As stated by Saldaña (2013), “A code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data.” (p.3). Some codes included “cultural immersion” whenever respondents referenced cultural immersion experiences; “race” whenever a respondent mentioned their or their students’ race; and “professional development” whenever a respondent referenced any school or district professional development initiatives. Based on initial research on cultural competency, other practices that emerged as codes were references to international travel or experiences being in a minority. I conducted a content analysis of results from the interviews and surveys to identify recurring themes. The research team documented the entire process in a shared electronic journal and process memo.

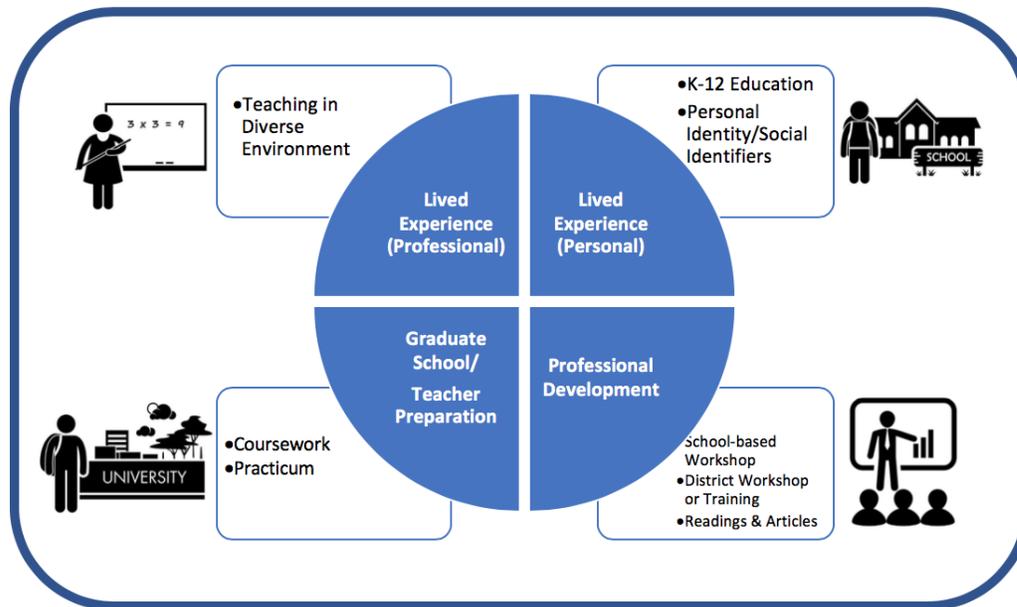
Findings

In the following section, I described trends emerging from interviews conducted with educators and drawn from responses to the survey administered to district educators. These responses addressed the research question of how educators make sense of how they developed their own culturally responsive practice.

Influences on Teacher Culturally Responsive Practice

Several recurring themes emerged across respondents to answer my research question. I grouped these influences into four categories as follows: Lived Experience (Professional), Lived Experience (Personal), Graduate School/Teacher Preparation, and Professional Development

Figure 3.1.
Key Influences on Teacher Cultural Competency Development



(see Figure 3.1).

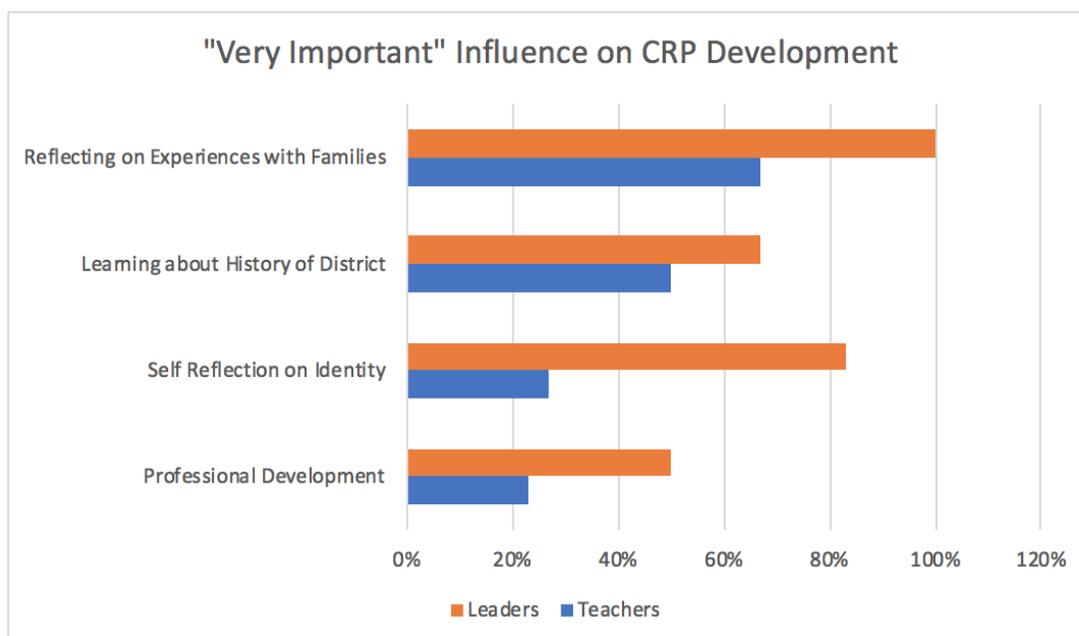
Lived professional experiences included experiences like teaching in diverse school environments or communities where students from minoritized groups were a majority or where the teacher's social identity differed from their students. Professional experiences differed from lived personal experiences which had to do with various aspects of the educators' own personal backgrounds and social identities. When discussing their lived personal experiences, teachers discussed their K-12 academic journeys and shared memories of experiences in their own education. Several teachers also reflected on their personal and social identifiers, like how their race, gender, ethnicity, first language, and/or immigrant status shaped their experiences. Other

respondents discussed their graduate school and teacher preparation experiences. These experiences included specific coursework on various multicultural education topics and student-teaching or practicum experiences. Finally, teachers referenced professional development experiences. It's worth noting the distinction between lived professional experiences and professional development. Lived professional experiences were things that occurred in the normal course of executing their teaching roles. Professional development experiences referred to programs and initiatives that were specifically designed to build professional capacity, including discussion groups, school-based workshops and trainings, and district supports and initiatives. Some also mentioned PD like conferences or workshops led by external organizations.

I further detailed each influence and its impact below. They are presented in descending order as indicated by teachers, with those influences cited most across teacher interviews appearing first. The first category discussed (lived professional experiences) appeared in 12 of the 16 teacher interviews whereas the final category discussed (professional development) appeared in 6 of 16 teacher interviews. In the category of professional development, there was a significant difference between the responses offered by teachers and leaders via the online survey. A comparative representation of the relative importance teacher respondents and leader respondents ascribed to various influences via the online survey appear in Figure 3.2.

As shown in Figure 3.2., 67% of teachers responding to the survey described reflecting on their professional experiences with students and families (coded as lived professional experiences) as “very important” in shaping their CRP. This was followed by another 50% of respondents who described learning about the people and history of the district (coded as lived professional experiences) as “very important” in shaping their CRP. The third highest influence

Figure 3.2.
Educators Ratings of Influences on Culturally Responsive Practice



cited by teachers was reflecting on their own cultural identity (coded as lived personal experience) which 27% of respondents described as “very important”.

It is worth noting where the responses from educators and leaders differed. While education leaders agreed with teachers that reflecting on their experiences with students and families was the most influential factor on their practice, with 100% of leaders citing it as “very important”, these education leaders were more likely to cite reflecting on their own cultural identity as the next highest influence with 83% citing it as “very important” compared to only 27% of teachers rating it as such. Educational leaders rated learning about people and history of the district as the third-highest influence on the development of their CRP with 67% of respondents rating it as “very important”.

Lived Professional Experiences

Lived professional experiences were the category of influences most mentioned in interviews on how teachers developed their CRP, being mentioned in 21 of the 25 interviews (12

of the 16 teacher interviews and all 9 of the education leaders' interviews) and were similarly rated as the primary influence in our online survey of educators. In the survey, both teachers and school leaders cited reflecting on their experiences with students and their families as the most important factor influencing their CRP with 67% of teachers and 100% of school leaders citing it as "very important". Lived professional experiences included "on the job" experiences teaching in diverse communities or immersive cultural experiences like participating in international programs where they lived and taught abroad.

Immersive Cultural Experiences. One theme within the group of lived professional experience involved immersive cultural experiences like teaching overseas as an influence on the development of their culturally responsive practice. One respondent described how working abroad influenced her beliefs: "I went to Chile for six months...so I feel like that really opened my eyes to the fact that...they lived this completely different way of life that was also awesome, and equally as awesome as my life in the United States. It really shifted my perspective."

Another teacher cited their experience in the Peace Corps:

I learned a lot about cultural understanding from that. From me being the person in a different culture having to learn a new language. So when I came back, I was working in a bilingual class, I had a very different perspective from before...I had traveled some, but I hadn't like *lived* in a place...So I feel like it made me see things differently...

Relatedly, another teacher shared her international teaching experience as an influence in learning to work with students from a different background stating: "I taught English in Thailand. So when I went over to Thailand, the kids there were very different from kids in America. And it was so interesting because they could not be more different." Most significantly,

however, a majority of respondents mentioned how their “on the job” learning was the primary influence in developing their CRP.

"On the job" Training. Another theme within the group of lived professional experience involved learning acquired in the daily practice of their teaching role, or “on the job” training as a major influence in their CRP development, with this specific phrase being used in 5 of the interviews. In response to a query about how they developed their CRP, one respondent stated: "...[I] feel like I didn't have a complete understanding of that [CRP] until I was in it and doing it". Echoing this comment, another educator offered:

When I was 20 and started teaching, I did not have this understanding of it [CRP]. But also just on the job training. Just the way I learned to manage my classroom when I was 22, I don't see it as appropriate now...But you learn, and grow, and you look back and realize and it's on the job training.

When asked to expand upon what "on the job" training looked like, one teacher explained: “I think it was a lot of just me making the connections with the parents...I think most of it came just from on the job experiences.” This harkened back to the teacher responses in the online survey where 67% of teachers described reflecting on their experiences with students and families as “very important” in the development of their CRP. In describing the influences on their CRP, another respondent ranked their answers saying: "Number one is [teaching] experience. I've worked here [in Sunnyside] a long time and I've seen the demographics change..." Multiple teachers specifically referenced working in the Sunnyside district, with its changing racial demographics, as being another majorly formative experience.

Working in Sunnyside's Changing Demographics. Another theme within the group of lived professional experience involved respondents referencing working in the Sunnyside district

itself as an influence on the development of their CRP. Addressing the topic of the town demographics, one teacher remarked:

Being here in [Sunnyside] for 18 years, the dynamic...the demographics of the population have changed, even within my 18 years. I started when the community had more of a, say, Jewish population. And it's quickly transitioned into a population that's more Haitian, Cape Verdean, Vietnamese populations. And that Jewish piece is that the Jewish population isn't necessarily there anymore.

Another teacher shared this perspective, and noted how their teaching shifted with demographic changes: "Because [Sunnyside] has changed, and I've worked with families and kids...[Sunnyside] has educated me immensely." An elementary school teacher similarly noted: "When you work in [Sunnyside], it is very, very diverse. And I actually love that about [Sunnyside] because it's very interesting. You're always learning something new about a different culture." These observations on the changing demographics of Sunnyside are supported by a review of demographic data for the town and district. As shown in Table 3.1, while the total population of the town has increased slightly over the last 40 years, the percentage of the population identifying as white has decreased by more than 50 percent, dropping from 85.4% in 1990 to 40.7% in 2018. Conversely, the percentage of people of color in the town more than

Table 3.1

Demographic data from Sunnyside (decennial Census Data 1990-2010, US Census estimates 2018)

Town of Sunnyside - Population	1980	1990	2000	2010	2018
Total Population		30,093	30,963	32,122	34,398
White		85.4%	62.8%	41.6%	40.7%
Black or African American		8.2%	20.9%	38.3%	39.2%
Asian		5.5%	10.2%	12.5%	12.4%
Hispanic or Latino (of any race)		1.8%	3.2%	6.4%	7.9%

doubled, rising significantly from 15.5% in 1990 to 59.9% in 2018. Not only are these demographic changes evinced in the town population, they are manifested in the town's student population. As shown in Table 3.2, while the white student population dropped from 65.9% in 1994 to 11.7% in 2018, the population of students of color increased from 33.8% to 83.1% in that same time period.

Table 3.2
Student enrollment data from Sunnyside (Source: MA DESE District Profile)

School Enrollment Sunnyside	1994	2000	2010	2018
Total Population	3,935	4,158	2,851	2,737
White	65.9%	49.2%	20.1%	11.7%
African American	17.8%	31.4%	51.5%	49.9%
Asian	10.1%	12.3%	16.5%	17.5%
Hispanic	5.9%	6.7%	8.5%	15.7%

Another teacher succinctly summarized these demographic changes and both the challenge and influence they had on staffing: “There is a tension in [Sunnyside] between what the town used to look like and what it looks like now. And I think the staff is really reflective of what the town used to look like.” Table 3.3 displays Sunnyside's current staffing data by race. The teaching population of 75% white educators is indeed more closely aligned with the town's racial demographics between the years 1990 and 2000 - twenty to thirty years ago.

Lived Personal Experiences

Table 3.3
Staffing data by race from Sunnyside (Source: MA DESE District Profile)

Staffing Data by Race Sunnyside	2019	%
Total Population	432	100%
White	326.8	75.6%
People of Color	104.9	24.2%
--African American	62.3	14.4%
--Asian	16.1	3.7%
--Hispanic	16.5	3.8%
--Multiracial	9	2.1%
--Native American	1	0.2%

Lived personal experiences were the category of influences the second most frequently mentioned as impacting how teachers developed their CRP. In describing their lived personal experiences, more than half of respondents 14 of 25 (9 of the 16 educators and 5 of 9 administrators) mentioned how their personal identity and social identifiers influenced their teaching. As one teacher commented:

In order to really think deeply about culturally responsive practice in education, you need to think deeply about culturally responsive behavior in general. And a lot of that involves identity politics. How do people identify...It's really important for people to self-identify, and to do personal exploration about what groups you are a part of and how that impacts you personally...

Another teacher offered: "The way that I approach [CRP] in my teaching is a really good combination of who I am as a person, and how I've grown as a person."

One teacher indicated that it is not just lived experience in general as a teacher, but particularly experience working and living in communities with marginalized populations. Yet another educator referenced their experience in the Peace Corps in Thailand alongside later work in a large, predominantly student of color, inner-city district. Their following quote alluded to the ever-present intersection between teachers' lived personal experiences and lived professional working experiences:

I think it comes a lot from life experience, for sure. Having lived overseas for three and a half years in the Peace Corps in Thailand. So I think life experience first and foremost. Then, of course, my education. My work in [large urban district] was very informative. We were in an inner-city high school so we had a lot of primarily - a Latino high school - but a lot of African-American students and Asian students too. And we had to learn to

work within that community. So I would primarily say life experience but then, my life has been made up of my profession too.

In alignment with the literature on CRP, this educator identified demonstrating a level of respect for those minoritized communities, demonstrating a sense of humility when engaging with them, and recognizing the inherent value, worth, and dignity of those communities as key behaviors and attitudes of successful culturally responsive teachers.

Referencing their own educational background and hometown, one respondent stated: “I think just how I was raised, the schooling, that I went to school in New York City...” More specifically, the lived experience the teacher identified were experiences in one’s historically marginalized identities. She felt that lived experience as a person of color or as a woman provided valuable insights for empathizing with the experience of students and families in the district.

Significance of Race and Ethnicity for People of Color. Race was an especially significant influence mentioned by multiple respondents. It should be noted that respondents who were themselves people of color, each commented directly on their racial or ethnic identity. One educator of color shared their belief that one’s own lived experience serves as a primary driver in determining a teacher's capacity in CRP stating: “It’s my personal experiences growing up as a black male...As a person of color growing up in a predominantly white town, those experiences molded a lot of my thoughts, negative and positive. Those experiences are why I went into education.” When asked the question of where her understanding of culturally responsive teaching comes from, an educator who identifies as a black woman started by acknowledging her academic learning, but then immediately moved her personal background with schools and education: “Oh, I think I've done a lot of studying. But you know, from a personal perspective as

sort of going back to my 'why,' very early in life." When asked about the types of experiences that influence them, another teacher of color's immediate response referenced their race and ethnicity stating: "Some of it's my own [background], so I'm Cape Verdean..." Another respondent of color similarly remarked on her racial and ethnic identity as a major influence on her practice stating: "It's based on my perspective I would say...using those experiences I have as a Filipino and then encouraging [students] to bring in their experiences as part of their culture." Yet another teacher remarked on the intersection of race, nationality, and ethnicity: "...growing up as a first-generation Chinese in the traditional household and knowing that my life was different and that I kind of toed the line of being American and Chinese and struggling between one or to be both. Um, both were equally important." Another respondent similarly sighted her racial identity and relationship as a primary influence on her practice: "Most of it is just years of experience. I'm an African-American. I was born and raised here, but my family has a strong Caribbean background and I married an African."

All respondents who identified as people of color referenced their race and ethnicity directly and cited it as being a key influence on the development of their CRP. One teacher described how his race influences how he executes his role. "I take my responsibility seriously so students can see themselves represented in the faculty - so students can see a black male in this role. It's why I wear a suit every day. There are hardly any teachers of color. There are a lot of paras of color, but not a lot of males and teachers of color."

Despite indicating the impact of one's racial identity in their comments, one educator of color also clarified their belief that sharing a marginalized identity does not necessarily guarantee that teachers possess strong CRP. While it can serve as a point for empathy with students with a shared background, they believed that having certain marginalized identities does not inherently

translate into having more culturally responsive practices. Commenting on the complexity of identity, one educator shared:

...the assumption should not be that because we're talking about this work [CRP] that if you're white you don't get it and if you're black you do get it. I mentioned two black teachers who identify as white, one because she was adopted by a white family and the other one because she grew up in an area where she was the only one and she feels like culturally, she's white.

Additionally, another educator of color stressed their belief that culturally responsive practices were not only about issues of race but more broadly around issues of access:

...what we found very quickly is for us [in the district], when we talk about culturally responsive teaching, it immediately becomes about race. And we're really trying to shift the idea that culturally responsive teaching isn't [only] about race, and that it's really about *access*. So, we're talking a lot more now about equitable access. Because it gets to the same point.

It should be noted that in our survey of educators in the district, school leaders were more likely than teachers to cite reflecting on their cultural identity (coded as lived personal experience) as “very important”, with 83% of leaders ranking it as such compared to 27% of teachers viewing it as “very important”.

Significance of Race for White Teachers. Although race was an especially significant influence in the development of educators’ culturally responsive practice mentioned by multiple respondents, the responses differed between white educators and educators of color. For white respondents, some mentioned how growing up in racially homogeneous predominately white environments left them with little interracial interaction in their lives. Indeed, more substantive

interracial interactions did not come until they were working in diverse environments. One respondent stated: "I think that's what brought part of me to [Sunnyside] was having that opportunity to have that diversity. I come from [hometown]. It couldn't be any more of a white suburban community...I think part of the appeal of working here was that there was that diversity piece." Another white teacher noted the contrast between Sunnyside and their hometown as a motivator for working in the district: "I grew up in [hometown], which is very wealthy, white, upper-middle-class, a not diverse area...And for me, that really influenced me going forward and made me want to become an educator". Acknowledging the impact of their white racial identity on their teaching, one respondent noted: "I really have tried to make a concerted effort to keep in my mind that you need to be on top of this [CRP] because I don't reflect my student body, I don't reflect my student population and I need to be sensitive to that and recognize that." Another teacher remarked on the importance of acknowledging race as a white educator stating: "There's no way this work [CRP] can't be done and there's no way I can sit here as a white educator in front of a population of students of color and not make this my priority."

While some white respondents mentioned their race directly, others either failed to mention it at all or mentioned it obliquely - only in reference to how their race differed from that of their students. One teacher remarked:

Because I teach students of color, I know that there's a lot of implicit biases that might come out of my mouth or just in my actions that I'm not thinking about...I know what I look like and just because my intentions are good, it doesn't mean my actions necessarily are. So I have to be really hyper-aware of that.

Another white teacher commented upon similarities he sees with his students, but also acknowledged the limitations of that connection when it comes to being from a different race: "I

identify a lot with my kids because I was also raised in a single-parent family with a working mom...So that's like one thing you know, I identify close to the kids. But then also when the kids look at me, I know they don't see that." I should point out that this sentiment could be an example of deficit-model thinking and illustrative of how this teacher is thinking about CRP. While it is not possible to know for certain whether this teacher viewing their students as coming from single-parent homes is an assumption based on stereotypes or if it is truly reflective of the specific demographics of their classroom, the sentiment did exhibit some clear deficit orientations.

Another white teacher acknowledged the barrier that their race can pose when working with students of color stating: "That's something that I struggle with having only worked in communities that are high percentages of people of color is everything they get from me is coming from the oppressor...I have to really work to show them that I am working against that role." This sentiment expressed a level of racial identity awareness that was not demonstrated by most white respondents. This awareness of racial significance can develop over time, as one white teacher explained when commenting on the evolution of her understanding over her career. Learning opportunities can be missed in the time it takes for that awareness to mature:

I spent this long part of my career so laser-focused on these kids but I never ever thought of them as kids with cultural, racial, religious class. I just saw them as this pool of kids that I was trying to help...and it's sad when I look back on it because it was really obvious. And I think that was very much of the sort of school of thought of just sort of like 'love everyone and I don't see race. It doesn't matter to me. I don't see race.' Thus, of course, I overlooked so much that I could have helped kids some more with, but I didn't, I was oblivious.

Significance of Ethnicity for White Teachers. White teachers who were either immigrants, the children of immigrants, or grew up in ethnic enclaves referenced how their cultural background and ethnicity was part of shaping their CRP. One teacher shared: “I am a first-generation born...sort of that having one leg in American cultural and - for lack of a better term - one leg in Lebanese culture, and how it’s so amazing, but can be so conflicting...so being a person who’s lived that life, I just know.” Another teacher mentioned growing up in an area where everyone shared a similar white ethnic identity: "I'm from a town where there's not that much difference of people. Everybody was the same Irish or Italian as me and you didn't see a lot of diversity in the schools." Another teacher similarly mentioned her upbringing as both a first-generation Greek student and English language learner:

English is not my first language. I’m Greek. I grew up in a Greek household. Greeks bring in their own understanding of what education means. We have our own culture, our own understanding of how the world works...I like to bring in my background with the kids and I welcome them bringing their background. Yes, it has influenced me.

While those white teachers with a strong ethnic identity were more likely to comment on race, it should be noted that *all* respondents who identified as people of color referenced their race and ethnicity directly.

Graduate School/Teacher Preparation

Teacher preparation was the third most prominent category teachers identified as impacting their development of CRP (see Figure 3.2). Less than half (10/25) of respondents (7 of the 16 educators and 3 of 9 administrators) mentioned their professional education during their interviews, whether it was their graduate, undergraduate, or practicum and student-teaching experiences. The significance of CRP work in education programs differed drastically between

respondents whereas there was more internal unity in the comments offered in other sections.

While one respondent felt it was a significant focus of her education stating: “I think it’s [CRP] been hammered into every class I’ve ever had on teaching” another shared that it was not a significant component of their work sharing: “I don’t remember much of what I learned in college. I don’t know that I really use a lot of it. It’s trial and error, this job is trial and error”.

This was mirrored by another respondent who offered their prior experience teaching in a large urban district being more valuable than their professional schooling: “...teaching in NYC, I think just being around various different cultures throughout my career has given me more of that understanding. It *definitely wasn't* a focus in my college coursework.” Another teacher similarly cited a lack of CRP in their undergraduate experience. When asked about her preparation in engaging with students from diverse backgrounds, this teacher shared:

In my undergraduate, I feel like I wasn’t prepared to deal with that [CRP]. I feel like depending upon where that particular professor had taught prior to becoming a college professor, they think: ‘Oh well, it’s very rare that you would get a student like that’...I just think it wasn’t in my undergraduate and I don’t feel like I was prepared to really take these kids in and make them successful.

Differing from the majority of respondents, one teacher cited her graduate experience as having an influence of greater impact than her professional experience. When asked about the source of her CRP, she indicated: “Sort of through experience, but mainly when I started doing my masters. I started really researching the connection between language and identity, and how impactful it is on second language learners especially, or anyone from another culture...So I think my master’s program brought a lot of that out.” Another teacher mentioned a course taught by a

Japanese-American professor in their graduate program who pushed students to explore lessons on other cultures sharing:

One class that I took was a social studies class and the teacher was Japanese American. He really helped people in the class look at the Japanese American experience, because it was something different that a lot of people hadn't really thought about...After that particular class and just being around a lot of different people from all different cultures, there was always discussion about that stuff. So that did help...

Another teacher cited the difference between her undergraduate and graduate experiences:

Undergrad, I would say, didn't help at all. But my graduate program, I think, did a good job of making sure that we knew the populations that we were working with. And I also think because I was working in a school at the time, it was easier to apply things right away. Versus like when I was in undergrad, it was just like, it was all kind of theoretical.

Another teacher mentioned her graduate work in English as a second language (ESL) courses as shaping her CRP. While some teachers referenced specific educational experiences influencing their work, a larger number reflected that their graduate work had minimal or no influence on their current teaching practice. Indeed, some referenced the negative impact of these experiences and how they provided them examples of things that they did not want to do in their teaching.

One teacher referenced a negative experience with their directing teacher from their student-teaching experience stating: "Sometimes it's like what *didn't* happen...so practicum...was not very good, actually I learned what I *don't* want to ever do." In both this category and in the professional development category, some respondents provided examples of experiences that negatively impacted their CRP.

Professional Development

Among the categories of lived personal experiences, lived professional experience, and teacher education, professional development experiences were the category of influences least mentioned as impacting teachers' development of CRP. Whether experiences were external PD opportunities, district initiatives, or school-based programs, slightly more than half (15 of 25) of those interviewed cited professional development experiences as having some influence on the development of their practice. Six out of sixteen teachers referred to professional development in shaping their practice, making it the least-cited influence by teachers. In contrast, all nine administrators indicated that professional development had impacted their CRP development. As shown in Figure 3.2, school leaders were more than twice as likely as teachers to cite the impact of professional development on the evolution of their practice in our survey of district educators. While 50% of leaders felt external professional development was "very important" only 23% of teachers felt that way. Examples of more individualized professional development experiences included things like reading articles and books on CRP or participating in book discussion groups. One teacher shared: "I spent time personally trying to educate myself, whether it be through my summer reading books that I choose, to conversations I have with other people." Another respondent who identified as white remarked:

I spend a lot of time reading about or just reading media that is from the perspective of people of color...I think it's valuable to explore that space because I hear a lot of white voices most of the time...Even here in [Sunnyside] the most diverse town in the state, we don't represent professionals of color very well.

One teacher cited the positive impact of a district workshop stating:

So there was, actually, the cultural workshop I went to on Haitian Creole. And that was the first time I learned that some parents might actually consider it insulting to be sent

something in Haitian Creole, because in their culture and in Haiti, French is considered more sophisticated. So if you're being sent something in Haitian Creole, it's like they're assuming you're uneducated.

This comment offered valuable insight into the complexity and nuance of how CRP can be interpreted. Some could view translating documents into Creole as an attempt at making information accessible and an example of CRP. However, there can potentially be drawbacks to actions depending on how they are received and interpreted by families. Impact may not be in alignment with intent.

Other forms of informal professional development included talking to other teachers about best practices and teaching strategies. Providing additional examples of external and school-based PD, others mentioned workshops, professional visits, and attending conferences as sources of CRP influence. In our survey of district educators, 24% of teachers cited external professional development as having a "very important" impact on their teaching. For example, several teachers mentioned a specific professional development experience of a school visit to the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia; a private school known for its dynamic culturally responsive practices:

I think they're really aware that our students are unique and are all coming from different populations, and being able to watch those teachers and participate in the professional development where they are really focusing on learning from that culture from where the students are from and how we're going to implement that in the classroom.

Another educator pointed to the impact of external professional development experiences in growing CRP. This teacher referenced the National SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity) Project as a shared experience for teachers in the district. As stated in their mission,

the SEED Project “partners with schools, organizations, and communities to develop leaders who guide their peers in conversational communities to drive personal, organizational, and societal change toward social justice.” Reflecting on the experience, she shared:

...that was where my beginning introduction to equity conversations happened...We started doing SEED in the district. And one by one, we started to see teachers trickle in. We ended up with about 25 of us in the meeting. But it was about a six-month process, or it might have been a full year. But we really started ... because what we realized is, people will listen.

It must be noted that some respondent’s references to professional development were to comment on how ineffectual they found it or what little impact it had on influencing their CRP. One teacher shared: “...we've had PD in the past. I want to put that down [as an influence] but it's like number three on my list of where I get my information...” This teacher placed professional development behind lived experience teaching in the district and talking with other teachers about their practice. When asked whether district or school-based PD offerings have influenced them, another teacher responded frankly: “To be honest, no. Nothing that really stood out, to be honest. It was one and done PD and then that was it. When these people come in for one day and you're like, okay, check that box.”

The topic of professional development was one area in particular where there were distinct differences between the responses of teachers compared to those of school leaders. Principals and school leaders were far more likely to cite the influence of PD opportunities on the development of their CRP than were teachers as shown in Figure 3.2. Only 24% of teachers cited external professional development as having a “very important” impact on their CRP compared to 50% of school leaders.

In summary, lived professional experiences which involved educator's experiences teaching in diverse school environments or settings where the teacher's social identity differed from that of their students emerged as the greatest influence on the development of teacher's CRP. While other influences emerged, the degree of their influence varied between teachers and school leaders. In fact, for every category listed in the survey, education leaders consistently rated the influence of that factor higher than teachers. I now turn to discussion to provide a summary of key findings and consider implications for future research and practice.

Discussion

Though responses varied among respondents, interviews suggested multiple sources contributing to the development of culturally responsive practice. Professional work that involved immersion experiences like teaching abroad was identified by some as an influence in developing CRP while others identified influences such as significant personal experiences like interracial relationships, or perceived marginalization in aspects of their own social identity. Others identified undergraduate and graduate coursework on multicultural practice as an influence. Each of these influences was referenced across the various teacher interviews conducted, though the perceived value and weight of their influence varied depending on the respondent. No one respondent identified all elements, and some teachers described how some of these interventions were either missing from their experience or were actively unhelpful in their development.

My findings are consistent with past research and literature that suggests multiple sources contribute to the development of culturally responsive practice. Coursework on multicultural practice was identified by some scholars as an effective training tool in developing teacher cultural capacity (Burstein & Cabello, 1989), while other sources identified graduate work that

involved a field experience (Sleeter, 2001), cultural immersion experiences like study abroad opportunities (Canfield, Low, & Hovestadt, 2009), significant personal experiences like interracial relationships or working for social justice in interracial organizations (Johnson, 2002), or perceived marginalization in aspects of their own social identity like one's race or gender (Johnson, 2002) as impacting CRP.

Implications

This study attempted to discover how teachers deemed to be strong culturally responsive practitioners made sense of how they developed their culturally responsive practice. Some implications from these findings begin to emerge. First, those educators with strong CRP might be utilized in a greater capacity to inform and influence the development of other district teachers. This could include serving as mentors for teachers with less-developed CRP or serving as consultants with school and district leaders in both hiring and professional development design. If lived professional experience is one of the key drivers of teachers with exceptional culturally responsive practice, schools and district leaders should seek to hire teachers who have had varied and prior experiences working across lines of difference with minoritized populations. If teachers did not have strong CRP components in their teacher education programs or graduate work, district teacher induction programs could include courses studying the demographics of the community to understand the races, ethnicities, and cultures of the students they will be serving.

Additionally, if teachers identify their lived professional experiences working in diverse communities as one of the primary drivers in developing CRP, then it would benefit teacher preparation programs to intentionally require such opportunities for teacher certification. It might also imply that teacher training programs include practicums in multiple settings that require

teachers to obtain experience working in multiple and varied communities. Given how few respondents referenced their teacher education, whether it be at the undergraduate or graduate level, teacher preparation programs at both levels could benefit from scrutinizing their curriculum for how well it incorporates work on CRP development. They might also consider polling their graduates working in education fields about the quality of preparation and how well the programs prepared them for working in diverse environments.

The findings of this study would not only be of interest to leaders of teacher preparation programs, but also to school and district leaders in charge of hiring teachers. Interview questions and screenings might probe for teachers who have had teaching experiences in diverse environments. Moreover, teachers should be asked to explicitly reflect on how teaching in these settings has shaped their practice; what they have learned from their students, families and communities; and how they went about learning about those populations. Finally, with so few teachers identifying professional development as key to their development, district and school leaders must better scrutinize how PD opportunities are structured and better design them to influence the work of teachers to serve the learning needs of all students.

CHAPTER FOUR⁴

Discussion, Recommendations, and Implications

This study examined how educators in the Sunnyside School District make sense of what it means to be culturally responsive and how they enact that understanding in their various roles. Employing a sensemaking framework, the five members of our research group each examined a specific area of district practice and investigated how stakeholders approached culturally responsive practice (CRP). Specifically, Rogers (2020) focused on district administration support of principals' culturally responsive leadership practice; Anderson (2020) focused on district administrator understanding and influence on educator CRP; Medeiros (2020) focused on how school leaders and teachers utilized supervision and evaluation to construct a shared understanding of CRP; McLaughlin (2020) focused on CRP as it relates to educators' family engagement practices; and Greenwood (2020) focused on how educators perceived their development related to CRP.

We conducted this case study in the Sunnyside School District, a district in Massachusetts, serving between two and five thousand students Pre-K to 12. Sunnyside's enrollment is composed of almost 90% students of color, nearly half of whom are classified as economically disadvantaged, and between 10 - 20% as English Learners. The demographic makeup of the student population has become markedly more diverse in the last two-to-three decades. (See Chapter Two for a full description.)

⁴ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach of this project: Daniel S. Anderson, James J. Greenwood, Sarah L. McLaughlin, Jason W. Medeiros, Tina C. Rogers.

In this final chapter, we answer our overarching research questions by presenting the common themes that emerged from our individual findings as well as implications for practice, policy, and research.

Synthesis of Shared Findings

The most prominent finding across all of our studies was that educators in Sunnyside did not operate with a shared understanding of CRP. While there were some similarities in the ways that district administrators, school leaders, and teachers discussed issues of equity, school leaders and teachers developed individualized understandings of CRP in the absence of a common definition from district leadership. Educators then enacted those understandings in varied, inconsistent ways.

Moreover, in the absence of a single espoused definition of CRP, other ideas and frameworks that are understood as district initiatives served as proxies for CRP. For example, when asked about their understanding and enactment of CRP, educators referred to the universal design for learning (UDL) framework and used its components to explain CRP. In addition to UDL, educators often connected the framework of CRP to positive behavioral interventions systems (PBIS) and social emotional learning (SEL), all of which were the focus of professional development initiatives in Sunnyside. Educators of all roles followed this pattern. Additionally, educators connected CRP to the value of equity that is espoused in the district from the top level of leadership. This focus on equity as a proxy for CRP may derive from the direction given by district leadership. In conversation, the Sunnyside superintendent shared a belief that culturally responsive practices were not only about issues of race but more broadly around issues of access.

The absence of a district-espoused definition of CRP, however, did not lead to a dearth of educator sensemaking; in fact, several distinct patterns formed around CRP sensemaking. The

following sections outline triggers in the Sunnyside district that prompted educators to interpret CRP on their own, and the behaviors that they displayed while interpreting these triggers and engaging in behaviors they believed to be culturally responsive.

Sensemaking Triggers within Sunnyside

How organizational leaders respond to sensemaking triggers impacts the organization's capacity to process, understand, and respond coherently to change. Such triggers include "environmental jolts and organizational crises," "threats to identity," and "planned change interventions" (Maitlis & Christanson, 2014). Maitlis (2005) characterized responses to these events as having varying levels of control (the extent to which leaders structure opportunities to guide understanding) and animation (the extent to which stakeholders participate and engage in the sensemaking process). Our data revealed three triggers that spurred educators in Sunnyside to make sense of what it meant to be culturally responsive: (1) demographic changes within the student population, (2) frequent turnover in superintendent leadership, and (3) investment of resources towards implementing UDL practices. Together, these changes jolted how educators saw their responsibilities to educate historically marginalized students in Sunnyside and have animated considerable amounts of sensemaking. After describing each of these triggers, we evaluate them in the context of Maitlis's framework and describe how efforts to control and animate understanding of CRP informed its enactment.

The Demographic Change of Sunnyside

A desire to understand how to support the diversity of Sunnyside's student population arose as a consistent theme in the data. Interview participants used language of "old" and "new" to articulate the difference between Sunnyside's pre-2000 demography (a predominantly white, ethnic European population) to its current racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse

composition. These responses conveyed apprehension amongst educators of all racial and ethnic backgrounds about how the district as a whole was meeting the needs of its students. While most participants named “diversity as a strength” of the district, teachers within Sunnyside expressed feeling on the frontline of this demographic change. Contributing to their sensemaking around Sunnyside students was the perception of consistent negative media attention of the district and, more generally, the sentiment in the community that the schools were now “second rate.”

Educators acknowledged a need for the district to respond to Sunnyside’s local context and explore the racialized environment inside and outside of the school system. A school system’s ability to respond strategically to racial demographic change, such as the one experienced in Sunnyside, requires leaders to reflect on how personal, professional, and organizational identities contribute to practices that are not aligned to the needs of the new populations entering the school system (Evans, 2007). The racialized perceptions in the community made it challenging for the district to address CRP because, as one district leader put it, racism “feels like it’s very much alive in [the] community.”

Tensions in District Leadership

Tensions in district leadership were the second prevalent trigger that spurred Sunnyside’s sensemaking of CRP. One form of tension stemmed from steady turnover in the district office leadership team (four superintendents in nine years). Frequent leadership transitions created few opportunities for educators to internalize and incorporate practices tied to a unified, lasting vision for teaching and learning. When sensemaking opportunities did arise, leader sensegiving was inconsistent and varied. The educators who have remained through these changes lamented that models of CRP either have not carried over across leaders or have not been defined at all.

In addition to the challenges caused by multiple leadership transitions, educators described damage caused by the poor leadership skills of some of these past administrators. Educators used phrases like “scary” and “reign of terror” to describe prior leadership. These previous experiences left some teachers feeling “attacked,” and subsequent leaders expressed having to “fix” the conflicts that arose from these moments. Such repair work was done at the expense of building new and different approaches to teaching Sunnyside’s students. As a result, school leaders expressed feeling alone and responsible for supporting the educators in their buildings through the issues related to the demographic changes referenced above. School leaders longed for a district culture that allowed for open conversation to occur, one where educators are “talking about race and just how it impacts kids, and how it impacts teachers.”

District Commitment to UDL

A third trigger that arose as a contributor to CRP sensemaking in Sunnyside was the district's continuing commitment to incorporating UDL as an instructional strategy. UDL, a set of classroom-based planning practices that enable access for diverse learners, was highlighted in the district’s Instructional Practice Guide (developed in 2017). Educators explicitly connected the focus on UDL and access to a larger focus on equity. This comprised the district’s tiered system of instructional support, along with SEL and PBIS. Elements of UDL, SEL, and PBIS also appeared in the district’s Instructional Monitoring Tool (updated in 2019, under the new superintendent), a classroom observation protocol intended to calibrate observations and norm school leader feedback. These practices have been the focus of leader sensegiving, and educators have had multiple opportunities to think about, adopt, and practice the pedagogical skills that contribute to these models. When asked to describe their understanding of CRP, educators frequently referenced components of UDL along with references to SEL and PBIS.

Though UDL and CRP have some commonalities, such as the belief that barriers to equitable access lie within educational systems rather than as deficits in students, they should not be conflated (Kieran & Anderson, 2019). Both frameworks require educators to understand students' individual needs and proactively remove barriers that are embedded in the systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. However, without intentionally acknowledging personal bias and considering how racial, cultural, and linguistic differences affect student learning, the differentiation within UDL may not be responsive to the unique needs of historically marginalized populations. The conflation of UDL and CRP surfaced in conversations with Sunnyside educators as they pivoted to more technical language tied to instructional practice and away from matters concerning beliefs about students' racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities. Thus, the use of UDL, or even of equity, as an explanation for CRP impinged on complete understanding of the latter.

The messaging that equity and UDL were about more than just race had the unintended consequence of diminishing the consideration of race and culture in educators' enactment of their practice. The UDL focus diluted the commitment to reflecting on one's own identity and how that identity informs one's beliefs and practices related to supporting historically marginalized students, crucial elements of CRP. As Weick (1995) posited, when sensemaking creates and maintains coherent understandings, collective action is enabled. In findings across the individual studies, action was neither collective nor consistent in Sunnyside.

Assessing the Sensemaking Processes within Sunnyside

A district leader can perform sensegiving by creating structures and systems that build efficacy toward the district's mission and vision (Leithwood, 2010) thus engaging in controlled sensemaking of the organization (Maitlis, 2005). These sensegiving opportunities can both

inform how district stakeholders understand key messages and provide opportunities for stakeholders to contribute to the organization's learning. It is the dynamic interplay between enactment, environment, and sensegiving that "differentiates sensemaking from interpretation" (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014, p. 84) and shapes the way practice and beliefs are adjusted and become accepted. In the case of Sunnyside, we saw fragmented organizational sensemaking (animated, but not controlled) when it came to the core beliefs surrounding CRP, and guided organizational sensemaking (controlled and animated) around the practices like UDL that educators used as proxies for CRP.

Fragmented Organizational Sensemaking of CRP Beliefs

Our data did not indicate that there were regular opportunities for educators to talk about how they might proactively confront the biases towards Sunnyside students that existed in the community, nor did it indicate that there were widespread opportunities to reflect on what biases educators themselves may have held or how those biases impacted their practice. Without such structure, high levels of animation could lead to multiple, narrow, and divergent understandings, leading the group's sensemaking to be "fragmented" (Maitlis, 2005). Fragmented groups act inconsistently and incoherently. Sunnyside consequently lacked coherence around conversations regarding the educator beliefs associated with CRP.

Findings across several of our individual studies revealed that individual educators' personal stories and life experiences held the most influence on their understanding of CRP. When such understandings are individualized and unique, the actions resulting from them are varied. In addition to educators' tendency to use other frameworks as proxies for CRP, there were also examples of how educators were acting within their own conceptions of CRP. These examples included varied ways of:

- introducing culturally relevant literature and themes in their buildings and classrooms;
- honoring student expression of cultural norms (e.g., not making eye contact with figures of authority);
- having documents translated into other languages;
- measuring family engagement by tallying attendance at school events; and,
- leveraging teacher evaluation as a CRP accountability tool rather than a developmental opportunity.

While each example represented a genuine attempt to act in a culturally responsive way, the actions were based on individualized understandings that had been formed in isolation and therefore had limited alignment. Furthermore, educators lacking a clear understanding of CRP or not having life experiences that enriched their understanding of CRP tended to enact more traditional or technical practices that were not fully in line with CRP scholarship or concepts.

Guided Organizational Sensemaking of CRP Practices

Educators in Sunnyside expressed confidence in the knowledge they were gaining about UDL. This CRP sensemaking trigger corresponded with a high level of leader control, signifying significant leader sensegiving. Sunnyside constructed a clearly defined commitment to UDL as an instructional strategy. They developed tools and protocols to ground feedback in UDL, and they allocated resources in accordance with this initiative. But this focus on UDL (and its use as a proxy) as discussed above, did not immediately translate into understanding of CRP aligned to its defining characteristics.

Despite the resources, structure, and support devoted to UDL, school leaders expressed improvising strategies to engage their respective faculty on issues related to CRP. The

superintendent, however, was clear in asserting that district sensegiving uniting the two was intended to begin with the district Equity Plan. Admitting it was not yet a comprehensive plan, they clarified that the plan's impetus was to establish equity "as a value" so that the district would not be "ignoring it." In systems change, maintaining systemic focus on equity begins with a strategic plan that is communicated to the community (Leithwood & Azah, 2017). However, the highly emphasized implementation of UDL did not immediately translate into the ability to use it as a scaffold for furthering sensemaking of CRP.

Discussion

Our analysis of how educators make sense of and enact CRP has implications for practice, policy, and research. We address each in turn.

Implications for Practice

Working with building and district leaders, educators should develop a shared definition for and deepen their understanding of CRP. This shared definition would then inform teaching practice and professional development opportunities that enhance and sustain CRP. Because schools are dynamic, social organizations where heterogeneous groups of educators continuously strive to make sense of the cues from their environment, we propose a model for how leaders could establish a strategic approach to organizational CRP sensemaking.

In doing so, we extend one of Maitlis's (2015) four forms of organizational sensemaking, guided organizational sensemaking, proposing a model to support practitioner sensemaking of CRP. We claim there are two unique patterns for sensemaking within the realm of CRP: a sensemaking structure for learning related to teaching practices that support historically marginalized students, and a pattern of behaviors associated with unpacking beliefs about students and their families - mindsets that are critical to CRP.

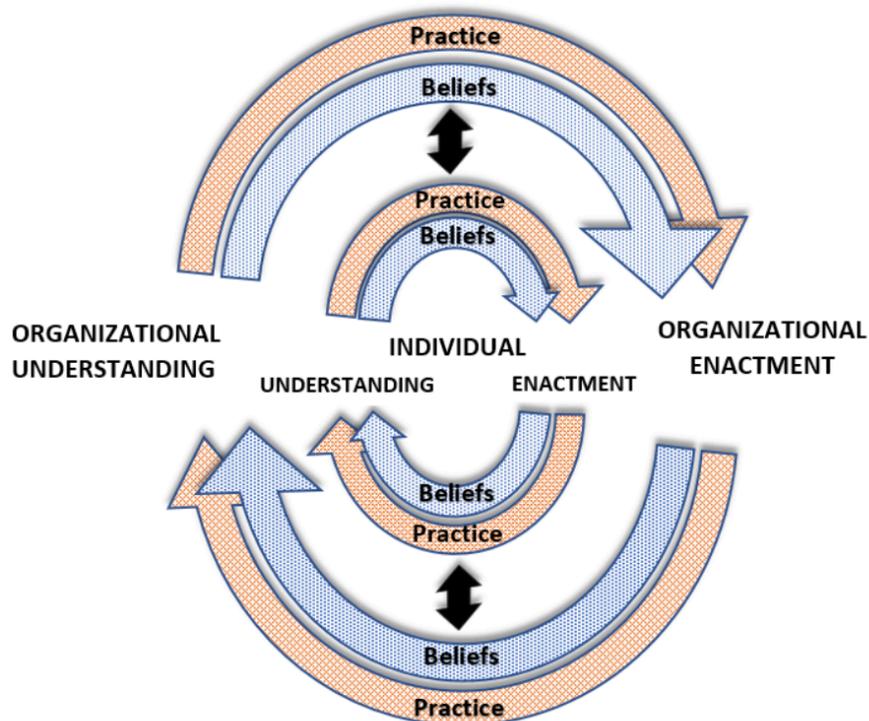
Figure 4.1*Sensemaking of CRP*

Figure 4.1 illustrates a model for organizational sensemaking specifically as it relates to CRP. This conceptualization emerged from the study's overarching research questions, which sought to understand, first, how educators make sense of CRP and, second, how they enact that understanding through their practice. As such, the figure depicts two concentric loops representing the iterative cycle of understanding and enacting new practice at both the individual and the organizational levels. We claim that there should be an intentional, aligned, and coherent approach to supporting sensemaking at both of these levels. In order to enhance CRP throughout a school district, the guidance and structures offered at the organizational level should not only detail and direct sensemaking activity, but should also serve as a model for individual stakeholders of what they should personally be reflecting upon and doing to grow CRP in their own work as culturally responsive practitioners. The double-sided black arrows between the two

loops in the figure indicate the need for the organization and individuals to engage in sensemaking and sensegiving exchanges that will help refine collective practice over time.

As noted above, this sensemaking requires a continuous cycle of learning, reflection, and implementation related to both the beliefs (represented in blue) and the practices (represented in orange) encompassed by CRP. The distinction between these concurrent cycles of learning is equally as important as the relationship between the organization and the individual. In this current study, we found a lack of controlled sensegiving by district leadership pertaining to CRP beliefs. Even though there was a highly controlled and animated sensemaking process for UDL and other related practices, the absence of a similar sensemaking process pertaining to CRP beliefs resulted in Sunnyside's educators relying on their current interpretations of the environment to inform the way they made sense of CRP. We contend that in order for districts to realize the benefits of organizational sensemaking of CRP, processes must be characterized by both high control and high animation in order to promote the practices and the beliefs related to CRP.

In addition to this model, we also acknowledge that federal, state, and local agencies are continuously implementing new reform initiatives. These reform efforts are often seen as something "new" for educators to learn and implement rather than an adjustment to current practice. When implementing CRP, districts should critically analyze their current landscape to assess how their current vision, core values, policies, and practices align with the tenets of CRP. Districts should then consider how they can leverage what already exists within the district, for example UDL practices, as a scaffold to support organizational sensemaking of CRP. This principle holds true for the introduction of any new concept, particularly in light of the evidence

that educators in Sunnyside often did seize on the few examples or concepts that they were provided.

Superintendents, school leaders, other district leaders should tightly align formal structures and tools such as scheduled meetings, district documentation, and formal committees to develop a shared understanding that builds on prior knowledge, practice, and policy (illustrated in the orange outer loop of Figure 4.1). These structures and tools should clearly articulate a district definition of CRP and empower stakeholders to negotiate meaning over time. For example, districts should consider developing observational tools and rubrics that clearly articulate the culturally responsive practices for which principals are looking. Teams should then debrief strategies and identify tools to use in addressing gaps they see in classrooms. Again, this interplay between individual and organizational beliefs and enactments is modeled in Figure 4.1.

If educational leaders form a better understanding of how teachers and other educators effectively develop CRP, then principals and district leaders will be able to use this information to more effectively design ongoing professional development programs and learning opportunities that sustain and enhance educators' CRP. Our data suggests that educators (both teachers and leaders) found opportunities—when they had them—to learn more about their surrounding communities and the history of the region to be helpful, in turn impacting educators' individual beliefs as represented by the inner blue concentric loop of Figure 4.1. As a result, professional development should be specifically tailored to learning the history of the district and the cultures of the populations therein. All educators should seek professional development opportunities that are immersive in both their professional and personal networks. Educators should also continue to pursue opportunities that provide them the experience of being in the minority and living and working amongst historically marginalized and minoritized groups.

These should include opportunities to reflect on their identities and the ongoing significance of race. All educators, both white and educators of color should seek and develop ways to strengthen their individual practices and beliefs surrounding CRP as illustrated by the inner concentric loops in Figure 4.1.

Teachers who have been evaluated and deemed as having stronger CRP practices by their principals and peers could be placed in leadership positions serving in mentorship roles for both new and veteran teachers. New teachers could model their developing practice on the best examples of skilled teachers. Moreover, they should work towards developing their practice and pedagogy in their direct work with students and families.

Implications for Policy

The findings presented in this study and the accompanying studies of the research group suggest several implications for policy. First, we list several district level policies and then turn to addressing school level policies and teacher preparation policies. As we saw in Sunnyside, one area that educators may immediately gravitate to when implementing CRP is ensuring instructional materials are relevant and representative of racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse student populations. Policymakers, particularly state education agencies or occasionally legislatures, are frequently in a position to provide guidance or requirements to school districts and other local education agencies on acceptable curriculum and instructional materials. If guidance or requirements do not direct educators towards cultural responsiveness, this may either be lost as a priority or educators may attempt to address it themselves and veer far afield if uninformed. This unique sensegiving opportunity allows states, either through adoptions or general guidance, to create the initial resources that any district must consult when undertaking a curriculum effort. Curriculum policy can channel leaders and educators towards CRP and inform their understanding.

A second implication involves licensure and tenure policies. State agencies or legislatures generally provide regulation or legislation governing requirements for educator licensure and certification. Similarly, school districts engage in collective bargaining or directly mandate contract terms to enumerate tenure-granting policies and requirements for teachers, administrators, and other educators, depending on the state collective bargaining environment. In all of these cases, there are opportunities to establish standards for teacher and administrator practice as well as for permanent status to be granted. These mechanisms can signal the importance of CRP by elevating it as a requirement. They may also make use of the captive audience that must attend to them by including detailed guidance on what CRP is and how to implement it.

Third, as states or districts establish evaluation policies, they have an opportunity to ensure that expectation-setting documents direct educators towards culturally responsive practices. Mandatory rubrics, resources on effective practice, and guidance documents that spotlight pedagogy can encourage CRP. Additionally, if policymakers frame educator evaluation as a system for supporting educator growth, and not strictly for accountability, school-based leaders can encourage educators to document and engage with elements of teaching practice that promote the self-reflection and critical consciousness required to understand the intersection of race, identity, and practice. Doing so will further support the interplay between organizational and individual practice and beliefs related to CRP (see Figure 4.1).

We now turn from district-based policies toward policy suggestions for teacher preparation and continuing development. As teacher education programs strive to prepare the next generation of teachers who will serve an increasingly diverse student body, there are implications for improving their work to better equip teachers around CRP. Teacher education programs should assess the current state of their coursework and curriculum and enhance it to

more thoroughly address development of CRP. Teacher preparation programs might also require a practicum that includes cultural immersion experiences working in diverse populations, supporting individuals' sensemaking of beliefs and practices related to CRP (see Figure 4.1). To address the cultural mismatch of the teaching force and student body, teacher preparation programs might aggressively enhance their outreach to (and recruitment of) candidates of color and teachers from diverse backgrounds to increase the diversity of the teacher population. Moreover, as districts continue to work with the continuing education of current and veteran teachers, districts must develop ways to enhance ongoing professional development beyond that which teachers obtained in their teacher education. If teachers did not have strong CRP components in their teacher education programs or graduate work, district teacher induction programs could include a course studying the demographics of their local communities to engender understanding of the racial, ethnic, and cultural identities of the students and families they will be serving.

Family engagement policies and practices can be adjusted to support the immediate needs of a school district experiencing substantial shifts in student and family demographics. Financial investments in translators, interpreters and parent activity accounts can meet near-term needs. However, effective and meaningful family engagement is not attainable without educators who are willing, supported, and prepared to engage in meaningful partnerships. Instead, efforts will be misaligned. As Mapp (2013) posits, the capacity of educators must be strengthened in four areas in order to achieve impactful family engagement: capabilities, connections, confidence and cognition. There is evidence of educator cognition of family engagement, believing it to be a critical component of their work. Mapp's other three areas directly connect to components of CRP: holding informed and asset-minded beliefs about families from other cultures (capabilities), building trusting relationships through social networks (connections), and feeling a

level of comfort in working across diverse populations (confidence). Districts such as Sunnyside can more effectively build the capacity of educators to engage families with CRP. This can begin with the induction and mentoring process as a key area of orientation and ongoing support for new educators and continue with regular opportunities to explore beliefs and practices.

Finally, all of the preceding policy ideas must be carefully considered. As policymakers consider adopting positions that encourage schools or districts to implement culturally responsive practices, they must be attentive to the challenges faced by educators who feel urgency but do not understand the subject. We have seen in this case study a tendency for educators to fixate on the first ideas which they can understand. Policy must take into consideration the need to provision for real concrete guidance on practice and for time and expertise to accompany any implementation, lest educators fearful of being on the wrong side of conversations about race and inequity rush for the wrong solutions in an effort to feel and be seen as acting correctly. If guidance and scaffolding are not channeled by policy to be priorities, educators, from district officials to individual classroom teachers, may be incited to grasp at partially or completely unrelated ideas, and then to solidify them before more authoritative knowledge can be provided. Policymakers should work with practitioners to identify the places where policy interventions may elevate the urgency of performing CRP, without undermining it as a compliance activity. A compliance-only approach would reduce the influences shown in Figure 4.1 to one loop of practices and negate the beliefs loop.

Implications for Research

Finally, our study has implications for future research. The findings across the individual studies point towards a need to further study the way in which educators negotiate multiple parallel sensemaking efforts. We found educators in Sunnyside grappling with the meaning of CRP and equity at the same time that they sought to understand and enact other concepts, such as

universal design for learning (UDL) and social-emotional learning (SEL). Educators, then, made sense of one concept by relating it to another, particularly if they were more fluent in one.

Research in this area could improve how we understand a school district's—or any institution's—approach and capacity to incorporate simultaneous initiatives supporting historically marginalized students. This focus would potentially expand Figure 4.1 to incorporate multiple loops of understanding and enactment happening at both the organizational and individual level each related to a specific initiative.

Additionally, this case study focused on the perceptions of educators within the district and did not examine their interactions with students or families. In the context of sensemaking research, it would be instructive to see examinations of organizational sensemaking using accounts from the perspectives of the organization's clients or consumers. This case study focused on educators and their leaders, just as Maitlis (2005) examined the roles of orchestra musicians and their executives. Literature that rounded out this view with, for example, the perspectives of students and families in Sunnyside might increase our understanding of how these stakeholders participate in the sensemaking and sensegiving activities within the organization.

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Appendix A

Abstract for Daniel S. Anderson's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

Central Office Administrators' Sensemaking and Sensegiving of Cultural Responsiveness

Culturally responsive practice (CRP) by educators is an essential tool to serve increasingly diverse public-school populations. This study examines the sensemaking and sensegiving that district central office administrators undertake regarding what it means for educators to be culturally responsive practitioners. This dissertation used a case study of a mid-sized urban district which has not yet undertaken systematic effort on CRP to explore three research questions: (1) How do district administrators understand what it means for educators to be culturally responsive practitioners? (2) How do district administrators seek to influence the cultural responsiveness of educators? (3) What does evidence suggest about the efficacy of these efforts to influence the cultural responsiveness of educators? Data included interviews with seven district administrators and nineteen teachers, a survey of 33 educators in the district, and a review of internal district documents. Findings included that administrators had limited understanding of CRP, though they believe it to be important. They connected CRP to methodologies and practices in which they were more fluent. Sensegiving by district administrators was more effective at conveying the importance of CRP than its meaning or how to implement it. Absent a shared definition of CRP, but with heavy signaling of its importance, educators developed varying conceptions through their sensemaking. This case study suggests several implications for research, policy, and practice, including for the study of sensemaking in multi-layered organizations grappling with multiple changes and for implementation by school districts of CRP, as well as barriers to such implementation.

Appendix B

Abstract for Sarah L. McLaughlin's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

Engaging Families Through Culturally Responsive Practice

As the populations of public schools in the United States grow increasingly more diverse, it is critical for district and school leaders to understand how educators make sense of their responsibility to improve outcomes for historically marginalized students. Culturally responsive practice (CRP) is a framework of beliefs and practices to enhance these students' success. Additionally, it is well established that family engagement in schools also supports student achievement. This qualitative case study explores the intersection of CRP and family engagement by focusing on two research questions: (1) How do educators understand CRP in efforts to engage families of marginalized students and (2) How do educators enact that understanding in practice? It is part of a larger case study examining understanding and enactment of CRP in a diverse Massachusetts school district. Along with Mapp's (2013) Dual Capacity Building Framework of family engagement, I apply Maitlis' (2005) organizational sensemaking theory to data collected from semi-structured interviews, document review and an online survey. Findings reveal that educators understood CRP in regards to family engagement as the need to know students and families and recognize differences in their cultures. Also, educator understanding emanates from both personal and professional experiences including learning from colleagues, students and families. However, educators lack a common definition or understanding of CRP in regards to family engagement. Consequently, family engagement practices vary and tend to be more traditional versus reflective of CRP. This study revealed the need for stronger district direction and support for CRP and family engagement.

Appendix C

Abstract for Jason W. Medeiros's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

Understanding Culturally Responsive Practice Through Supervision & Evaluation

This qualitative case study of a medium-sized Massachusetts school district was part of a larger study exploring how educators throughout a school district make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice (CRP). This individual study focused on how school leaders and teachers incorporated their understanding of CRP into the supervision and evaluation process. Despite a growing body of literature on the effectiveness of educator evaluation standards on teacher practice, there is little on how these tools increase teachers' capacity to support the learning of historically marginalized students. Specifically, this research asks two questions: (1) How do teachers and school leaders understand CRP? (2) How does the supervision and evaluation process contribute to a shared understanding of CRP for teachers and school leaders? Data were collected from 22 semi-structured interviews of school leaders and teachers, document review, and an online survey. Incorporating a cognitive framework for policy implementation, findings revealed that school leaders and teachers understand CRP through their own identities and life experiences and through their interpretation of the district's professional environment. Findings further noted that the lack of a shared definition of CRP in the district contributed to inconsistent application and prioritization of CRP in the supervision and evaluation process. Without a shared understanding, educators often pivoted to other district initiatives to describe CRP. Implications include the need to establish a system of reflection and practice for educators to explore the beliefs they hold about historically marginalized students and how those beliefs inform practice.

Appendix D

Abstract for Tina C. Rogers's Individual Study

Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District:

A District's Support of Principals' Culturally Responsive Leadership Practice

This qualitative single site case study examined how district administrators in one racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse Massachusetts school district supported and strengthened principals' culturally responsive leadership practice. Building coherent culture and structures that provide space to critically self-reflect and collaboratively learn are essential. Data collection included interviews with district administrators and principals, observations of leadership meetings, document review, and a survey. Findings revealed district administrators established collaborative relationships with principals by employing a coherent service-oriented approach. Participants perceived the intentionality of the superintendent's efforts as foundational to building trust, however prior experiences with district leadership impede these efforts. The superintendent controlled sensemaking to signal equity as a district priority, yet the lack of a shared understanding of culturally responsive practice led participants to conflate culturally responsive practice with other district endorsed equity practices. Though attempts were made to align structures and tools to equity priorities, culturally responsive practices were subsumed within other equity initiatives creating variance in the perception of the effectiveness of how structures and tools support principals' culturally responsive leadership practice.

Recommendations include developing a district definition of culturally responsive practice while leveraging equity practices as a scaffold to support principals' understanding and enactment of culturally responsive practices. Also, efforts should be made to support sensemaking of individual and organizational beliefs through critical self-reflection and conversations about

racial and cultural bias. Future research may extend this study to analyze sensegiving interactions and examine the impact of these interactions on principals' cultural responsive leadership practice.

Appendix E
Document Analysis Protocol

Item Name	Date of publication	Format	Author	Intended Audience	Code	Detail

Appendix F

Interview Screener Survey

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on culturally responsive practice in education. This is a research project being conducted by a team of doctoral students at Boston College. It contains just 4 questions designed to provide aggregate information and to ask for volunteers for future activities such as interviews.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to understand how various educators within the school district make sense of what it means to implement “culturally responsive practice” and how that understanding influences an individual’s practice. The intent of this study is to explore how information and knowledge about culturally responsive practice is accumulated, shared, and then translated into practice. It is not an evaluation of the district’s or individual educator’s efforts.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the role that district leaders, school leaders, and building-level educators alike share and implement local best practices in support of historically marginalized student populations.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than the risk that you may find some of the questions to be sensitive.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers are collected as data and will be stored in a password protected electronic format. This platform does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Within the survey you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an additional interview. If you choose to provide contact information such as your phone number or email address, your survey responses may no longer be anonymous to the researcher. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to this survey will remain confidential.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact our research supervisor, Professor Martin Scanlan via email at martin.scanlan@bc.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records. Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older Anonymous
- AGREE
- DISAGREE

Anonymous Questions

What is your professional role in your school district? (Please select the answer that best fits your primary role)

- District Administrator
- Principal/School Leader
- School Level Administrator
- Teacher
- Paraprofessional
- Other School-Based Educator
- Other: _____

For how many school years have you worked in this district (in any educational role)?

Based on your experience in this district only, have you engaged in the following practices with the purpose of reflecting on or improving your understanding of “culturally responsive practice?” Please check all that apply.

- Personal self-reflection on my own identity
- Personally sought out professional development through a course, seminar, etc.
- District-based professional development
- School-based professional development
- Through supervision and evaluation
- Professional coaching offered by district staff
- Through informal professional conversation within the school
- Through informal professional conversation within the district
- Any experience focused on the practice of family engagement
- None of the above

Interview and Survey

If you would be willing to be interviewed by a researcher about the professional learning experiences you identified above, please provide an email address and phone number.

Note: your responses will not be reported anywhere linked to your contact information. They will only be used in written analysis as part of an aggregate of all responses. The research team may not be able to interview all willing participants if the response is high.

Name

Email Address

Phone Number

Is there a colleague from the district skillful in culturally responsive practice whom the research team should contact for an interview? If so, please provide their name and contact information. Your referral will be kept confidential. You may enter multiple colleagues.

Appendix G

District Administrator Interview Protocol

Introduction

- a. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview
- b. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is that: “We are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do. This is not an evaluation of individual educators or of the district; it’s a case study that is part of our doctoral work.”
- c. Your confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all information
- d. I have a consent form that outlines the background of this interview. I want to give you time to review this before we begin, and I will need you to sign it
- e. Would you confirm that it is okay to record, just for our research purposes? No recordings will be shared.
- f. Thank you
- g. We’re going to start with some background questions

Background Questions

2. Would you confirm your name and your role here?
3. How long you have been at the school/district?
 - a. How long an educator?
4. How did you come to be in this role? What was your trajectory?

Understanding of CRP

Again, in this study, we are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do.

5. What do you think it means for an educator to be culturally responsive in their practice?
 - a. [Probe for further clarification/detail as needed.]
6. Where does this understanding come from? How have you come to this understanding?
 - a. Probe: Does the district explicitly define cultural responsiveness, cultural proficiency, or similar ideas for educators?
 - i. If so, how would you explain it?
 - b. Probe: To what extent is that same understanding shared throughout the district?
 - c. How did that come about (or what do you think the barriers are to that shared understanding)?
7. Can you think of one specific practice that is implemented throughout the district that supports the diverse student body?

Experiences Supporting Principals

Thank you. The next question relates to how the district influences and supports principals, generally.

8. How does the district support the learning and growth of principals?

- a. Do you see these supports enhancing principals' learning and growth?
- b. If yes, how? In what ways?

Experiences with CRP Work

Shifting now, the next set of questions relates to how the district influences culturally responsive practice of educators.

9. Do you see the district trying to explicitly influence teachers' or principals' cultural responsiveness in any way?
 - a. If yes, how? What ways does the district do this?
 - b. What are the effects on practice?
 - c. [If respondent only answered for teachers or principals, ask again about the other group]
 - d. [If necessary] How has the district used [as needed, any of:] policy, brokering and boundary spanning, direct influence, professional development?
10. Would you identify any changes in your or others' perceptions of what it means to be culturally responsive that came as a result of district action?
 - a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
 - b. If needed: Specific probe re school leaders and teachers
11. Would you identify any changes in your or others' practice that you have made explicitly to be more culturally responsive as a result of district action?
 - a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
12. Is there anything we missed or anything you would like to add?
13. For context, how do you identify in terms of race and ethnicity?

Appendix H

School Leader Interview Protocol

1. Introduction

- a. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview
- b. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is that: “We are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do. This is not an evaluation of individual educators or of the district; it’s a case study that is part of our doctoral work.”
- c. Your confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all information
- d. I have a consent form that outlines the background of this interview. I want to give you time to review this before we begin, and I will need you to sign it
- e. Would you confirm that it is okay to record, just for our research purposes? No recordings will be shared.
- f. Thank you
- g. We’re going to start with some background questions

Background Questions

2. Would you confirm your name and your role here?
3. How long have you been at the school/district?
 - a. How long have you been working in education?
4. How did you come to be in this role? What was your trajectory?

Understanding of CRP

Again, in this study, we are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do.

5. What do you think it means for an educator to be culturally responsive in their practice?
 - a. [Probe for further clarification/detail as needed.]
6. Where does this understanding come from? How have you come to this understanding?
 - a. Probe: Does the district explicitly define cultural responsiveness, cultural proficiency, or a similar practice for educators?
 - i. If so, how would you explain it?
7. Can you think of one specific practice that is implemented throughout the district that supports the diverse student body??
 - a. Probe: To what extent is that same understanding shared throughout the building? How did that come about (or what do you think the barriers are to that shared understanding)?

Experiences supporting principals

Thank you. The next set of questions relates to how the district influences and supports you as a principal, generally.

8. How does the district support your learning and growth?
 - a. Do you see these supports enhancing your learning and growth?

- b. If yes, how? In what ways?

Experiences with CRP Work

Shifting now, the next set of questions relates to how leaders in the district attempt to influence culturally responsive practice.

9. First, in terms of your growth, do you see the district trying to explicitly influence your cultural responsiveness in any way?
 - a. If yes, how? What ways does the district do this?
10. Would you identify any changes in your perceptions of what it means to be culturally responsive that came as a result of district action?
 - a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
11. As a leader yourself, how do you approach determining if a teacher is effective at teaching students from diverse backgrounds?
 - a. Does the supervision/evaluation process play a role at all?
 - b. What does feedback look like? What areas for growth do you observe?
12. What framework/structure/language do you lean on to talk about that aspect of teacher practice?
 - a. How did you come to that understanding?
 - b. To what extent is that same understanding shared throughout the building?
 - c. How do teachers respond to that feedback?
 - d. How did that come about (or what do you think the barriers are to that shared understanding)?

Last topic now. I want to inquire about family engagement in such a diverse context...

13. How do you, as a leader, try to engage families in the life of the school?
 - a. Probe: Was it always this way?
 - b. Probe: How did you come to develop this approach?
14. What are your expectations for teachers in terms of family engagement?
 - a. Probe: Have these expectations shifted at all from your learning in the district?
15. What have been your successes in this area?
16. What about areas of struggle?
17. Is there anything I missed or anything you would like to add?

Appendix I

Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Introduction

- a. Welcome and thank you for agreeing to this interview
- b. As a reminder, the purpose of this study is: “We are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do. This is not an evaluation of individual educators or of the district; it’s a case study that is part of our doctoral work.”
- c. Your confidentiality will be maintained by anonymizing all information
- d. I have a consent form that outlines the background of this interview. I want to give you time to review this before we begin, and I will need you to sign it
- e. Would you confirm that it is okay to record, just for our research purposes? No recordings will be shared.
- f. Thank you
- g. We’re going to start with some background questions

Background Questions

2. Would you confirm your name and your role here?
3. How long you have been at the school/district?
4. How did you come to be in this role? What was your trajectory?

Understanding of CRP

Again, in this study, we are seeking to understand how various educators in the district make sense of what it means for educators to have culturally responsive practice, and how that influences what they do.

5. What do you think it means for an educator to be culturally responsive in their practice?
 - a. [Probe for further clarification/detail as needed.]
6. Where does this understanding come from? How have you come to this understanding?
 - a. Probe: How did your undergraduate, graduate and/or pre-service education prepare you to effectively teach students across lines of difference?
7. Were there specific lived-experiences in your background that were particularly helpful in shaping your cultural proficiency? (Don’t lead, but if they need examples - i.e. international travel or cultural immersion experiences)

Experiences with supervision

Thank you. The next set of questions relates to your experiences with supervision.

8. What opportunities do you have to learn about, share ideas, or get feedback on this aspect of practice?
 - a. Probe: Has there been any feedback through supervision, be it a helpful suggestion or a commendation?
 - b. Probe: If you needed support, who would you turn to? Why that person?
 - c. Probe: How did they develop that skill?
9. Has the evaluation process played a role at all? If so, how?

- a. Probes could be about self-assessment, goal setting, observations, or evaluation

Experiences with CRP Work

Shifting now, the next set of questions relates to how the district influences culturally responsive practice of educators.

10. Do you see the district trying to explicitly influence teachers' cultural responsiveness in any way?
 - a. If yes, how? What ways does the district do this?
 - b. What are the effects on practice?
 - a. [If necessary] How has the district used [as needed, any of:] policy, brokering and boundary spanning, direct influence, professional development?
11. Would you identify any changes in your or others' perceptions of what it means to be culturally responsive that came as a result of district action?
 - a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
 - b. If needed: Specific probe re school leaders and teachers
12. Would you identify any changes in your or others' practice that you have made explicitly to be more culturally responsive as a result of district action?
 - a. Can you say more about how the district action influenced you?
13. Is there anything we missed or anything you would like to add?

Thank you. The next set of questions relates to your experiences with Family Engagement.

Family Engagement

2. How do you work to engage families?
 - a. PROBE: What are your family engagement practices?
 - b. PROBE: Are there different things for different families?
3. Why do you do family engagement?
 - a. PROBE: What are you trying to achieve?
4. Next set of questions is about how you as an educator learned to do family engagement
OR How do you decide what to do?
 - a. Something that influenced you
 - b. Colleague, experience, training, PD
 - c. Directives or requirements from district or school leaders
5. Is there anything we missed or anything you would like to add?

Appendix J

Interview Consent Form



Consent Form

BOSTON COLLEGE
Lynch School of Education
Professional School Administrator Program

Research Study: Enhancing Culturally Responsive Practice in a District

Individual Consent Form

Introduction:

You are being asked to participate in a research study exploring how various stakeholders make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice.

You were selected to be in this study because you are either a central office leader, a principal, or a teacher in the Sunnyside Public Schools.

Please read this form. You may ask any questions you have before agreeing to participate in this study.

Purpose of Study:

The purpose of this single-site case study is to understand how various educators within the school district make sense of what it means to implement “culturally responsive practice” and how that understanding influences an individual’s practice. The intent of this study is to explore how information and knowledge about culturally responsive practice is accumulated, shared, and then translated into practice. It is not an evaluation of the district’s or individual educator’s efforts.

What Will Happen in this Study:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in one or more of the following: (1) a semi-structured interview facilitated by one or two of the researchers, (2) a focus group facilitated by one or two of the researchers, (3) a regularly scheduled meeting or training that is observed by one or two researchers, (4) an online questionnaire. The interviews, focus groups, and observations will be audio recorded.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

There are no expected risks. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

The purpose of this single-site case study is to explore how various stakeholders make sense of and enact culturally responsive practice. The participants may derive some benefit from having the opportunity to discuss and reflect on their experiences. Further, the district may benefit from the information gleaned from the interviews and information gathered during this study. However, no benefit to the participants can be guaranteed.

Payments: There is no payment or other compensation for participating in this study.

Costs: There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:

Participants' identities will remain confidential throughout the research and reporting of this study. The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file, this includes transcripts of interviews. Audio files will be deleted upon the completion of this study.

Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records. Otherwise, the researchers will not release to others any information that identifies you unless you give your permission, or unless we are legally required to do so.

Choosing to be in the Study and Choosing to Quit the Study:

Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the Sunnyside Public Schools or Boston College. You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.

Getting Dismissed from the Study:

The researchers may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g. your identity cannot remain anonymous), or (2) you have failed to comply with the study rules.

Contacts and Questions:

The researchers conducting this study are Dan Anderson, James Greenwood, Jason Medeiros, Sarah McLaughlin, and Tina Rogers. The Boston College faculty advisor for this study is Martin Scanlan, Associate Professor, Lynch School of Education and Human Development. For questions or more information concerning this research, you may contact him at martin.scanlan@bc.edu or 1-617-552-1255.

If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu

Copy of Consent Form:

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates:

Study Participants Name (Print): _____ Date: _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness/Auditor Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix K

Online Survey Protocol

You are invited to participate in a web-based online survey on culturally responsive practice in education. This is a research project being conducted by a team of doctoral students at Boston College. It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to understand how various educators within the school district make sense of what it means to implement “culturally responsive practice” and how that understanding influences an individual’s practice. The intent of this study is to explore how information and knowledge about culturally responsive practice is accumulated, shared, and then translated into practice. It is not an evaluation of the district’s or individual educator’s efforts.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You may refuse to take part in the research or exit the survey at any time without penalty. You are free to decline to answer any particular question you do not wish to answer for any reason.

BENEFITS

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the role that district leaders, school leaders, and building-level educators alike share and implement local best practices in support of historically marginalized student populations.

RISKS

There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than the risk that you may find some of the questions to be sensitive.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Your survey answers are collected as data and will be stored in a password protected electronic format. This platform does not collect identifying information such as your name, email address, or IP address. Therefore, your responses will remain anonymous. No one will be able to identify you or your answers, and no one will know whether or not you participated in the study. Within the survey you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an additional interview. If you choose to provide contact information such as your phone number or email address, your survey responses may no longer be anonymous to the researcher. However, no names or identifying information would be included in any publications or presentations based on these data, and your responses to this survey will remain confidential.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact our research supervisor, Professor Martin Scanlan via email at martin.scanlan@bc.edu.

SOURCE MATERIAL

This questionnaire was adapted from original materials provided by the Washington state Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Original materials may be accessed on the OSPI website: <https://www.k12.wa.us/special-education-9>

The following references also informed the questionnaire's content:

Mason, J. L. (1995). Cultural competence self-assessment questionnaire: A manual for users. Portland, OR: Portland State University, Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health.

Goode, T. D. (2000). Promoting cultural competence and cultural diversity in early intervention and early childhood settings. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Child Development Center.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT:

Please select your choice below. You may print a copy of this consent form for your records.

Clicking on the "Agree" button indicates that

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate
- You are 18 years of age or older

Agree

Disagree

What school setting do you currently work in?

District-Level

Secondary School (6-12)

Elementary School (PK-5)

Which of the following best describes your role?

District-Level Administrator

School-Based Administrator

School-Based Educator

For how many school years have you worked in the field of education?

0-5

6-10

11-15

16-24

25+

For how many school years have you worked in this district (in any educational role)?

0-5

6-10

11-15

16-24

25+

This research defines culturally responsive practice as a combination of educational mindsets, instructional skills, and pedagogies that collectively reject deficit mindsets linked to the languages, cultures, and abilities of historically marginalized students, their families, and the communities in which they live. Such practice entails beliefs and practices such as:

- an inherent belief that all students can learn
- a willingness to challenge the status quo
- a willingness to reflect on how one's identity informs practice
- the ability to set high expectations while offering high levels of support
- the ability to scaffold instruction
- the ability to engage students' lived experiences into the classroom learning experiences

Given this broad overview, respond to the following prompts regarding your own practice:

I am confident in my own understanding of the diverse cultures of the students and families in the district.

- Very
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure how to answer

I am confident in my own understanding of how students' cultural backgrounds influence their learning and behavior.

- Very
- Somewhat
- Not at all
- Not sure how to answer

How frequently do you take part in (or support) the following practices?

	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Modify instruction so that students from different cultural backgrounds have their unique learning needs met.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Examine assessment data with the specific purpose of exploring any discrepancies in performance by cultural background	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Ensure that classroom displays and curriculum materials contain pictures and images that reflect the cultural backgrounds of students and families in your district

Assess whether or not curriculum resources are free from negative cultural stereotypes

How frequently do the following practices occur throughout your building (or buildings if you are responsible for more than one building)?

Always Most of the time Sometimes Rarely Never

Modify instruction so that students from different cultural backgrounds have their unique learning needs met.

Examine assessment data with the specific purpose of exploring any discrepancies in performance by cultural background

Ensure that classroom displays and curriculum materials contain pictures and images that reflect the cultural backgrounds of students and families in your district

Assess whether or not
curriculum resources
are free from
negative cultural
stereotypes

Rate how influential the following types of experiences have been in helping you improve your culturally responsive practice?

	Very	Somewhat	Not at all	I have not had this experience
Personal self-reflection on my own cultural identity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Reflecting on my experiences with students and their families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Learning about the people and history of the district	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District-based professional development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School-based professional development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
External professional development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Through supervision and evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional coaching offered by district staff	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Through informal professional conversation within the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Through informal professional conversation within the district	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

To what extent are the following aspects of the supervision and evaluation process utilized to explore culturally responsive practice?

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	Always
Self-Assessment & Goal Setting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom Observation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Formal conferencing (formative or summative)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Informal conferencing or coaching	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Written evaluations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

For each of the following, SELECT the items that you currently utilize to complete the stated task. Then, RANK ORDER them with the most important items listed first.

If I want to have more...

information about the diverse cultures of the families in my district...

I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

-
- _____ District Leaders
- _____ School Leaders
- _____ Professional Peers in district
- _____ Professional Peers in other districts
- _____ Students and Families directly
- _____ Community Resources
- _____ External Professional Development
- _____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection
- _____ I don't know where I would go

If I want to learn more about how...

a student's cultural background influences learning and behavior...

I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

-
- _____ District Leaders
- _____ School Leaders
- _____ Professional Peers in district
- _____ Professional Peers in other districts
- _____ Students and Families directly
- _____ Community Resources
- _____ External Professional Development
- _____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection
- _____ I don't know where I would go

If you want to have more...

information on how student achievement looks for students of different cultural backgrounds

I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

-
- _____ District Leaders
- _____ School Leaders
- _____ Professional Peers in district
- _____ Professional Peers in other districts
- _____ Students and Families directly
- _____ Community Resources
- _____ External Professional Development
- _____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection
- _____ I don't know where I would go

If I want...

feedback on my own efforts to support the learning of students from diverse cultural backgrounds...

I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

-
- _____ District Leaders
- _____ School Leaders
- _____ Professional Peers in district
- _____ Professional Peers in other districts
- _____ Students and Families directly
- _____ Community Resources
- _____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

If I want advice about how...

to communicate effectively with families from diverse cultural backgrounds

I go to...

Items listed in order of their importance to you

_____ District Leaders

_____ School Leaders

_____ Professional Peers in district

_____ Professional Peers in other districts

_____ Students and Families directly

_____ Community Resources

_____ External Professional Development

_____ Independent Research/Self-Reflection

_____ I don't know where I would go

Appendix L
Observation Protocol

Date: _____
Time Start: _____
Location: _____

Description of activity (what is being observed): _____
Time End: _____
Participants: _____

Component	Descriptive Notes	Reflective Notes
<input type="checkbox"/> Description of participant <input type="checkbox"/> Description of activity <input type="checkbox"/> Interaction <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Unplanned event <input type="checkbox"/> Specific comment/quote <input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Physical setting		
<input type="checkbox"/> Description of participant <input type="checkbox"/> Description of activity <input type="checkbox"/> Interaction <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Unplanned event <input type="checkbox"/> Specific comment/quote <input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Physical setting		
<input type="checkbox"/> Description of participant <input type="checkbox"/> Description of activity <input type="checkbox"/> Interaction <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Unplanned event <input type="checkbox"/> Specific comment/quote <input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Physical setting		
<input type="checkbox"/> Description of participant <input type="checkbox"/> Description of activity <input type="checkbox"/> Interaction <input type="checkbox"/> Behaviors <input type="checkbox"/> Unplanned event <input type="checkbox"/> Specific comment/quote <input type="checkbox"/> Non-verbal behavior <input type="checkbox"/> Physical setting		