



CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP: A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

April 2021

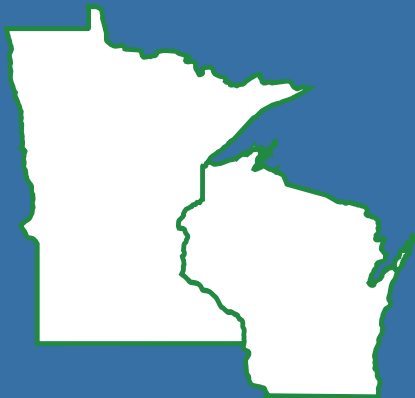
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In response to the killing of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other victims by law enforcement and the growing, glaring inequities unearthed by the COVID-19 pandemic, education leaders are searching for a way to disavow white supremacy, decenter whiteness in education, and correct the entrenched generational wrongs that persist and thrive in education, disparately impacting students who are Black Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC). They are working to dismantle practices that reinforce whiteness, like biased standardized tests, and reconstruct school spaces altogether.

In the long history of schooling, BIPOC students have rarely, if ever, been at the center of teaching and education. In fact, much of history demonstrates the detriment schools inflicted on students of color, Indigenous students, and their families. Schools once operated to destroy the culture and communities of Indigenous students,ⁱ remove the displeasing accents of Latinx children to make them more American—teaching them to be “clean” and acceptable,ⁱⁱ and ensure Black students were uneducated and remained in the fields.ⁱⁱⁱ In an historic shift, BIPOC students now represent the majority of the public school population. This alone should trigger schools to reflect on and, in many cases, re-evaluate how they are instructing students, academically and socially. Even more so, the historical relationship of schools and BIPOC students should prompt leaders to move from centering whiteness and exclusivity to culturally responsive schooling.

Minnesota ranks near the bottom of all U.S. states in shrinking the achievement gaps between students of color and white students. In 2019, The Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis penned *The Statewide Crisis: Minnesota’s Education Achievement Gap*, which revealed that race—even more than economic class—appears to be the most common indicator when discussing achievement gaps in standardized test scores and college preparedness.

Minnesota also has a history of disproportionate discipline practices towards Black and brown students. The National Center for Education Research indicates that from 2011–14, approximately 2.6 million public school students, or 5% of the public-school population received one or more out of school suspension. Black students represented the highest suspended demographic at approximately 13%, and of Black students, Black males were twice as likely than females to be suspended.^{iv} The most recent Minnesota discipline data from 2013–18 indicates Black students are 10% of the K–12 student population and represent the highest



- i. Tyack, D. B. (1974). *The one best system: A history of American urban education* (Vol. 95). Harvard University Press. 249.
- ii. García, D., Yosso, T., & Barajas, F. (2012). “A few of the brightest, cleanest Mexican children”: School segregation as a form of mundane racism in Oxnard, California, 1900–1940. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(1), 1–25.
- iii. Anderson, J. D. (2010). *The education of Blacks in the South, 1860–1935*. Univ of North Carolina Press.
- iv. National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Indicator 15: Retention, Suspension, and Expulsion.

suspended demographic at approximately 39.5%,^v in spite of significant research dispelling “behavioral differences” amongst Black and brown and white students.

Though these are only two examples of the struggles students of color face in schools, they indicate a clear and urgent need for change; this brief offers a framework to enact this change through Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL).

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy arose in education reform approximately twenty-five years ago to address the unique learning needs of minoritized students.^{vi} Attributed to the work of Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings and Dr. Geneva Gay, culturally responsive pedagogies address the unique needs of marginalized students in schools. Scholars predicted that diversifying of schools would be inevitable, and the shift of student demographics would occur around 2020.^{vii} Additionally, research identified school leadership’s lack of preparedness to adequately address issues of diversity or “articulate meaningful discourse around diversity.”^{viii}

The measuring of leadership preparedness is key in the implementation of culturally responsiveness as the literature demonstrates that to enact the necessary culturally responsive practices, or any education reform for that matter, leadership plays a pivotal role. Good leadership, research suggests, understands the necessity for culturally responsive measures in their schools as well as recruiting and retaining teachers that are equally committed to meeting the needs of minoritized students through CRSL.

What makes a Culturally Responsive School Leader

According to the most comprehensive literature review of CRSL, four major components are identified: critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and partners in community context. Below we outline what each of these components looks like according to the literature.

Critical Self-Awareness. Paralleling what some may emphasize as critical consciousness,^{ix} self-awareness is required of good leadership. The research suggests that it can be learned through leadership preparation programs, but ultimately relies on the “critical consciousness of culture and race” and their role in informing one’s practice and understanding. This means actively questioning how systems, curriculum, and other aspects of schooling marginalize students, and reimagining

those aspects of schooling. In addition, educators should engage with context to inform and impact the teaching environments.

Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation.

Some scholars argue that teachers “primarily are not culturally responsive and that they do not have access to culturally responsive teacher training programs.”^x Here the research suggests that the role of leadership is to have a vision that “supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teaching” as well as recognize and challenge ongoing inequities in schools that are negatively impacting minoritized youth. The research posits that this can be accomplished via:

- recruiting and retaining culturally responsive educators,
- securing culturally responsive resources and curriculum,
- mentoring and modeling culturally responsive teaching, and
- offering professional development around CRSL or cultural responsive pedagogies.

It is important to note that scholars argue that it is not only the role of leadership to develop a plan for developing teachers in cultural responsiveness, but to “counsel out” those who identify culturally responsive work is not for them.

Additionally, scholars identify the need for culturally responsive curriculum. As many minoritized students are culturally invisible in the curriculum, researchers like Christine Sleeter argue not only do we need to highlight and lift up minoritized epistemologies and ways, but that even the dominant culture and white students benefit from being exposed to them.^{xi}

Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments.

CR leaders create a welcoming environment for students and parents,^{xii} which contrasts what the literature highlights as the disproportionality at which BIPOC students are disciplined and removed from school spaces—an identified issue in Minnesota. It is important to CRSL to resist the deficit narrative about minoritized students that ultimately lead to exacerbating the disproportionality in exclusive punishments and low expectations from leaders and teachers. To combat this, the research suggests the use of critical consciousness and the ability to have courageous and at times uncomfortable conversations concerning inequities occurring in schools. Research also offers that culturally

v. Average of Minnesota Department of Education Discipline Data from 2013–2018

vi. Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272–1311.

vii. Prescott and Brasnberg (2008), as cited in Khalifa et al. (2016). 1279.

viii. B.L. Young et al. (2010), as cited in Khalifa et al. (2016). 1279.

ix. (Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2005a; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gooden, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008), as cited in Khalifa et al. (2016). 1280.

x. Gay, (2010); C. Hayes & Juarez, (2012); Sleeter, (2001), as cited in Khalifa et al. (2016). 1281.

xi. Sleeter, C. (2012), as cited in Khalifa et al. (2016). 1287.

xii. Madhlangobe, L. (2009). Culturally responsive leadership in a culturally and linguistically diverse school: A case study of the practices of a high school leader (Unpublished dissertation). Texas State University–San Marcos, San Marcos, Texas.

responsive spaces focused on inclusivity are equally important to teacher development. Creating culturally responsive and inclusive environments in reference to discipline requires:

- using data to discover and track disparities in academic and discipline trends,
- using student voice to dispel the behavioral myths surrounding BIPOC students, and
- promoting a vision of inclusion through behavioral and instructional practices.

Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts.

Research tells us that marginalized student voices, epistemologies, and experience are often excluded from school and classrooms. Creating intentional space to capture the authentic community, concerns, narratives, events—things that are central to a community—is an important part of CRSL. Schools that are truly culturally responsive “accept and validate” other ways of knowing and learning. However, it is not in a single instance or one-off manner. Being inclusive of indigenous and marginalized perspectives means implementing school structures, systems, and resources that sustain an

environment of cultural responsiveness. Ways to engage with community context can include:

- building in time for teachers to visit families homes/ community spaces,
- bringing community and cultural artifacts and curriculum into school spaces, and
- creating a space for community members and community partnerships.^{xiii}

Conclusion

With the highlighting of social and education inequities occurring in Minnesota, many education leaders are wanting to stand up to resist persistent oppression of minoritized students. To not go back to “normal” after a pandemic or injustice, but to create reconceptualized spaces that are inviting to students. Leaders want to create a school where all are welcomed and valued but may not know where to begin. This brief sheds light on providing a framework to create those spaces through CRSL that achieves the goals of the “Good Trouble” coalition and all those who want to create incubators of inclusion and learning.

xiii. Khalifa et al. (2016).

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Framework

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Critically Self-Reflects on Leadership Behaviors

- Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts
(Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006)
- Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection
(Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006)
- Uses school data and indicators to measure CRSL
(Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004)
- Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools
(Ishimaru, 2013; Smyth, 2006)
- Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school
(Theoharis & Haddix, 2011)
- Uses equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice
(Skrla et al., 2004)
- Leads with courage
(Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1988)
- Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion
(Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010)

Develops Culturally Responsive Teachers

- Develops teacher capacities for cultural responsive pedagogy
(Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003)
- Conducts collaborative walkthroughs
(Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
- Creates culturally responsive professional development opportunities for teachers
(Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003)
- Uses school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services
(Skrla et al., 2004)
- Creates a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive
(Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006)
- Engages/reforms the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive
(Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002)
- Models culturally responsive teaching
(Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
- Uses culturally responsive assessment tools for students
(Hopson, 2001; Kea, Campbell-Whitley, & Bratton, 2003)

Promotes Culturally Responsive/Inclusive School Environment

- Accepts indigenized, local identities
(Khalifa, 2010)
- Builds relationships that reduce anxiety among students
(Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
- Models CRSL for staff in building interactions
(Khalifa, 2011; Tillman, 2005)
- Promotes a vision for inclusive instructional and behavioral practices
(Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007)
- If need be, challenges exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors
(Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
- Acknowledges, values, and uses students' Indigenous cultural and social capital
(Khalifa, 2010, 2012)
- Uses student voice
(Antrop-González, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
- Uses school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends
(Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2007)

Engages Students, Parents, and Indigenous Contexts

- Develops meaningful, positive relationships with community
(Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001)
- Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and in other roles
(Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006)
- Finds overlapping spaces for school and community
(Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012)
- Serves as advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community
(Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012)
- Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families
(Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006)
- Resists deficit images of students and families
(Davis, 2002; Flessa, 2009)
- Nurtures/cares for others; shares information
(Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
- Connects directly with students
(Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)