

IF YOU CHECK YOURSELF, YOU WON'T WRECK YOURSELF! DEVELOPING AND
TESTING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CHECKLIST FOR
PRINCIPALS

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ABSTRACT

Culturally responsive school leadership synthesizes multiple leadership theories to make schools equitable and inclusive within a racialized educational system. Principals have the most influence and accountability in schools. Their actions create and sustain a culture that is inclusive of minoritized students.

This qualitative study assessed the efficacy of designing and implementing a culturally responsive school leadership checklist tool that provided principals with a means to promote greater self-reflection, culturally responsive teaching, and engagement with community and student contexts.

I developed and tested a reflective tool for principals to apply culturally responsive leadership in their daily practice. I designed this culturally responsive school leadership checklist to help principals critically reflect on their actions and ensure their decisions align with culturally responsive principles. The checklist provides a framework for principals to evaluate their leadership decisions regularly, promoting intentionality and alignment with best practices to address the diverse needs of their school communities.

After testing the checklist, one major finding was that principals found critical self-reflection enhanced their perception of their effectiveness as culturally responsive school leaders. Principals also found that the checklist enhanced their communication skills, particularly when advocating for cultural responsiveness at their schools and speaking to families and teachers. The checklist enabled the principals to provide better feedback for their teachers to implement culturally responsive teaching. It also enabled the principals to envision new approaches to professional development, student discipline, and accessing minoritized student voices and perspectives.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my incredibly supportive family, who encouraged me to pursue this journey and endured countless vacations, weekends, and evenings of me sitting at my computer or talking about my research. To my sons, Avi and Lev, thank you for encouraging me and having unshakable confidence in my ability to reach this critical milestone. Your own experiences at school inspired me to envision how we can continue to create greater more inclusive and bolder approaches to supporting minoritized students through school leadership.

To my husband, Victor, thank you for all your support and constant encouragement. I persisted because you encouraged me and celebrated every time I completed a chapter. You have heard so much about this topic that you could have written this dissertation as well. Thank you for your support and for allowing me to achieve this lifelong goal.

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Thanks to my wonderful friends Dara and Wendy, who gave me advice and feedback on my work throughout my writing. Your good counsel helped me place things in perspective and make bold choices. Thanks also to my dear dogs Ricky and Freddy, who sat by my side while I wrote every chapter and always knew when it was time to take a break and take them for a walk. Sadly, Ricky was only with me for chapters one and two, but I wish he could celebrate with us all.

Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to the faculty, students, and families at Learning Community Charter School. Over the past 11 years, I have had the privilege of serving as the

Head of School at LCCS. Being the principal of such a vibrant school community enables me to make the world a better place through being a culturally responsive school leader, and I sincerely hope that my research will help other principals do the same for their students, faculties, and communities.

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Thanks to everyone at Learning Community Charter School who asked me about my research and encouraged and challenged me to ensure that my work matched the high standards our faculty sets for themselves and our students every day.

The principals who participated in my research inspired me. They ensure their students are challenged, supported, and welcomed at school every day. It is inspiring to know that so many students across North America attend schools led by caring leaders who are deeply committed to making sure their schools are supportive and inclusive for all students.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As a school principal, I researched culturally responsive school leadership to be a better leader at my school. I wanted to know what research and tools were available for principals to make their schools more inclusive so that all students were successful. I learned that although there is research about culturally responsive school leadership, there is a lack of tools to support principals in applying this type of leadership within their schools. This study was my effort to create a resource for principals everywhere to make their schools welcoming and empowering for students, teachers, and families.

School principals navigate the complex process of educational change. They must lead a safe, welcoming school that supports academic growth and achievement (Minkos et al., 2017). Principals are similarly responsible for engaging in critical self-reflection, disrupting discriminatory practices, promoting inclusion, and engaging their school's community to promote success in school and life (Khalifa, 2018). Culturally responsive school leaders are essential to leading and collaborating with their school communities to confront and disrupt oppression and discrimination (Milner, 2023).

School principals must support their teachers in culturally responsive practices to ensure student equity and success (Brown et al., 2022). Improving overall teacher efficacy in instruction is integral to ensuring educational equity for students (Viloria, 2019). As their schools' instructional and culturally responsive leaders, principals must support teachers in implementing culturally responsive practices and provide professional development that enables teachers to be culturally responsive leaders in their classrooms. Culturally responsive school leaders also play an integral role in continually making a case for why this is essential to

foster student growth. Principals are the “public leaders” responsible for forming alliances to promote equity, engagement, democracy, and academic excellence (Horsford et al., 2011).

Being a culturally responsive leader is embedded within the Standards for Professional Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015), making this a critical component that defines all successful school leaders. The NPBEA created these standards in 2015 to assist all school leaders to lead schools effectively. Standard 3 focuses on equity and cultural responsiveness: “Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 17). The standard describes eight specific actions a school leader should undertake to meet it (NPBEA, 2015). Tools are needed to assist all principals in effectively integrating Standard 3 into every aspect of their leadership practices. School leaders play the most crucial role in sustaining and supporting cultural responsiveness in their schools, but implementing this type of leadership is challenging and complex (Khalifa, 2018).

A culturally responsive principal facilitates a process to identify gaps in performance among students due to institutional racism and discrimination and seeks to correct them (Milner, 2023). At the same time, a principal needs to assist their faculty in understanding how to use this knowledge to develop ways to understand their own identities, recognize biases to improve their work with students, and identify and confront institutionalized oppression (Hunsberger et al., 2016). If successful, the principal will ultimately cultivate trust among students, teachers, families, and the surrounding community. The principal becomes a leader with a sociopolitical consciousness that challenges social norms and advocates for equity and diversity (Lopez, 2015). Investing in these efforts disrupts the opportunity gap for minoritized

students and creates a school culture defined by connectedness and caring relationships (Cormier, 2022; Gregory et al., 2010). Professional standards and academic research define culturally responsive leadership, but current research does not address the process and support principals require to become culturally responsive school leaders. Principals need reflective tools to integrate culturally responsive school leadership into every aspect of their daily leadership practices. The existence of such tools can lead to higher student achievement and an inclusive culture for students, teachers, and families.

Statement of the Problem

Principals are their schools' instructional and cultural leaders. They are integral in conveying the value of culturally responsive practice. They are essential in leading culturally responsive practices due to their identifiable role and responsibility for implementing school-level reforms (Khalifa et al., 2016). Although a body of research defines culturally responsive school leadership, preparation and accessible tools for principals to develop their skills in this area are lacking (Harris, 2024; Horsford et al., 2011; Suwak et al., 2024). There must be accessible and practical resources for principals to assist them in making their schools inclusive for their minoritized students (Cooper, 2009).

The role of a principal in a school is broad and includes many tasks demanding an integrative leadership style (Azorín & Fullan, 2022; Minkos et al., 2017). Research about how to implement culturally responsive school leadership is available to school principals. Still, the broad amount of information can lead to that information not being applied in practice, which is termed a "crisis of eptitude" (Gawande, 2009, p. 10). Despite a vast body of research and professional standards that support culturally responsive school leadership, the daily application of this research relies upon each principal's memory, experience, and personal interpretation of

culturally responsive school leadership (Suwak et al., 2024). Throughout a principal's day, they decide on topics ranging from instructional matters to student behavior to operational concerns. The principal does not have time to consult research during these moments, but instead relies upon their leadership knowledge and training. This leads to an overreliance on memory and experience, as in many highly trained professional fields, such as aviation or medicine (Gawande, 2009). Principals must remain aware of how political and demographic changes influence their ability to foster a collaborative and equitable school culture for all students or be unprepared to meet the most current challenges facing their minoritized students (Horsford et al., 2011). Cultivating that level of awareness remains challenging without reflective tools for principals to integrate these factors into decision-making.

A principal can be personally aligned with culturally responsive school leadership but require assistance in assessing whether their actions demonstrate it. Principals, therefore, need a simple checklist to serve as a reflective tool to base their decisions on culturally responsive school leadership consistently and accurately (Gawande, 2009). Using such a checklist can enhance equity, help principals lead and sustain a culturally responsive school culture and climate, and ultimately help them provide students with an education drawn from multiple cultural epistemologies (Pratt, 2020).

Rationale for Instrument Development

Leadership positions demand constant decision making. Gawande (2009) described doctors within Harvard Hospital making 100,000 medical decisions within a year for their patients, and a patient in intensive care requires 178 medical actions per day. The number of decisions associated with this level of critical care increases the possibility of errors and vital information being missed. Principals are also highly trained professionals who make constant

decisions and may miss vital information. Addressing complex matters such as patient care or leading a school requires streamlined tools to promote best practices and outcomes, like a checklist (Gawande, 2009).

A school leadership checklist must differ somewhat from those used in health care and aviation (Gawande, 2009). Aviation and medical checklists focus aggressively on error prevention (Alspach, 2017; Ely et al., 2011; Gawande, 2009). School leadership is not a field where mistakes lead to fatal errors. Cultural responsiveness is rooted in understanding the impact of one's own culture on one's understanding of others and then identifying how broader cultural attitudes define inequity within one's school (Horsford et al., 2011; Pratt, 2020). A culturally responsive school leadership checklist should focus solely on promoting reflection to enhance the successful application of culturally responsive school leadership theory and actions. Such a checklist can bridge the divide between how researchers define culturally responsive school leadership and how it is applied by school principals (Horsford et al., 2011).

Therefore, as a meaningful step in this line of inquiry, I developed and tested a checklist based on the research of Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023) and Gawande's (2009) tenets for checklist design. The availability of a checklist based on culturally responsive school leadership research will allow future work to assess whether using the checklist improves teacher, student, and community efficacy, improves school culture, and promotes culturally responsive teaching.

Framework for Instrument Development

I based the development of the checklist on Khalifa's (2018) and Milner's (2023) frameworks for culturally responsive school leadership. Khalifa (2018) defined culturally responsive school leadership as "(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). I also incorporated Milner's (2023) eight tenets of frontline leadership, which, although named differently, directly relate to culturally responsive school leadership. These tenets are knowing the research, disrupting color and race blindness, advocating hard work, knowing meritocracy is a myth, moving above abstractions of race, rejecting racial neutrality, learning and developing every day, revising punishment practices and decreasing pushout, and involving and centering young people (Milner, 2023).

Summary

Culturally responsive school leadership is essential, enabling all students to learn in schools invested in inclusion and dismantling oppressive and inequitable practices. Principals who view themselves as social justice advocates have the potential, through changes both large and small, to confront and dismantle obstacles preventing students from being successful both in school and in life (Hunsberger et al., 2016). A reflective checklist that incorporates culturally responsive leadership into practice could help bridge the gap between leadership theory and application and contribute to principals making lasting changes within their schools for the better.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The United States is experiencing a massive demographic change. By 2050, most of the population will be people of color (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). These changes do not reflect the staffing of American public schools, which remains 82% White and 76% female (Minkos et al., 2017). Principals in 2022 were 77% White, 10% Black, 9% Latino, and 3% other ethnicities. Most K-12 principals in the United States are White while leading the education institutions of an increasingly intersectional student body (Taie & Lewis, 2022). Black and Latino students continue to underperform nationally on standardized assessments and are overrepresented in suspension and expulsion data (Gregory et al., 2010; Minkos et al., 2017). Implementing culturally responsive school leadership practices can help principals address long-term opportunity gaps and educational debt for their minoritized students (Milner, 2023).

Opportunity gaps remain in schools (Milner & Howard, 2015). These gaps exist due to a public school system that is highly racially segregated, with resources not allocated to Black and Hispanic communities to address over 200 years of discrimination (Ray, 2019). Curricula do not always address minoritized students' experiences, language, and history, and classroom experiences do not account for the assets and knowledge based on their culture and ethnicity (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Schools disproportionately rely on disciplinary practices that result in suspension for students of color, leading to lower academic achievement and disconnection from school altogether (Gregory et al., 2010). Schools can address these opportunity gaps directly through effective leadership and instruction, empowering minoritized students and supporting their communities (Brown et al., 2022). A school that focuses on

enhancing students' sense of belonging enhances social capital, leading to increased opportunities and an improved sense of well-being (Morrow, 1999). Change begins through school leaders effectively implementing culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023). Principals can promote academic success and positive academic identity formation in minoritized students due to their influence on instruction, school culture, and resource access (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Historically, White cultural epistemology and experience have served as the basis of education for all American children (Khalifa, 2018). This emphasis on White cultural epistemology renders minoritized students and their families, cultures, and history invisible in curricula. Academic success for a minoritized student in these settings is based on studying and mastering the dominant culture and separating themselves from their own culture (Pratt, 2020).

Principals can disrupt this educational paradigm by applying culturally responsive school leadership—the concept that the principal focuses all leadership actions on the academic achievement of minoritized students and assists them in developing a positive personal cultural identity. Culturally responsive school leadership synthesizes several critical leadership theories: inclusive leadership, transformative leadership, and social justice leadership (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Inclusive leaders maintain an environment where followers feel valued for their attributes and reach their fullest potential (Chrobot-Mason & Roberson, 2022). Transformative leadership is about creating a connection between leader and follower, originating from the leaders' motivation and morality to help their followers succeed (Northouse, 2022). This concept of enabling individuals to feel valued as part of the moral purpose of the leader informs the basis of culturally responsive school leadership and directly relates to social justice leadership (Hunsberger et al., 2016). Social justice leadership is

formulating actions and policies to respond to the injustices of racism and oppression (Hunsberger et al., 2016). The main difference is that culturally responsive school leadership places minoritized students at the center (Khalifa, 2018). Placing a leadership focus on minoritized students means leaders will always approach their work with the goal of promoting equity and opportunity. Creating an equitable and inclusive school experience for minoritized students enhances social capital through increasing social ties and building networks associated with success at school (Coleman, 1988; Morrow, 1999).

Culturally responsive school leadership emerged from two strands of educational research based on effectively teaching diverse students: culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Culturally responsive teaching, developed by Gay (2002), focuses on how a teacher engages a student's cultural background and epistemology within lessons and curriculum. Culturally relevant pedagogy, developed by Ladson-Billings (Aronson & Laughter, 2016), focuses on the motivation and mission of an educator to apply and learn about their students' cultures to promote student success in a racialized society. A culturally responsive principal implementing culturally responsive school leadership must advocate, model, and support culturally responsive teaching in all classrooms and cultivate culturally responsive pedagogy in their teachers (Khalifa, 2018).

A culturally responsive school leader must understand culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching to support teachers in instruction and curriculum development. Both approaches focus on improving minoritized students' academic performance by making their cultures and experiences the basis for making meaning of content. In culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, learning for minoritized students employs students' language, history, music, and neighborhoods to connect, critique,

and engage with academic content standards (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). The difference between the two approaches is that culturally responsive teaching emphasizes instructional competence, while culturally responsive pedagogy focuses on the attitude and disposition of the educator to support academic, political, and social-emotional knowledge needed for a minoritized student to succeed academically within a racialized education system (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). These strands require that a teacher synthesize both, possessing the overall vision for their students related to culturally responsive pedagogy and the instructional capacity to achieve culturally responsive pedagogy through daily culturally responsive teaching.

Principals can be the most influential culturally responsive leaders because they provide both instructional and cultural leadership for their schools. They can directly disrupt marginalization and effectively create opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue between teachers, community members, and students (Brown et al., 2022; Faas et al., 2018). A principal's focus on addressing equity and oppressive practices allows minoritized students to be fully included and welcomed in school and be successful academically (Shields & Hesbol, 2020). A culturally responsive principal assists their minoritized students in developing socially and emotionally through cultural references to convey content, skills, and attitudes. Principals can develop a hidden curriculum at their school that implicitly communicates to students the value of learning from multiple cultural epistemologies to produce a richer understanding of culture, systems, problem-solving, and communication (Pratt, 2020). When minoritized students find their culture validated, they can focus on academics and find their voice and identity as students (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). Failing to address these issues can leave minoritized students falling behind their White peers, leading to further discrimination at school and beyond (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ray, 2019).

Therefore, the first step in the checklist design process was understanding culturally responsive school leadership and its essential components regarding principal actions.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership

Culturally responsive school leadership is the synthesis of multiple leadership theories meant to address the ongoing diversification of schools within a racialized educational system (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). As demographic changes continue to diversify American schools, culturally responsive school leadership becomes critical for effective school leadership, particularly for principals (Cooper, 2009). Principals are the most recognized school figures and have the most influence and accountability. Their actions create and sustain a culture that is inclusive of minoritized students or harmful to them (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Culture shapes thinking and forms an understanding of others (Faas et al., 2018). Cultural responsiveness in schools entails having an inclusive and positive reaction to different cultural expressions and behaviors for students to succeed (Brown et al., 2022). Culturally responsive teaching empowers minoritized students and their families (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). It establishes trust between minoritized students' families and the school because their needs and culture are celebrated and centered within the learning process (Banwo et al., 2021).

As developed by Khalifa (2018), culturally responsive school leadership outcomes consist of empowering the child and community through equitable power sharing, identifying and responding to inequity and marginalization, and developing inclusive spaces defined by cultural artifacts, epistemologies, and behaviors. Khalifa described a new model for equitable power sharing between the community, families, students, and the principal. Culturally responsive principals advocate for community causes because they consider them school priorities as well. Facilitating a process that leads to power sharing begins with the principal

reflecting on how well they “listen to it, to embrace, validate, and promote it” (Khalifa, 2018, p. 49). Principals working in primarily minoritized communities need to be especially aware of how to establish and enhance social capital for their minoritized students, families, and the community. Simultaneously, culturally responsive principals with an understanding of community concerns and priorities can advocate for resources and policies to benefit the communities they serve (Khalifa, 2018).

Principals who engage in self-reflection, develop curricula and culturally responsive teachers, and promote an inclusive and anti-oppressive school culture demonstrate culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018). These attributes provide a frame for principals to evaluate their performance as culturally responsive school leaders. Culturally responsive school leadership demands that principals adapt their mindsets and actions to this work.

Behaviors and mindsets associated with culturally responsive school leadership align with culturally responsive instruction and social justice leadership attributes. Culturally responsive principals must be “warm demanders” of their minoritized students, maintaining high expectations while developing supportive mentoring relationships with them (Khalifa, 2018, p. 158). In modeling these relationships, the culturally responsive principal effectively communicates that teachers must adopt this same perspective in their classrooms (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023). Teachers and culturally responsive principals must approach curriculum from the perspective of reintroducing what is missing related to all students’ identities and cultures (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). This approach cultivates teacher and student agency, establishing a collaborative and supportive view of learning (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012; Vilorio, 2019). These actions enable principals to recruit and retain culturally responsive teachers who will view school leadership as supportive of their

approaches in the classroom and focus on confronting deficit mindsets at school (Khalifa et al., 2016). Being a warm demander and maintaining an inclusive school culture requires a culturally responsive principal to engage in an ongoing process of self-reflection and specific instructional leadership actions. School culture through culturally responsive school leadership is consistent, patient, and responsive, given that it takes time to implement (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012).

Self-reflection is integral to culturally responsive school leadership. Critical self-reflection enables the culturally responsive school principal to regularly assess whether their school celebrates and centers minoritized students and confronts inequities (Cooper, 2009). The culturally responsive principal must also reflect on their role, biases in this process, and blind spots that might lead to school practices that credential Whiteness. A culturally responsive principal routinely considers their actions, language, race, and privilege as part of their decision-making process (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). This routine process of reflection is helpful because it addresses inequity, greater community engagement, and power sharing (Khalifa, 2018).

The process of self-reflection develops a culturally responsive leadership mindset, which is an essential lens for the leader to address problems of practice (Khalifa, 2018). The culturally responsive leader seeks to understand students' cultural differences regarding community values and how they play out at school (Faas et al., 2018). They aim to create an inclusive culture celebrating minoritized students and decentering Whiteness (Ray, 2019). This is equally vital for culturally responsive principals in White schools because, by adopting a culturally responsive leadership model toward curriculum, the principal enables White students to understand the world in a racialized context (Milner, 2010). White schools face unique

culturally responsive school leadership challenges in that their principals, teachers, and communities must identify that a binary approach to White culture as the basis for all learning limits students' learning opportunities. A culturally responsive school leadership approach that supports culturally responsive teaching and curriculum enables students to formulate an understanding of culture that is not hierarchical or centered on Whiteness (Yosso, 2005).

In diverse school settings, culturally responsive school leadership enables minoritized students to recognize their inherent attributes, knowledge, and value as part of an academic community and leads to the development of a curriculum that is global in its design (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). This requires the principal to view their overall approach as bridge building, establishing networks enabling their school to move from its current state to one that is cooperative and emancipatory for all students (Viloria, 2019). A culturally responsive principal establishes community coalitions through distributed leadership, developing students' agency to address mutual goals and confront oppression (Brown et al., 2022).

A crucial area where a culturally responsive principal can use their influence is supporting culturally responsive teaching (Khalifa, 2018). Principals can reframe negative perceptions of minoritized students by supporting teachers in developing and growing their culturally responsive teaching capacity. Culturally responsive pedagogy challenges Eurocentric views in the curriculum and assists teachers in making their classes inclusive for minoritized students (Brown et al., 2022; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). Providing support in these areas requires understanding how to support teachers in curriculum development, instructional strategies, and assessment. Principals must make oppressive practices visible and support mentoring and modeling culturally responsive instructional strategies (Banwo et al., 2021). A

culturally responsive principal must be present for teachers, students, and families to model commitment and passion for supporting and sustaining culturally responsive school leadership (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). The principal must assess the school's hidden curriculum by evaluating the use of space, scheduling, celebrations, messaging, and how all students' cultural epistemologies are valued to foster a positive academic identity for minoritized students (Pratt, 2020).

Most principals consider themselves unprepared to address these complex issues and lack explicit models for routinely and effectively applying culturally responsive school leadership in their daily practice (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals must clearly understand culturally responsive school leadership and how to implement it effectively, even in primarily White schools. A culturally responsive approach to school culture and curriculum ensures that White students have a greater understanding of what it means to be part of a diverse society (Milner, 2020).

Minoritized principals develop their commitment to culturally responsive pedagogy through their own experiences addressing institutionalized racism as students and adults. White principals become committed to culturally responsive school leadership due to a critical moment when they realize inherent educational and societal inequality (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). Some administrative preparatory programs offer culturally responsive school leadership courses, but even this coursework must support the actual application in schools (Johnson, 2007). Principals require tools to measure their success and to guide their thinking regarding culturally responsive school leadership. The complexity of applying culturally responsive school leadership without support in developing the skills to implement and sustain it makes a checklist incorporating culturally responsive school leadership theory into action beneficial for principals

(Cormier, 2022; Horsford et al., 2011; Milner, 2023). The mindset required for this work is deeply rooted in ongoing self-reflection (Khalifa, 2018).

Culturally Responsive School Leaders' Mindset

Being a culturally responsive school principal is highly demanding (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023). Some traditional school leadership mindsets and behaviors define these principals and play an integral role in how they approach their work. They continually focus on maintaining high expectations for minoritized students and maintaining dialogue between those in school and the community to enhance connectedness and overall success (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023) further define the behaviors of a culturally responsive principal as courage, connectedness, humility, healing, deference, intolerance of inequity, and ending punishment through pushout, and describe them as transformative, distributive, decolonizing, and humanizing. These behaviors result in a school culture that is democratic, celebratory, and open to collaboration (Azorín & Fullan, 2022; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). Culturally responsive principals must simultaneously model this vision of school culture and assist their faculty to develop it in their classrooms (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012).

Culturally responsive school principals view their work as moral (Khalifa, 2018). This moral stance and the behaviors described by Khalifa (2018) enable principals to envision their care for their students as lasting beyond school into adulthood. This approach to serving minoritized students throughout their lives empowers them to develop anger toward inequity in education and advocate for culturally responsive school leadership (Banwo et al., 2021; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). Realizing the importance of this work helps principals understand their agency in building a culture of hope for minoritized students. Culturally

responsive principals understand their influence and how their direct actions can support and affirm minoritized students and communities. At times, culturally responsive principals will challenge discriminatory rules and practices and demonstrate a willingness to explain their actions. This display of courage is essential because it models for teachers that the principal expects the same level of dedication to cultural responsiveness and demonstrates trust and support to minoritized families and communities (Johnson, 2007; Vilorio, 2019).

Culturally responsive principals' mindset draws from the positive attributes of their identity and is known as applied critical leadership (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). They enter leadership understanding the need to build trust and engage in critical conversations. They seek to address unmet educational challenges through collaborative processes within their schools, based on empirical research. They define themselves as transformative and servant leaders who seek to serve the greater good (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). Applied critical leadership enables the culturally responsive principal to approach the challenges of leadership by establishing collaborative partnerships and trust while keeping minoritized students at the center of their mission and vision.

The culturally responsive principal views minoritized students as whole beings rather than statistics. This means envisioning students' futures beyond their time within a specific school or their test scores (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). The culturally responsive principal routinely states that minoritized students can learn when given culturally responsive instruction, and insists that all teachers incorporate this mindset (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Milner, 2010).

School leaders must regularly contend with their deficit mindsets and those among teachers and students. Deficit thinking in this context comprises the perception of minoritized

students as lacking skills and having parents who do not value education, but also the equally problematic view that they are empty vessels in need of receiving only White cultural information. Where this view persists, minoritized students' culture is not discussed or valued at school (Yosso, 2005). Utilizing social and emotional learning and culturally responsive school leadership can help students and faculty understand that everything in school can potentially empower minoritized students (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). Establishing this core value within the school enables the principal and teachers to ensure that the explicit and hidden curricula prepare students academically, empower them, and confront societal inequality based on understanding community values and history (Brown et al., 2022).

The culturally responsive principal also contends with the school's hidden curriculum in displays, celebrations, languages used at school, and how students and families are welcomed (Faas et al., 2018). The language used when students arrive at school matters. Principals can model inclusion by greeting students by name and saying they are glad to see them. The visibility of culturally responsive principals and how they convey and model inclusivity is essential in establishing trust with families. The culturally responsive principal's understanding of student language and epistemologies significantly affects behavior. When bilingual students are encouraged to use their language at school, cultural epistemologies become assets that allow all students to view themselves as valued community members (Johnson, 2007; Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). Displays and celebrations throughout the school building that reflect students' culture and language further welcome them in school as who they are, both inside and outside (Faas et al., 2018).

Culturally responsive principals view interactions with families as bidirectional, with the community partnering in educating students. They work to connect with parents and seek to

understand and assist with their needs as well (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Minkos et al., 2017). The culturally responsive principal's approach toward teachers is one of patience for those working to implement culturally responsive instruction and impatience for those with a deficit mindset. Principals must convey that minoritized students come to school with essential and valuable cultural epistemologies, and the role of teachers is to provide them with more than just dominant cultural knowledge (Yosso, 2005). Developing an overall process for culturally responsive school leadership action is embedded in the leader's ongoing self-reflection process.

Challenging institutional oppression and addressing longstanding opportunity gaps for minoritized students is a mission sometimes met with significant resistance. Culturally responsive principals must expect considerable pushback, both internally within their schools and externally from the community. Principals should develop a network of other culturally responsive principals to support them as they focus on culturally responsive school leadership and advocate for their minoritized students. These critical friends can provide emotional support, feedback, and additional perspectives for effectively managing and developing responses to pushback (Lopez, 2015; Milner, 2023).

The Process of Critical Self-Reflection

Addressing racialization and systemic oppression within a school is complex for a culturally responsive principal. It is difficult to determine where to begin understanding unique issues at school and beyond. Understanding one's school in a culturally responsive manner occurs through an ongoing process of critical self-reflection (Khalifa, 2018). This process allows culturally responsive principals to identify personal blind spots, recognize social tensions within their schools, and develop a cultural change plan (Cooper, 2009). Critical self-reflection places the principal as a learner rather than an expert (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006).

The first step in critical self-reflection is for the culturally responsive principal to reflect on their experiences regarding culture, race, and privilege. Exploring this personal context allows leaders to understand their roles and experiences concerning racialization, culture, and oppression. It is helpful to construct a cultural autobiography to contextualize past experiences with current understandings and recognize biases when they emerge (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Genao, 2021; Milner, 2023; Terrell et al., 2018). Understanding one's cultural identity formation is critical in effectively demonstrating culturally responsive school leadership.

The next step in this process is for the culturally responsive principal to study the history and culture of minoritized communities at their school (Banwo et al., 2021). Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023) maintained that culturally responsive school principals must understand the historical context of oppression in schools and how that legacy is represented today. Studying historical minoritization in American education is essential to identify personal blind spots regarding racialized educational practices (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023). Milner (2023) referred to these practices as “under(Lie)ing conditions” (p. 17) that maintain Whiteness and racism in education. Khalifa (2018) suggested that understanding historical context regarding the minoritization of people of color and their communities helps principals understand their own administrative privileges and how to become advocates for community-based causes. Milner (2023) wrote that frontline leaders must actively work to challenge pervasive and racialized untruths about minoritized students through a thorough understanding of research that disproves racialized policies and approaches. Khalifa (2018) posited reframing school leadership programs to focus on the historical role of schools in colonization and to point out how Black principals in segregated schools acted as community advocates, which can

help principals reflect on their administrative privilege, promote opportunity, and disrupt further minoritization at their schools.

Understanding the history of minoritized communities enables culturally responsive principals to understand students and families at their schools (Banwo et al., 2021) and ensure that any action they take supports students' culture at school (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). The culturally responsive principal also needs to understand the history of American public schools in supporting racialization and the colonial system, which silenced indigenous and cultural voices and knowledge (Khalifa, 2018). These understandings prepare culturally responsive principals to learn about the history, culture, and current needs of the communities they serve. Thus, when they begin to act as school leaders, their actions are based not only on internal school data about students, but also on culture, history, and epistemologies. These community data make any action more effective for students and their communities because there is knowledge of history (Banwo et al., 2021; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive principals routinely need to ask themselves why they are taking an action, how it disrupts the status quo, how it values the knowledge diverse learners bring, and whether it is equitable and inclusive (Lopez, 2015).

Once the culturally responsive principal completes their critical self-reflection, it is imperative to model this process for faculty and students. Teachers engaging in critical self-reflection become more effective practitioners of culturally responsive instruction. They can support culturally responsive principals in confronting oppression and establishing equity. Teachers also need to develop their own culturally responsive pedagogy for their classrooms. Culturally responsive principals can facilitate this by encouraging teachers to envision their classrooms and all spaces at school as fully valuing and welcoming all students. The process is

made even more concrete by asking the teachers to imagine what they want all students to hear, see, and experience (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). For students, critical self-reflection enables them to identify and understand oppression within their lives and communities and develop strategies to confront it based on the skills and content they master at school. Students can also join their teachers in creating a vision for inclusive classrooms and common spaces throughout school (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). By modeling self-reflection, the culturally responsive principal can empower and enlist the entire school community to confront oppression and promote inclusion (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Khalifa, 2018). This also means reflecting on how disciplinary practices focused on school exclusion have disproportionate negative effects on minoritized students' academic progress (Gregory et al., 2010). Once a culturally responsive principal engages in critical self-reflection, it is essential to develop a plan to address inequality and oppression within their school and the surrounding community. The principal must act as a bridge builder between the community and school by establishing networks to support students and community needs.

Establishing Social Capital

Social capital is defined by Coleman (1988) as resources derived from people's social ties. The greatest influence on an individual, for Coleman, comes from family and friends. In situations where a child lacks family to influence their social development, community institutions such as schools can have an equally positive influence if they are mission based. Religious and boarding schools provide high levels of social capital for their students, reducing dropout rates and encouraging the pursuit of rigorous coursework in high school, due to the community relationships that are integral to these schools (Coleman, 1988; Mikiewicz, 2021; Morrow, 1999). Putnam interpreted social capital as an individual's

connection to civic networks such as schools, based on their sense of belonging and trust in these institutions (Morrow, 1999). Bourdieu (Morrow, 1999) defined cultural capital by how language, presentation, and social etiquette exist within an institution (Mikiewicz, 2021). Given the critical role that a school can play regarding social capital, culturally responsive school leadership can strengthen minoritized students' and families' connections to school by increasing their sense of belonging and trust and employing cultural capital.

Khalifa (2018) defined social capital as when networks or relationships educationally benefit students and their families, which aligns with Putnam (Mikiewicz, 2021; Morrow, 1999). Establishing social capital through a culturally responsive leadership approach occurs when the school and community's needs are aligned to help students and their families. The school advocates for family concerns in these scenarios, ranging from after-school tutoring to increased traffic safety. Assisting with these causes makes the school a vital community partner, but not the leader. This positions the culturally responsive principal to attend community gatherings and learn more about community needs and priorities. These actions have the potential to enhance belonging and trust in a school and its leadership for minoritized students and families (Mikiewicz, 2021; Morrow, 1999).

Being present within the community allows the culturally responsive principal to establish trust among community members and model culturally responsive practice for the faculty (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa, 2018; Morrow 1999). This demands that the principal be engaged and curious in school and at community events (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). A culturally responsive principal's presence is more significant when they create opportunities for parents to partner with the school constructively. Routinely inviting parents into school to see instruction enhances empathy and breaks down cultural barriers between home and

school. Asking parents to join faculty committees on curricular decisions demonstrates the value placed on community perspectives (Milner, 2023). A culturally responsive principal who directly reaches out to minoritized parents about a problem with a student, sincerely seeking to partner with and listen to them, is the greatest of all social capital builders (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012).

Partnerships between schools and communities are historically successful, leading to better student educational outcomes (Minkos et al., 2017). Establishing social capital begins with the culturally responsive principal discussing with community members about how to make the community a better place to live. Although the principal can conduct these conversations, many culturally responsive schools have specific staff members charged as liaisons with one or more communities that comprise the school. These liaisons help the principal understand community needs and cultural data (Johnson, 2007; Khalifa et al., 2016). An ongoing dialogue with community members leads to resource sharing: the community can use school space for meetings, or the school can host parent or student affinity groups to advocate for their needs (Milner, 2023). Hosting these groups at school allows a culturally responsive principal to act as a bridge builder, connecting community members to other social service organizations that can address concerns raised in the groups (Banwo et al., 2021; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Faas et al., 2018; Minkos et al., 2017). The physical presence of the principal at these meetings enhances this work.

The school's hidden curriculum affects social and cultural capital (Morrow, 1999). Displays, celebrations, and general practices that honor and welcome community members build trust and connections by referencing the community's culture and epistemology at school (Morrow, 1999). The hidden curriculum also influences how culturally responsive

principals honor a multilingual school community. Schools where other languages are heard at events and seen throughout the building convey that students' linguistic identities are celebrated and protected at school (Faas et al., 2018; Khalifa et al., 2018; Milner, 2023; Minkos et al., 2017; Morrow, 1999). Developing parent and student book clubs with books in languages spoken at school is another way to make students' cultures visible and further establish social capital (Lopez, 2015). A culturally responsive principal must leverage their school's hidden curriculum to make students' cultural epistemologies integral to promoting academic achievement and overall social-emotional well-being (Pratt, 2020). Social capital is essential for principals to lead culturally responsive instruction at school.

Leading Culturally Responsive Instruction

An area where culturally responsive principals have a significant impact is their work with teachers to foster and sustain culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy, referred to as culturally responsive instruction. Leading culturally responsive instruction entails staffing and teacher support, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and supervision of instruction. The culturally responsive principal obtains resources, sets building goals, meets agendas, promotes effective practice, and provides teachers with the support needed to succeed (Milner, 2023; Riehl, 2000). Focusing on all these areas helps teachers address equity, contributing to overall student success and positive identity formation.

Culturally responsive instruction begins with a focus on hiring, retaining, and supporting teachers invested in it. Staffing is the culturally responsive principal's opportunity to place the most skilled, culturally responsive teachers in every classroom. When a culturally responsive principal can hire for an open position, selecting candidates with an understanding and passion for culturally responsive teaching is as essential as instructional capacity (Minkos

et al., 2017). Principals must try to develop new faculty members' understanding of culturally responsive teaching, providing ongoing modeling, explicit professional development, and support for new teachers (Banwo et al., 2021; Khalifa, 2018). Structures to support teachers in developing culturally responsive teaching skills can include mentorship from other teachers.

Culturally responsive principals must work to reduce teacher anxiety and establish calm and psychological safety to implement culturally responsive teaching (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). Principals can mentor and coach teachers who resist implementing culturally responsive teaching to highlight its importance at the school (Khalifa, 2018). Culturally responsive principals should communicate that teachers promote academic success and positive identity formation of minoritized students. However, this requires the entire faculty's support and efforts, in partnership with the community. Creating a willingness among teachers to seek each other out for assistance with culturally responsive teaching requires the principal to publicly recognize teachers who excel in this area and bring other faculty members to their classrooms on collaborative walkthroughs (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012).

A culturally responsive principal must ensure that all teachers use a curriculum that draws upon cultural and community experience, history, and epistemology to make it significant to students. Developing a culturally responsive curriculum begins with auditing the current curriculum to identify bias and determine whether minoritized people's experiences and voices are missing (Gay, 2000; Genao, 2021). The principal's role in this process is to help teachers critically assess the curriculum for cultural responsiveness and understand how to address what is missing and what might receive greater emphasis. It is critical to focus on the universality of needing a culturally responsive curriculum and not restrict it to the humanities and arts. Schools often implement culturally responsive curricula that cover these areas, but fail

to cover STEM and lack community knowledge integration (Gay, 2000; Khalifa, 2018). A culturally responsive principal must always press for and provide examples of the decoupling of cultural responsiveness from specific curricula or community information, such as tracking traffic safety within a math class to advocate for better community safety (Milner & Howard, 2015).

Community members can be welcomed into classrooms to highlight the precise application of STEM and establish social capital, such as inviting a local barber to explain how they cut angles (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2015). Teachers can also learn from hearing minoritized students speak about their school experiences, particularly regarding whether curricula are culturally responsive, through professional development sessions (Milner, 2023). A culturally responsive curriculum leads to overall positive student performance outcomes, particularly regarding student engagement, interest in specific academic content, and perception of their own intellectual capacity and agency (Aronson & Laughter, 2016). A culturally responsive curriculum leads the entire school to understand the funds of knowledge minoritized students bring to school and contribute to learning (Lopez, 2015).

Teachers build their skills to assess curriculum through professional development. Culturally responsive principals employ professional development to emphasize the importance of culturally responsive teaching and how to implement it within classrooms effectively. Professional development programs may include whole faculty presentations, smaller meetings, and professional learning communities. They focus on achieving equity, high academic performance, positive identity formation for minoritized students, and the strategies for implementing these goals (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023). This work begins through culturally responsive principals' use of data and state and federal mandates for schools to

address the underperformance of minoritized students on standardized assessments and overrepresentation in disciplinary data. Using data can spur reflective conversations about strategies for achieving equity (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012; Riehl, 2000; Vilorio, 2019). These conversations are entry points to identify growth and success, discuss barriers to achievement, and develop plans to address areas of concern. Culturally responsive principals begin conversations by helping teachers understand the messages that minoritized students absorb from mainstream culture, as well as how their communities are sources of resilience and strength (Gay, 2000; Genao, 2021; Vilorio, 2019). Professional development sessions are also spaces where culturally responsive principals can directly confront bias and engage in courageous and honest conversations to point out when teachers demonstrate racialized thinking or a deficit mindset (Faas et al., 2018; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018).

Due to the complexity of culturally responsive instruction, it often means disrupting traditional teaching practices. A culturally responsive principal provides opportunities for more experienced teachers to co-teach or assist fellow teachers in implementing culturally responsive units or lessons. Principals can encourage teachers to engage in action research or collaborative inquiry to better serve their minoritized students. Collaborative walkthroughs in a proficient culturally responsive teacher's classroom provide additional opportunities to observe student behavior, the classroom environment, and instruction (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). Culturally responsive principals should always seek out ways to offer mentoring and models of culturally responsive teaching for their teachers (Cooper, 2009; DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Genao, 2021; Riehl, 2000). In every professional development meeting, culturally responsive principals must make equity and serving minoritized students the focus. These

meetings must frequently allow the entire team, including the principal, to engage in critical self-reflection to model the ongoing work associated with culturally responsive teaching (Banwo et al., 2021).

Principals' daily actions can further support culturally responsive teaching, mainly through their presence in the building and feedback to teachers. Walkthroughs and observations allow the principal to offer regular feedback on implementing culturally responsive teaching and assess the level of cultural responsiveness within the building. Principals can emphasize aspects of culturally responsive teaching in their teacher evaluation tools to address success and areas for improvement for teachers (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Riehl, 2000). Principals should engage in collaborative walkthroughs with teachers to see culturally responsive teaching in action and evaluate the school's hidden curriculum. These collaborative walkthroughs can engage the entire faculty in assessing whether students and families see their communities and cultures reflected within student work displayed throughout the school. This information can support data conversations regarding professional development (Faas et al., 2018; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). The work of culturally responsive principals varies in every school, but they need more tools to structure their actions and support culturally responsive school leadership daily (Milner, 2023).

Research Gaps

Culturally responsive school leadership research is highly theoretical. Successful culturally responsive principals' biographies vary based on their overall school population. The comprehensive research on culturally responsive school leadership speaks of broad categories aligned with some leadership action. Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023) each offered a definition of culturally responsive school leadership, while the NPBEA (2015) described

cultural responsiveness as a component of what defines an effective school leader. Table 1 shows the similarities between these authors' definitions of culturally responsive school leadership. Synthesizing this research into a concise tool for principals to use daily could assist them in understanding and implementing culturally responsive school leadership.

Table 1

Comparison of Culturally Responsive School Leadership Definitions

Culturally responsive school leadership behaviors (Khalifa, 2018)	Tenets of frontline leadership (Milner, 2023)	Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015)
Being critically self reflective	1. Understand and know the research 6. Learn and develop every day 5. Reject racial neutrality	g) Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision-making, and practice.
Developing and sustaining culturally responsive teachers and curricula	2. Disrupt color- and race-blindness 4. Move beyond abstractions of race, racism, anti-Black racism, and Whiteness	c) Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success. f) Promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society
Promoting inclusive, anti-oppressive school contexts	3. Advocate hard work and know meritocracy as a myth 7. Revise punishment practices and decrease pushout	d) Develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner. e) Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status. h) Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.
Engaging students' Indigenous (or local neighborhood) community contexts	8. Involve and center young people	a) Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context. b) Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.

Gawande's (2009) advocacy of checklists as tools for improving performance quality and preventing errors in aviation, medicine, and finance offers insight into incorporating culturally responsive school leadership theory and actions into a checklist. A culturally responsive school leadership checklist could remind principals to place minoritized students at the center of their leadership actions, enhancing the overall educational experience for all students, faculty members, and families (Khalifa, 2018).

Contribution of the Study

This study aimed to develop and pilot a checklist for principals to implement culturally responsive school leadership strategies through their daily practice. The checklist reminded them to consider professional development, instructional supervision, social capital, and critical self-reflection. Principals purposefully piloted the tool in various school settings to assess its effectiveness and enhance their capacity for culturally responsive school leadership. The checklist provided a bridge between academic research into culturally responsive school leadership and the daily practice of school principals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, school leaders and educators urgently needed information about best practices, particularly regarding virtual learning. Fisher et al. (2020) wrote a series of playbooks to provide the essential research background for school leaders to quickly implement best practices in distance learning, social-emotional learning, and returning students to school. Gawande (2009) described how checklists serve as even simpler tools for highly skilled professionals to focus on the critical actions within their professions that are essential for success.

While there are checklists and playbooks in school leadership, there is a noticeable lack of accessible and practical resources for school leaders to enhance their culturally responsive school leadership skills to benefit their students, faculty, and community (Harris, 2024). What exists instead are larger frameworks for leaders and teachers regarding cultural responsiveness, such as New York State's Culturally Sustaining Education Framework or the Leadership Academy's Culturally Responsive Leadership Framework (Leadership Academy, 2022; State Education Department of New York [SEDNY], 2018; Suwak et al., 2024). These frameworks provide research-based guidance, but cannot directly influence a school leader's daily actions like a simple checklist can. A checklist based on culturally responsive school leadership theory serves a purpose similar to playbooks by enhancing principals' implementation of culturally responsive leadership.

The implementation of checklists in aviation and medicine is a component of pilots', doctors', and nurses' professional training (Gawande, 2009; Winters et al., 2011). Well-designed checklists counter cognitive errors in the dual process of Type 1 and 2 thinking (Ely

et al., 2011). Type 1 thinking is based on memory; it is fast and almost subconscious, such as driving a car. This type of thinking has a high potential for error, given that overfamiliarity with a task can lead to mistakes based on overconfidence. Type 2 thinking processes require attention and analysis and are far slower (Ely et al., 2011). A checklist enables Type 2 thinking to come into play to prevent overreliance on memory, consider alternative solutions to problems, and raise awareness of bias and emotions that may influence decision-making (Ely et al., 2011). Principals make countless decisions as part of school leadership, and a checklist could enable them to employ Type 2 thinking to make more culturally responsive decisions.

The model of evaluating checklists to enhance professional effectiveness originates from Pronovost's development of checklists for intensive care unit doctors at Johns Hopkins Hospital (Gawande, 2009), which prevented infections and deaths and led to considerable hospital savings. Pronovost based his checklists on memory recall, the minimum necessary steps in a procedure, and overall enhanced baseline performance (Gawande, 2009).

In 2006, the World Health Organization contacted Dr. Atul Gawande to address a growing worldwide problem of increases in complications during surgery (Gawande, 2009). Addressing this issue was complex given the diversity of hospitals globally. Gawande (2009) formed an international team charged to develop a solution defined as "simple, measurable, transmissible" (p. 9). Gawande's team concluded that a checklist similar to those used in aviation would promote communication and collaboration among a surgical team. Developing a checklist that promoted communication rather than simple task completion took multiple drafts. Gawande ran an eight-city pilot study of the checklist to understand its effectiveness in a variety of hospital settings. The study focused on the stories of surgical team members, who reported catching errors and working better as a team when they used the checklist. Gawande's

checklist reduced surgical complications by 36% and deaths by 47%, demonstrating that a checklist could improve performance and collaboration and prevent errors.

A culturally responsive school leadership checklist could allow for reflection and clarity to implement an inclusive approach to school leadership. The central purpose of the checklist in this study was to promote success through reflection rather than error prevention. The checklist was a tool for principals to implement culturally responsive school leadership behaviors, and promoted Type 2 thinking through a series of reflective questions. In medicine and aviation, checklists are used by a team to assist a leader in performing successful and safe actions. In contrast, the culturally responsive school leadership checklist was an internal and reflective tool for the principal.

The checklist's individual focus was due to the principal's position as the person who most significantly influences school procedures, instruction, resource allocation, culture, and climate (Alspach, 2017; Ely et al., 2011; Gawande, 2009; Khalifa, 2018). The checklist was developed through drafting and testing, much like Gawande's (2009) process for his surgical checklist. A qualitative study of principals' experiences using the checklist examined its capacity to promote critical self-reflection leading to promoting culturally responsive instruction and engaging with students' cultural and community contexts.

Both the lack of practical resources to enhance culturally responsive school leadership skills and the documented success of well-designed and tested checklists in aviation, finance, and medicine point to the great potential value of designing and implementing a culturally responsive school leadership checklist for principals (Alspach, 2017; Ely et al., 2011; Gawande, 2009). A checklist has the potential to improve a principal's leadership performance, reduce errors causing minoritization, and promote collaboration.

This qualitative study focused on developing and assessing a checklist tool for principals to reflect on culturally responsive school leadership strategies in their daily practice. This checklist helped principals support and promote culturally responsive teaching, establish social capital, and critically self-reflect. A qualitative phenomenological study research design captured principals' perspectives on the effectiveness of the checklist in integrating culturally responsive school leadership into their daily leadership practices. To assess the effectiveness of the design and use of the checklist, the research process developed for this study answered the following questions.

Research Questions

1. How can a checklist assist principals in applying culturally responsive school leadership in their schools?
2. How did principals use the checklist regarding their culturally responsive school leadership practice?
3. How did the checklist change principals' culturally responsive school leadership practice?

In this study, 25 principals piloted the checklist in various school settings. The checklist synthesized academic leadership research into a potential tool to enhance the daily work of school principals. Semistructured interviews conducted before and after principals used the checklist provided data to assess its effectiveness.

Research that Influenced the Design of the Study

Culturally responsive school leadership synthesizes several critical leadership theories, including inclusive leadership, transformative leadership, and social justice leadership. It emerged from two strands of educational research based on effectively teaching diverse

students: culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

As developed by Khalifa (2021), culturally responsive school leadership outcomes consist of empowering students and the community through equitable power sharing, identifying and responding to inequity and marginalization, and developing inclusive spaces defined by cultural artifacts, epistemologies, and behaviors. Principals demonstrate culturally responsive leadership by self-reflecting about how they develop curricula and culturally responsive teachers and promote an inclusive and anti-oppressive school culture (Khalifa, 2018). Khalifa (2018) defined culturally responsive school leadership by a set of behaviors, while Milner (2023) listed eight tenets of culturally responsive frontline leadership. Although research exists describing the attributes and mindset of a culturally responsive school leader, a measurement tool for principals to reflect on culturally responsive school leadership in their daily work is needed.

Choice of Research Design

The documentation and analysis of principals' use of a checklist to enhance their culturally responsive school leadership skills lent itself to a qualitative phenomenological approach. Principals were the unit of study for this research, given that they have the most significant influence, decision-making power, and access to research and data within a school (Khalifa, 2018). Principals impact their schools' vitality, success, and health (Milner, 2023). Culturally responsive school leadership directly impacts students, teachers, community members, and principals. A qualitative approach was chosen because the experiences of principals would provide insight into the checklist's efficacy. The potential for more principals to adopt culturally responsive school leadership is based on this study's iterative process of

designing, testing, and refining the culturally responsive school leadership checklist. This study followed a sequential research design with seven phases:

1. I developed the checklist. This required synthesizing the research that defined culturally responsive school leadership into categories and essential tasks aligned with a principal's work (Alspach, 2017; Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023).
2. I shared the checklist with five experts (practicing school leaders and researchers on school leadership) for feedback on the clarity of purpose and ease of use. Based on their feedback, I revised the checklist.
3. I shared the checklist with a larger sample of 10 experts for additional feedback on the content validity, clarity of purpose, and ease of use. I made final revisions based on expert feedback to produce the version of the checklist sent to school leaders.
4. I recruited school leaders from principal mastermind groups and school leadership communities of practice to ensure I worked with school leaders interested in improving their leadership skills.
5. Participating principals had a brief pre-interview over Zoom to identify their culturally responsive school leadership knowledge. They received a short orientation on using the checklist.
6. Principals used the checklist for 10 days.
7. Principals participated in a post-interview over Zoom to discuss whether the checklist enhanced their culturally responsive school leadership.

Positionality Statement

As a White cisgender school principal working with a diverse student population, I continually seek ways to be a better school leader to serve students of color. I began my career

as a teacher to engage in antiracist work and promote inclusive schools for all students. I taught at charter, independent, and school districts, continually seeking ways to provide my students with the greatest amount of academic opportunity that enabled them to connect their cultural and personal experiences to curriculum and their work. As a principal of one of the most diverse public schools in the United States in terms of student and faculty composition, I determined it was incumbent for me to pursue doctoral-level studies to be a school leader who effectively promotes students' academic success and empowers students and faculty to develop an inclusive school culture.

As a doctoral student and practicing school leader, I am concerned about bridging academic research and theory into actual practice so that school leaders can further enhance equity and social justice for their students. Developing a culturally responsive school leadership checklist tool enhanced my school leadership and the leadership of other principals. This informed my professional and academic interest in culturally responsive school leadership as an essential tool for principals to develop more inclusive and successful schools for their students.

Study Sample Description

The target sample size for this study was 30 practicing school principals working in various school settings across the United States and Canada, including suburban and urban public school districts, independent schools, and charter schools. Recruiting 30 principals allowed for diversity regarding grades, enrollment, and student demographics. The principals in this study were primarily members of mastermind groups and professional development communities of practice, such as the National Association of Secondary School Principals

LGBTQ Leaders Network and the Diverse Charter School Association Inclusion Education Community of Practice.

Mastermind groups began with corporate and political leaders from the first half of the 20th century, such as Andrew Carnegie, Franklin Roosevelt, and Henry Ford. These leaders met with other intellectual and political change-makers to enhance and grow their leadership skills (Bauer, 2022). Today, mastermind groups exist to increase leadership capacity through regular meetings with professional peers. Principal masterminds are groups of school leaders that meet outside of school hours weekly via web conferencing tools to hone their leadership skills through studying books from the corporate sector. Each is led by a coach who is a school leader invested in leadership development. Masterminds charge a membership fee, enabling members to benefit from additional leadership professional development resources and creating more investment among members. Principal masterminds provide a broader level of leadership training for school leaders and help them address issues such as isolation in a leadership role, limited opportunities for principal professional development within a district, and cultivating a network of peers to consult when facing the ongoing challenges of school leadership, particularly regarding equity and expanding inclusivity and opportunity for minoritized students (Bauer, 2022). Communities of practice are similar to masterminds, but tend to have a narrower focus on working with a particular demographic, such as special education students, and tend to be sponsored by national or state professional education organizations.

Masterminds and communities of practice were ideal sources of participants for this study, given that their members made financial and time commitments to these groups to enhance their leadership skills. Due to their investment in professional growth, mastermind

principals may have been more interested in using the culturally responsive school leadership checklist to improve the success of their students, faculty members, and communities.

Participant Recruitment

Participants for this study were recruited using purposive sampling. Half of the 25 principals who agreed to participate were contacted through masterminds or communities of practice. I joined a mastermind in 2014 to enhance my professional growth after I experienced isolation as a school leader and sought a community of peers to address the challenges of leading a school and growing as a leader. Membership brought me into contact with principals who continually sought ways to enhance their leadership capacity by making time and financial commitments for that purpose.

As a principal mastermind group member and a member of communities of practice from the Diverse Charter School Coalition and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, I reached out to principals within those networks, which consisted of over 150 principals. Since these groups meet via web conferencing platforms, I attended as many Zoom sessions as possible to recruit participants. After each meeting, I emailed participants about the study and their participation. I also emailed New Jersey charter school principals through the New Jersey Public Charter School Association listserv, of which I am a member, and recruited six principals from that group. I recruited three other principals due to collegial relationships over my years as a principal.

Potential participants received a recruitment email and consent form and a follow-up email 2 weeks later. The email described the research study, which included agreeing to participate in pre- and post-implementation interviews via web conferencing and using the culturally responsive school leadership checklist over 2 weeks. Participants did not receive

compensation for their participation. Receiving the checklist was an incentive for the principals participating in the study, due to their interest in their own professional development.

The participants came from district, charter, and independent schools in the Northeast, South, Midwest, and West, and one principal came from rural Canada. They led elementary, middle, and high schools. The diverse sample of participants further supported the checklist's efficacy at any school.

Participant Inclusion and Exclusion

Participants in this study had to be principals. Principals have the most significant influence and access to resources within their schools for implementing culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018). Through their participation in a professional learning network, principals in a mastermind or community of practice were already engaged in critical self-reflection to grow their leadership skills, which is an integral component of culturally responsive school leadership. These participants were instrumental in providing their perspectives and feedback on the checklist.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

I have been a member of a mastermind group since 2014. My affiliation with this group motivated some participants to join the study because I have longstanding collegial relationships with many mastermind members and facilitators. Some potential participants in the study had collegial relationships with me before participating. I do not believe this caused any ethical concerns. My membership in a mastermind and communities of practice assisted me with recruiting participants, given that they considered fellow group members to be colleagues invested in leadership.

Data Collection

I employed a sequential research design with seven phases to develop and test the checklist.

Phase 1

I reviewed Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership behaviors and Milner's (2023) tenets of frontline leadership and developed a one-page checklist (Alspach, 2017; Gawande, 2009). The checklist incorporated a balance between items that addressed reflection on the principals' part and other items that focused on engaging the faculty community and students to promote equity. I focused heavily on design elements such as the number of items and font, clarity of directions, and word choice to make the checklist easy to use for the principals (Alspach, 2017; Gawande, 2009).

After completing the checklist, I generated three a priori codes: reflection, culturally responsive teaching, and social capital development. These codes allowed me to identify the participating principals' specific actions to enhance their culturally responsive school leadership and evaluate the checklist's effectiveness during data analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

Phase 2

I recruited five experts, principals or professional researchers, with instructional evaluation rubric design expertise. The experts assessed the checklist's content validity and provided feedback on the overall refinement of checklist items via Zoom interviews or email. The experts received the checklist a week in advance to review all the items within the checklist. Their feedback provided insight that enabled me to develop the next version.

Phase 3

I sent the second draft of the checklist to the original five experts, five more school leaders, and professional researchers with expertise in instructional evaluation rubric design and school leadership for further review on clarity of language, purpose, and ease of use. In this phase, I provided the experts with an electronic survey based on Lawshe's content validity ratio to determine whether the individual items in the checklist were "essential," "useful," or "not necessary" for culturally responsive school leadership (Gilbert & Prion, 2016, p. 531). The data collected during this phase allowed me to draft a new checklist incorporating their feedback. This version of the checklist was the one sent to the 25 principals for field testing.

Phase 4

I recruited 30 interested principals by joining meetings of mastermind groups and communities of practice, posting on the New Jersey Public Charter School Association listserv, and reaching out to principal colleagues. Eventually 25 principals agreed to participate in the research project.

Phase 5

I conducted an individual semistructured interview with each participant via Zoom about their understanding of culturally responsive school leadership, its current role in their leadership practice, and their interest in enhancing their capacity as a culturally responsive principal. Conducting these interviews via Zoom allowed them to be recorded and transcribed. Each interview lasted 20–25 minutes. The semistructured interview format enabled me to ask for clarification or delve deeper into each subject's understanding of culturally responsive school leadership and their experiences using the checklist. The pre-interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

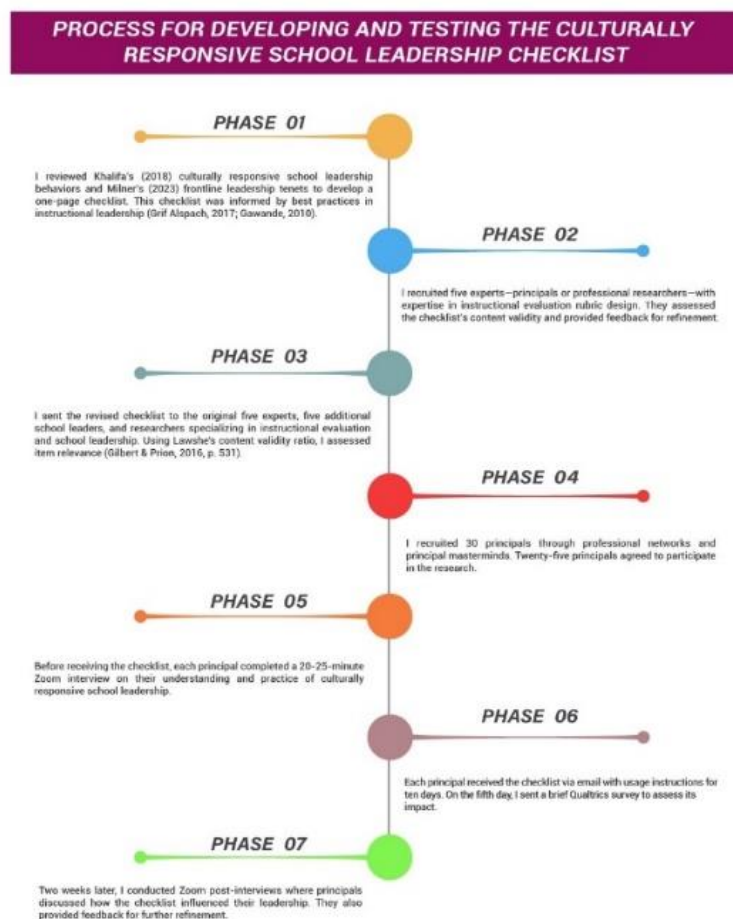
Phase 6

Each principal received a copy of the checklist via email at the close of the pre-interview. I reviewed how they should use it over the next 10 days. I answered any questions regarding checklist use; by the fifth day of using the checklist, I sent them a one-question open-ended survey through Qualtrics to capture further data on how it influenced their culturally responsive school leadership practice.

Phase 7

Two weeks later, the principals met with me individually via Zoom for a 30-minute semistructured post-interview. During the post-interview, the principals discussed how the checklist enhanced their culturally responsive school leadership and gave feedback on the checklist. The post-interview questions can also be found in Appendix A.

The engagement required to collect all data related to this research took 100 hours, given that the interviews totaled 1 hour per subject and were frequently rescheduled due to the principals' demanding schedules as school leaders. Figure 1 illustrates the design and testing process for the checklist.

Figure 1*Process for Developing and Testing the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist***Data Analysis**

The study utilized a hybrid thematic deductive and inductive analysis approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). This analytical method provided insight into answering the study's research questions and captured the efficacy of the checklist in enhancing culturally responsive school leadership among principals. This approach also provided opportunities for research replication.

I conducted data analysis throughout Phases 2–3 and 5–7 using different methods associated with the tasks occurring within each research phase. During Phase 2, exploratory analysis was employed by soliciting feedback from five experts via Zoom or email for overall checklist refinement.

In Phase 3, the expert cohort grew to 10, and a revised checklist incorporating feedback from Phase 2 was redistributed to them. I provided the experts with an electronic survey based on Lawshe's content validity ratio to indicate whether the individual items in the checklist were "essential," "useful," or "not necessary" for culturally responsive leadership (Gilbert & Prion, 2016, p. 531). This final level of feedback allowed me to produce a checklist ready for distribution to principals in Phases 5 and 6.

In Phase 5, the principals testing the checklist participated in a brief four-question interview recorded and transcribed over Zoom. The pre-interview addressed their current understanding of culturally responsive school leadership, how they currently engaged in it, and whether they believed a checklist could enhance their capacity as culturally responsive school leaders. During Phase 6 of the research, the principals received the checklist and directions for its use over 10 school days. They completed a one-question open-ended survey through Qualtrics. In Phase 7, I conducted a post-interview with each participant over Zoom that focused on whether the checklist improved their capacity as culturally responsive school leaders and if they had any suggestions for checklist improvement.

After completing both sets of interviews, I applied a hybrid coding approach, with three a priori codes developed before data collection and using values and a descriptive approach to generate code categories. Coding was done using Dedoose. As the only coder for this research, I looked at whether participants, through their pre- and post-interviews, noted growth in their

capacity as culturally responsive school leaders. The positive responses provided an overall understanding of the checklist's efficacy. Chapter 4 highlights specific interview quotes from the principals to demonstrate how the checklist enhanced their capacity as culturally responsive school leaders.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Culturally responsive school leadership synthesizes several leadership theories: inclusive leadership, transformative leadership, and social justice leadership. It emerged from two strands of educational research: culturally responsive teaching and culturally relevant pedagogy (Aronson & Laughter, 2016).

As developed by Khalifa (2018), culturally responsive school leadership outcomes consist of empowering the student and community through equitable power sharing, identifying and responding to areas of inequity and marginalization, and developing inclusive spaces defined by cultural artifacts, epistemologies, and behaviors. Principals demonstrate culturally responsive school leadership by self-reflecting, developing curricula and culturally responsive teachers, and promoting an inclusive and anti-oppressive school culture (Khalifa, 2018). These attributes provide a basis for principals to evaluate their performance as culturally responsive school leaders. In addition, Khalifa (2018) described the behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders, and Milner (2023) created a set of tenets for frontline school leadership. The NPBEA's (2015) professional standards for school leaders include cultural responsiveness and serve as the basis for principal evaluation rubrics throughout the United States.

States and partnering educational leadership organizations have also created frameworks for school leaders to understand culturally responsive leadership actions. These are the primary tools for principals to apply culturally responsive school leadership at their schools (Leadership Academy, 2022; NPBEA, 2015; SEDNY, 2018). Frameworks focus on a more extensive application of culturally responsive school leadership and defining culturally responsive school leadership actions. Both New York State's (SEDNY, 2018) and the Leadership Academy's

(2022) frameworks are broad, offering multiple approaches to culturally responsive school leadership. The Leadership Academy (2022) compared its framework to a “menu of actions” (p. 1), and the SEDNY (2018) framework is lengthy, containing multiple suggestions for school leaders. In studying these frameworks, Suwak et al. (2024) determined that despite their existence, school leaders implemented culturally responsive school leadership informed by local standards and policies. Suwak et al. advocated for a common framework school leaders could refer to that defined culturally responsive school leadership and its associated actions.

As a result, I determined that an appropriate next step in this line of inquiry was to develop and test a checklist that defined culturally responsive school leadership for principals. I divided my findings into two sections: Part 1 addresses checklist design and Part 2 addresses checklist testing.

Part 1: Checklist Design

During the first part of this study, I developed and field-tested a culturally responsive checklist for principals to reflect on their culturally responsive school leadership actions and assist them in applying them. The purpose of this research was twofold: first, to develop and test a culturally responsive school leadership checklist, and second, to evaluate its effectiveness in answering the three research questions I developed for the study.

1. How can a checklist assist principals in applying culturally responsive school leadership in their schools?
2. How did principals use the checklist regarding their culturally responsive school leadership practice?
3. How did the checklist change principals’ culturally responsive school leadership practice?

The checklist was developed and tested through a seven-phase process.

Phase 1: Checklist Development First Draft

To develop the first version of the checklist, I reviewed Khalifa's (2018) aspects of culturally responsive school leadership and Milner's (2023) frontline leadership tenets. I followed Gawande's (2009) recommendations for checklist design to ensure every step was clear, concise, and actionable. I had to make decisions about how to incorporate critical self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers and curricula, promoting inclusive school contexts, and establishing social capital into the checklist along with Milner's (2023) eight tenets of frontline leadership. It became apparent that Milner (2023) and Khalifa (2018) based their behaviors and tenets on critical self-reflection to understand and improve principals' actions to support students and faculty. Therefore, in the first draft of the checklist, I determined that it needed to promote critical self-reflection over all other processes because, through self-reflection, principals understand their roles in various situations and how to make the conditions more inclusive and equitable. I realized that a principal could engage with the checklist once daily, but not in every moment throughout the day. Making the checklist a tool that principals reviewed once daily made the process of self-reflection even more critical; principals could reflect on what they had done the previous day or earlier in the day and think about the day ahead.

I designed a simple three-column checklist to adhere to Gawande's (2010) emphasis on a concise and clear checklist. I chose to integrate Khalifa's (2018) and Milner's (2023) work into three categories: critical self-reflection, developing culturally responsive teachers, and engaging student and neighborhood contexts. I collapsed the concepts of culturally responsive school leadership and frontline leadership. The checklist was broad enough to apply effectively

in various school settings. In each column, I created four cells, each with a question promoting critical self-reflection. The first draft of the checklist can be seen in Appendix E.

Phase 2: Expert Feedback Round 1

During Phase 2, I contacted five expert school leaders. These individuals consisted of one retired school superintendent, one assistant school district superintendent, one former school principal turned school leadership author and coach, one district curriculum director and one professor of education focused on equity and inclusion in schools. I sent the five experts my checklist and asked them to provide feedback on the checklist's overall language, design, and directions. Three experts met with me over Zoom, and two emailed their comments. All experts indicated that the terms included in the checklist needed explicit definitions and the reflective questions could be more straightforward. The second version of the checklist is presented in Appendix F. I added definitions for terms referenced in the checklist and simplified specific questions.

Phase 3: Expert Feedback Round 2

In Phase 3, I recruited five additional experts for a second round of feedback in addition to my original five experts. The five new experts included two assistant school superintendents, two professors of education focusing on educational equity in curriculum development, and a former school administrator and current professor of educational leadership. I asked the experts if each of the items on the checklist, including directions and definitions, were essential, useful but not essential, or not necessary to determine Lawshe's content validity ratio (CVR; Gilbert & Prion, 2016). Items deemed essential by the experts had a CVR of 1.

Not all experts considered all items on the checklist essential. The experts ranked three questions below the minimum CVR of 0.833 needed to retain an item:

- How will their decision make minoritized students equal members of our school community?
- How did I speak to community members about their concerns, and how could the school help them?
- How did I welcome community members into school to share their knowledge and enhance learning?

These questions were difficult to remove altogether from the checklist, given that the first directly related to how a principal can promote an inclusive community in school, and the other two directly related to establishing social capital. Two experts provided feedback about rewording these questions to make them understandable and promote greater critical self-reflection. They suggested revisions to the questions as follows:

- Did my decision provide equitable opportunities for minoritized students?
- How did I speak to diverse minoritized community members about their concerns, and how could the school help validate and respond to their concerns?
- How have I welcomed diverse minoritized community members into school to share their knowledge and enhance learning?

The revisions resulted in more straightforward questions, so I retained them in the final version of the checklist, which is presented in Appendix G.

Phase 4: Participants

In Phase 4, between September and November of 2024, I contacted over 40 principals and eventually distributed the checklist to 25 principals who agreed to participate.

In this phase, I aimed to develop a sample of principals from North America working in district, independent, and charter schools with various student populations. I wanted to see whether the checklist worked at schools with homogenous and heterogeneous student populations.

Eleven principals were recruited from mastermind programs. Three other principals came from the National Association of Secondary School Principals LGBTQ Leaders Network and the Diverse Charter School Association Inclusion Education Community of Practice. The remaining 12 principals came from various professional groups where I posted recruitment materials, including the New Jersey Charter School listserv and my collegial network, or were recruited by other principals from the study. Seventeen principals knew me before this research, through either a mastermind, a community of practice, or my collegial network.

Obtaining a diverse sample of school leaders was essential when evaluating the checklist. I needed to know if the checklist worked in independent, district, and charter schools across North America. In my sample of principals, 12 came from school districts, 10 came from charter schools, and three came from independent schools. One principal came from Canada, and the other 24 came from the United States; every geographic region within the United States was represented. The racial demographics of my principals included 13 White principals and 12 non-White principals. A majority of these principals led schools with diverse student populations. Fourteen principals led schools in suburban areas, and 11 led schools in urban areas. To maintain subject confidentiality, each principal received a letter as a pseudonym. A complete listing of the principals in the study with basic information about the schools they led is in Appendix B.

Phases 5 and 7: Interviews

I met with each principal individually via Zoom for pre- and post-interviews. During the pre-interview, I determined how they defined culturally responsive school leadership and culturally responsive school leadership actions. After the interview ended, I emailed them a copy of the checklist. I told them to look at the checklist once daily for at least 10 days at school and that after the 10th day, we would meet for a post-interview. I also informed them that they would receive a one-question Qualtrics survey about how they used the checklist to make a decision. During the Zoom post-interviews, we discussed whether the checklist enhanced their culturally responsive school leadership skills and I asked for feedback about improving the checklist.

Part 2: Testing the Checklist

In analyzing the data from principals' use of the checklist, I utilized a hybrid thematic deductive and inductive analysis approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Employing this analytical method provided insight into answering the study's research questions about whether the checklist enhanced culturally responsive school leadership. All 25 principals who used the checklist believed that it enhanced their culturally responsive school leadership, particularly by engaging in daily critical self-reflection about their actions. Principals reported that the checklist improved their capacity for communicating with teachers and community members about cultural responsiveness in school, and that it gave them new insight into coaching, providing professional development for culturally responsive teaching, and envisioning the next steps in making their schools more culturally responsive.

Limitations and Delimitations

I designed this sequential research study to test the checklist to enhance school leaders' efficacy in culturally responsive school leadership. Although the participants provided data

needed to refine and test the checklist, they were a convenience sample that did not represent all school principals. Recruitment through masterminds and communities of practice resulted in a sample of principals more likely to participate, given their participation in groups focused on enhancing school equity and professional development opportunities that touch on culturally responsive practice.

Emerging Themes from Testing

Findings from the preliminary review and pilot testing of the checklist, based on principal interviews, indicated that it was valid for assisting principals in enhancing their culturally responsive school leadership. Three themes emerged from the qualitative data regarding how the principals stated they grew professionally after the checklist:

1. Critical self-reflection: How the principal understands culturally responsive school leadership and evaluates their own actions and disposition in making their school more equitable and inclusive.
2. Supporting and developing culturally responsive teaching: How the principal supports and coaches faculty members in enhancing their own culturally responsive teaching skills and developing their own culturally responsive pedagogies.
3. Doing the right work with focus and direction: How the principal is mission driven regarding culturally responsive school leadership, understanding their current school's level of performance, and envisioning where to focus their efforts and resources going forward.

Before discussing the research questions, I will address how the principals in the study defined culturally responsive school leadership before using the checklist, how they described

their culturally responsive school leadership actions, the barriers they encountered to using the checklist, and their aspirations for expanding their culturally responsive practices.

Defining Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Actions, and Barriers to Implementation

In my pre-interviews, I asked the principals to define culturally responsive school leadership and what they considered culturally responsive school leadership. All principals defined culturally responsive school leadership as a three-phase process of self-reflection, understanding the students they served, and taking action.

The process began with aligning their missions and values through self-reflection. The principals determined that being self-reflective in their practice was essential in addressing minoritized students' and their families' needs and concerns. Principal A defined this process as "recognizing your values, and how you are living through your values and being mindful of everyone else's cultures, perspectives, and way of life and how you are as a school leader." They considered critical self-reflection essential before taking action. Principals routinely asked themselves questions as leaders. Principal B defined the questioning process as "How does a leader reflect on their identities? How do they reflect on their lived experiences? And how do they play a role in culture?" All principals acknowledged that being self-reflective was self-evaluative. They admitted they made mistakes in implementing culturally responsive school leadership. Fourteen principals questioned whether their actions were effective or accurate. As Principal P described, "I feel like my detriment is that I just don't know anything else. So I'm trying to learn myself because I feel like once I know things, then I can enhance and do things."

Critical self-reflection on their leadership helped the principals better understand the students and communities they served at their schools. When asked in their pre-interviews to define culturally responsive school leadership, 22 principals defined it as understanding the

students and community. All the principals valued understanding their communities as essential in guiding their actions as leaders. Principal H described the connection between community knowledge and action as “an orientation towards the work that we do and the way that we run a large organization.”

Once the principals understood their school community’s needs and priorities, they based their leadership actions on improving school practices and teacher professional development.

Principal U described their process:

When I say removing barriers, I’m talking about if a kid is hungry, you give him food. If a kid needs additional assistance, we provide that assistance. If a child needs to express themselves in their vernacular in their way, that’s the way they speak.

All principals defined their culturally responsive school leadership actions as community events or how the school allocated resources and managed practices regarding inclusivity and equity.

Before using the checklist, the principals who participated in this study defined their work as culturally responsive school leaders in two main areas: curricular development and community events. Ten principals worked within districts that prioritized implementing culturally responsive curricula. These principals expressed pride in their districts’ inclusive practices, but noted that implementing these curricular materials took time due to teacher hesitancy. The principals acknowledged the need to find better ways to support teachers in implementing these materials and understanding the cultural identities of their students and families. Principal F described the process as “How do we use these pedagogical tools and mindsets to talk about student culture?” Fifteen principals indicated frustration with teachers for not being as self-reflective as they were. All 25 principals acknowledged they needed to approach supporting teachers’ growth as culturally responsive teachers with empathy. As

described by Principal H, “I see there is needed more than anything else is to be able to take a step back and try to look at it through their eyes.”

The 25 principals identified two types of programs to engage with families and the larger school community. The first program template involved the school inviting community members to share their cultural experiences through celebrations or school programs. The second type of program involved the school developing parent affinity groups and parent ambassadors to address community concerns. Some schools developed scripts and protocols to assist in increasing community engagement, but these programs were driven by the school rather than based on community needs and concerns.

Twenty-three principals said their performance as culturally responsive school leaders needed improvement. Ten principals cited being unable to speak the language of most of their school community as a perceived limiting factor in engaging with their students and community members. A secondary issue regarding communication was simply being able to communicate school values and priorities to families effectively. As described by Principal J, “We’re doing great things, and yet that might not translate or what we deem important and things that are essential to our school may not translate into things that other stakeholders may value.” All the principals were concerned that they lacked resources, tools, and support to evaluate their work in culturally responsive school leadership, as described by Principal P: “Every day I turn around, and it’s like we don’t have something for their group of kids and I don’t even [know] where to start.” Given the principals’ interest in improving their performance, particularly regarding communication and self-reflection, the first area of the checklist’s efficacy I evaluated was how it assisted them in their culturally responsive school leadership.

Research Question 1

How can a checklist assist principals in applying culturally responsive school leadership in their schools? All 25 principals in the study agreed the checklist encouraged them to self-reflect on how they addressed the needs of their minoritized students. Seven principals found culturally responsive leadership broad and daunting at times, and the checklist provided a way to narrowly focus on what they could do as leaders. Principal S shared during their post-interview, “I think it gave me a framework as to what culturally responsive means, because I feel sometimes that other terms get thrown out there, and they’re a little ambiguous.” Principal R found the checklist gave them direction regarding what to do as a leader to be culturally responsive within their school: “It opened my eyes to it being little things that can make changes, as opposed to feeling or thinking like there’s big overarching DEI that we need to get done.” All principals said the checklist helped them connect their values to what they could specifically do, as described by Principal E: “It really made me check in with myself, because I think a lot of times you think you’re being culturally responsive or being reflective on what’s happening.” Influence on principals’ self-reflection emerged as a major theme regarding how the checklist assisted them in applying culturally responsive school leadership.

Theme 1: Critical Self-Reflection

The process of critical self-reflection helped all principals respond to situations that occurred at their schools. Principal E described the value of critical self-reflection as “it just made me pause a little more because the continuous act of looking at the checklist made me think about that.” All principals valued taking time to reflect, especially on critical school practices such as discipline, student feedback, and working with parents and faculty.

Seven principals reported that self-reflection helped them manage discipline. They considered the impact of their disciplinary decisions specifically on minoritized students and how to apply other disciplinary options beyond suspension. Three principals used the checklist when they provided feedback to minoritized students who received some form of disciplinary consequence. One principal focused on the racialization of a disciplinary incident when a Black student was accused of stealing an additional piece of pie from a Thanksgiving event. The principal concluded the student received harsh treatment from other school personnel due to his race, and was concerned about the humiliation the student experienced. This principal used critical self-reflection to consider how to make school disciplinary practices less influenced by implicit bias against minoritized students.

Seven principals found the checklist reminded them to use restorative language with students, and three principals said it helped them resolve conflicts between teachers and parents by being more effective communicators. One principal described mediating a dispute between a Black teacher and a White paraprofessional. The checklist gave this principal the courage and language to resolve the matter and point out to the teacher how implicit bias prevented the paraprofessional from following through on the teacher's plan for supporting a particular student. The principal shared what they said to the Black teacher and her response to their comments: "I'm aware of biases that people have and might not even know they're there, and I want you to know that I see it here, and the teacher was super appreciative." A similar situation occurred for Principal U when they mediated a conflict between parent leaders about plans for an upcoming Black history event. Principal U said that instead of immediately responding to the situation, they referred to the checklist to determine the right questions to ask of both parties. "I don't think I would have gotten where I needed to be."

The checklist helped the principals notice what was missing from their schools. Nine principals noted they were not creating enough opportunities to hear minoritized students' perspectives about school. These nine principals acknowledged the checklist and pointed out whom they still needed to engage with in and out of school. Principal Q described how critical self-reflection assisted their understanding of what they needed to do as a leader: "It made me take a critical look at what I do and do not do during the course of the day."

Overall, self-reflection through the checklist helped the principals assess their overall effectiveness as culturally responsive school leaders. Principal I described this as, "It made me think about how I do with my staff. How do I do with my kids? How do I do with my community? What stood out was my staff."

Theme 2: Developing and Promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching

The checklist assisted all principals in developing and promoting culturally responsive teaching and helped them identify culturally responsive teaching in their schools. Fifteen principals expressed frustration that their teachers had farther to go regarding culturally responsive teaching. One principal described attempting to convince a teacher to teach a more culturally responsive novel than *The Great Gatsby*. Principal B initially described frustration with their faculty's struggles adopting culturally responsive teaching practices, saying, "You should already know these things." After using the checklist, Principal B adopted a more empathetic approach towards their teachers, sharing, "How am I specifically as the leader contributing to the learning and growth of and development of my teachers?"

All 25 principals found the checklist gave them direction regarding how their faculty needed to adopt culturally responsive teaching practices and what they needed to support them. One principal reflected on their practices as a teacher and what they learned as a leader to help

their teachers. Two principals thought the checklist provided a way to plan future professional development opportunities for their teachers. Principal F found the checklist assisted in determining how to support their teachers: “It’s brought to light that it’s going to take more from me to help my giving my teachers resources and learning opportunities to start seeing things differently.”

Twelve principals identified that, in addition to making long-term plans for faculty professional development, the checklist helped in managing day-to-day conversations with teachers regarding instructional needs and behavior management. Because the checklist assisted with critical self-reflection and supporting and developing culturally responsive teaching practices, it supported the principals in doing the right work with focus and direction.

Theme 3: Doing the Right Work with Focus and Direction

The third theme was how the checklist helped principals identify the culturally responsive school leadership work they needed to focus on moving forward. All principals mentioned that they could not engage with the checklist’s neighborhood, community, and student contexts section. They attributed their inability to address these areas to their heavy involvement with instruction, students, and teachers. Given their amount of effort in these areas, they had great difficulty seeing how they could effectively engage with more pressing community concerns as culturally responsive school leaders.

Three principals pointed out that the checklist illustrated what they had already accomplished as culturally responsive school leaders, and also assisted them in envisioning what they still needed to do. All 25 principals emphasized that the checklist helped them understand the issues related to culturally responsive school leadership and break them down into minor daily interactions. Principal J said the checklist assisted them in determining their actions: “I was

quickly reminded of no matter what happens in the day, this is how I should be thinking about how I should make decisions.” Principal R described it similarly: “I think just looking at this every day definitely keeps a lot of the big picture things in the forefront, which was definitely helpful.”

The checklist assisted all principals in understanding culturally responsive leadership, specifically within their schools’ context, and their actions’ impact on improving opportunities for minoritized students. How the principals used the checklist provided greater insight into how the checklist enhanced their culturally responsive leadership efficacy.

Research Question 2

How did principals use the checklist regarding their culturally responsive school leadership practice? At the end of the pre-interviews, I gave the principals minimal directions on how to use the checklist, telling them to look at the checklist daily to reflect on their decisions and issues at their schools. Overall, the principals looked at the checklist regularly. They reviewed it at the start of their day and kept it in a prominent place on their desks, as described by Principal J: “I checked it in the morning, reminding me of what culturally responsive leadership is, and it kind of grounded me that way.” The principals compared using the checklist to following a lesson plan as a teacher. One principal shared that it reminded them of a series of checklists they maintained while teaching to guide instruction and be aware of specific student needs.

Three principals kept the checklist with them throughout the day. They consulted it regularly before making decisions, as Principal U described: “I just lifted it up and just said, ‘Okay, where am I? What am I doing?’” Some principals used the checklist to prepare for parent meetings and found that it helped them listen more effectively to parent concerns. Two

principals said that without the checklist, they would have entered parent meetings with more significant biases toward parents' concerns and made decisions that did not reflect community needs and concerns.

Four principals developed novel uses for the checklist and identified ways it could further enhance culturally responsive school leadership. One principal wrote daily journal entries about their issues and decisions and how the checklist influenced or changed their thinking. Another principal used the checklist to assess their daily actions and reflected on how they and their faculty were culturally responsive over the week. Another principal shared the checklist with their assistant principal, and they consulted it during their daily meetings to evaluate how they were performing as culturally responsive leaders. They also shared that they planned to use the checklist as a basis for developing faculty professional development programs. Another principal used the checklist to set a goal to speak at length every day with a minoritized student at their school, to learn more about what was going well at school and where there were opportunities for improvements and support. All principals believed using the checklist daily made them more reflective, as described by Principal S: "It was at the forefront of my thoughts. When I made a decision, it just made me pause a little more because I'm like, wait a minute, I have to think about that."

Theme 1: Critical Self-Reflection

The principals shared that before using the checklist, daily reflection was not a part of their daily practice. Three principals described themselves before using the checklist as "reactive" and "emotional." Principal Q described their decision-making process before using the checklist as being "a hamster on a wheel." The principals valued using a checklist, which allowed them to pause and reflect on their overall decision-making. As shared by Principal A,

I think it allowed me to really analyze and reflect inward on the decisions that I'm making who it actually affects and also the fact that if I'm either making decisions based upon emotion or a sense of urgency as a school leader.

They described their reflection as improving communication with teachers, students, and families. Principal F pointed out that by being less reactive, they could "hear what's going on and be able to communicate effectively" and support their faculty and students. Using the checklist helped them "be less reactive and more inclusive." Principal E shared a similar experience with using the checklist to reflect on their communication skills: "I did use the checklist to be aware of how I was presenting and how I was responding to feedback." The opportunity to be reflective rather than reactive enabled the principals to support their communities and to understand what was going well and what needed improvement.

Five principals found they could evaluate their own culturally responsive school leadership through self-reflection. Two principals found the checklist highlighted what they needed to do as school leaders. In contrast, two other principals found the checklist affirmed what they had already accomplished as culturally responsive school leaders. The principals expressed that using the checklist enabled them to narrow their focus regarding culturally responsive school leadership, so that even if they considered their shortcomings, it gave them guidance regarding what they could do to improve.

Using the checklist reminded the principals of their leadership capacity and what they could do as culturally responsive school leaders. One principal used the checklist to change their agendas so their school leadership team could focus specifically on minoritized students' academic progress and the overall inclusivity, support, and affirmation they experienced at their school. Another principal used the checklist to coach teachers on adopting and teaching

culturally responsive books in their classrooms. Principal B used the checklist to reflect on how well they supported and developed culturally responsive teachers: “How am I specifically as the leader contributing to the learning and growth and development of my teachers?” The checklist reminded the principals of their effectiveness as leaders, and they used it to make progress in promoting and developing culturally responsive teachers.

Theme 2: Developing and Promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching

Fifteen principals found using the checklist enhanced their ability to develop and promote culturally responsive teaching, mainly through feedback. One principal used their checklist to provide feedback on their instructional walkthroughs. Nineteen principals found the checklist helpful in meetings to discuss student performance. The checklist provided ways to raise questions about support and intervention for minoritized students and how to make them more effective. Five principals used the checklist to target minoritized students’ academic support effectively. The principals routinely referred to the checklist to ask questions during meetings. Two principals used the checklist to provide targeted feedback to teachers struggling with implementing culturally responsive teaching. One principal used the checklist to identify the need to be culturally responsive when they provided feedback to a teacher from a minoritized community. Fifteen principals emphasized that using the checklist helped them work with teachers to support minoritized students’ academic progress. Their use of the checklist made those conversations highly respectful, as described by Principal F: “I think being able to have a respectful conversation, whether it is an agreement or disagreement, helps foster having a calm, nurturing, learning environment.”

Using the checklist to support and develop culturally responsive teaching enabled the 15 principals to ask challenging questions of their teachers, but in a highly supportive manner.

Employing the checklist as a guide to support and develop culturally responsive teaching and to enhance their overall self-reflection provided clarity regarding doing the right work with focus and direction.

Theme 3: Doing the Right Work with Focus and Direction

Using the checklist enabled all principals to understand what they could do as leaders about inclusivity and equity at their schools. Principal F discussed the challenges of the work they still needed to address at their school: “Even though things are fine like we’re status quo here, it does not mean that there’s stuff that needs to be addressed, and usually when things are fine nobody wants to change anything.”

All principals appreciated that even though much was left to accomplish to further their culturally responsive school leadership, the checklist narrowed their focus to achieve their goals. Principal R reported that using the checklist daily was essential in working with focus and direction regarding culturally responsive school leadership: “If the checklist is gonna be used, there has to be the caveat of using it every day, because that’s what made me focus more.” Principal U described that despite all their school responsibilities, the checklist allowed them to focus their actions: “It just narrowed the focus when I was making decisions that they’re going to impact our students.” Twenty principals shared that they intended to continue using the checklist for the remainder of the school year, due to its value in helping them critically self-reflect and envision new ways to support all their students and teachers.

The checklist assisted one principal to address a group of disruptive middle school students. The principal hoped that inviting the disruptive students to work on solutions for their conduct would encourage them to share what they needed to be successful at school. The principal stated that their goal was to keep these students in school. Four principals planned a

similar approach, regularly receiving feedback from students, community members, and community organizations to serve their minoritized students more effectively. All 25 principals indicated that the checklist developed for this study clarified their role as culturally responsive school leaders. Using the checklist changed their perspective on what they could and should do as culturally responsive school leaders.

Research Question 3

How did the checklist change principals' culturally responsive school leadership practice? The checklist changed all 25 principals' practices in three distinct ways. First, principals used critical self-reflection to improve their understanding of how they could advance cultural responsiveness within their schools. Second, the principals changed their communication regarding cultural responsiveness in faculty and community meetings. Third, they improved their ability to listen, understand, and take action on community concerns, as well as to support teachers with feedback on culturally responsive teaching. The checklist introduced the principals to critical self-reflection as an essential process for being a culturally responsive school leader.

Theme 1: Critical Self-Reflection

The introduction of daily critical self-reflection changed the principals' leadership practices. They reflected on their current approach to culturally responsive school leadership, what they accomplished, and how they might need to change. As stated by Principal E,

I think a lot [of] times you think you're being culturally responsive or being reflective on what's happening, and I just think looking at it and continuing to review the different definitions helped me to be more conscious of my decision making.

Principal E found the checklist helped them understand community members' concerns about providing a second cafeteria at their school to serve halal meals. Before using the

checklist, they had thought one halal cafeteria served that need. However, after using the checklist, they realized that culturally responsive school leadership entailed factoring in community members' perspectives and aspirations when making decisions.

All 25 principals found the checklist introduced them to new ideas, which led to different ways of making decisions at school. Principal I described the change in their decision-making process using the checklist: "It enhanced the way that I interacted and thought about being, and the checklist made me think about things I would have never thought about before making a decision." Another principal found the checklist enabled them to discuss culturally responsive school leadership and equity with their assistant principal. Routine self-reflection helped the principals pause and understand what was happening at their schools.

The process of self-reflection changed the perspective of all principals. After conducting their daily self-reflection, the principals considered how their actions contributed to culturally responsive school leadership. Principal O described reflecting on how they could respond to the needs of economically disadvantaged families at their school:

I have some folks like right on the extreme edge of living poverty and food security issues, and reflecting on, this is the systemic oppression of these folks and the power imbalance where they are coming from and who I represent to them, and just trying to figure out how to help them.

Principal B found critical self-reflection gave them context for the slow growth of culturally responsive teaching at their school: "The self-reflection tool on the left side was helpful but very frustrating because I am ready to do things, but I am recognizing that my team is not." Critical self-reflection altered all 25 principals' understanding of their role as leaders, making them more patient and empathic.

Theme 2: Developing and Promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching

All 25 principals found that using the checklist enhanced their approach to developing and promoting culturally responsive teaching. During pre-interviews, 15 principals expressed frustration that their teachers were not aligned with culturally responsive teaching to the same extent as their schools and districts. Through critical self-reflection, the 15 principals began to see their work support and develop culturally responsive teaching, which was more effective when coaching teachers. Principal A noted that they personally also needed to grow in terms of culturally responsive leadership: “What is the language I am using? But also, what is everybody using, and how does that trickle down into the students?” Principal N described becoming more intentional in making decisions: “I’m considering all the different factors that go into a decision and how it might impact others in particular.” Principal U and another principal both had particular minoritized students with behavioral issues at their schools. They consulted the checklist to engage teachers in discussions about supporting these students in decreasing their negative behaviors.

One principal went even further and worked with teachers to identify other ways for the students who caused behavioral issues to be successful at school. Another principal applied a similar approach with a teacher who employed exclusionary practices toward minoritized students, using the checklist to help the teacher identify ways to be more inclusive. One principal incorporated these conversations into post-observation conferences with all their teachers. Two principals wondered whether they could create a version of the checklist for teachers to assist them as culturally responsive educators. Another principal pointed out during a meeting that their school’s high state testing performance was due to White students, and the school needed to

investigate why minoritized students were not performing as well. The checklist transformed 15 principals' approach to working with teachers into a collaborative and solution-oriented one.

Theme 3: Doing the Right Work with Focus and Direction

All principals found that using the checklist augmented their culturally responsive school leadership by making it something they thought about daily. It helped them make decisions to promote inclusivity and equity-based practices for their minoritized students. The principals thoroughly evaluated their schools, their faculty, and their overall leadership regarding cultural responsiveness. Two principals thought their schools were doing well in terms of being culturally responsive. Six other principals realized there was improvement needed for their schools to be culturally responsive. All 25 principals reported that the checklist enriched their leadership. After using the checklist, the principals were optimistic about their capacity to make their schools more culturally responsive and support their teachers, faculty, and communities further.

Eighteen principals believed their schools were moving steadily towards being more inclusive and equitable. There were several unifying factors among these principals. They worked in larger systems that the principals defined as culturally responsive regarding long-term goals for improving minoritized student performance, and they reported that their culturally responsive curriculum and materials helped the most in their progress toward these goals. These 18 principals said their focus as school leaders was to design professional development and coaching opportunities to support teachers who were unprepared or reluctant to utilize these materials. The seven principals who did not have larger organizational support for cultural responsiveness expressed personal visions and missions for expanding cultural responsiveness within their schools. These principals indicated that their teachers required help understanding

culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy as potential tools for enhancing overall student performance and well-being.

In their post-interviews, all principals expressed optimism regarding their faculty, their school communities, and themselves as leaders. They shared that if they continued to utilize the checklist, they could incorporate more student feedback to make their schools more inclusive and equitable institutions.

Future Versions of the Checklist

The final post-interview question was a request for feedback to improve the checklist for other principals. Based on the feedback of the 25 principals in this study, I drafted a fourth version of the checklist. The principals consistently expressed that additional checklist resources could strengthen their efforts to support teachers in implementing culturally responsive curricula. They suggested adding more prompts and links to resources within the checklist to better assist teachers in this work. Six principals also suggested that future versions of the checklist include expanded resource links and proposed the development of a companion checklist specifically for teachers to support culturally responsive teaching practices.

Six principals recommended removing the community organizations section from the checklist, as they could not meaningfully address these broader neighborhood and organizational concerns. In their feedback, they questioned the relevance of this section, citing their primary focus on supporting students and teachers as a more immediate and pressing priority.

Summary of Findings

The study's main finding was that the checklist helped principals incorporate culturally responsive leadership practices into their daily routines. After utilizing the checklist, principals who initially questioned their efficacy began to perceive themselves as effective, culturally

responsive leaders. The checklist also enhanced their communication skills, particularly in interactions with teachers and community members. Additionally, it supported principals in developing strategies for addressing student discipline, designing professional development, and listening to and learning from their minoritized students about their experiences at school.

The checklist I designed in this study enabled principals to enhance their culturally responsive school leadership. The checklist was based on Khalifa's (2018) culturally responsive school leadership behaviors and Milner's (2023) frontline leadership tenets (2023), as well as Gawande's (2009) template for checklists. It went through three rounds of development, including two rounds of evaluation by school leadership experts. The third version of the checklist was tested by 25 principals leading diverse schools across North America. I interviewed the principals before and after they used the checklist for 10 days.

In reviewing the qualitative data from the interviews, three themes emerged regarding how principals used the checklist: critical self-reflection, promoting and developing culturally responsive teachers, and doing the right work with focus and purpose. All 25 principals found that daily self-reflection helped them effectively communicate with teachers and community members, support their teachers to grow and develop as culturally responsive teachers, and focus on equity, student support, and inclusive teaching practices. Four principals found the checklist assisted them in changing disciplinary practices to be more restorative and equitable. All principals struggled to engage with community and neighborhood concerns, given their focus on supporting students and teachers. However, the checklist enabled the principals to understand their efficacy as culturally responsive school leaders and identify actions and goals to move their schools forward for their minoritized students.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This chapter restates the research problem and reviews the methods used in this study before summarizing the results and discussing their implications. Then, I provide the reader with recommendations for future studies.

Statement of the Problem

Principals are essential to foster culturally responsive school practices. They serve as instructional and cultural leaders. While their role is critical in implementing school-level reforms, they often face a gap between the available research and practical tools to apply it effectively. The disconnect, described by Gawande (2009) as a crisis of “eptitude” (p. 10), occurs when principals rely heavily on memory and experience to make decisions about instructional priorities, student behavior, and operational concerns. Without accessible, reflective tools, principals may struggle to adapt their leadership to evolving demographic shifts, potentially hindering their ability to create equitable and inclusive school cultures (Cooper, 2009; Horsford et al., 2011; Suwak et al., 2024).

To address this challenge, principals require practical resources, such as a reflective checklist, to guide their daily decision-making through the lens of culturally responsive school leadership. Such a tool can bridge the gap between research and practice to help principals consistently integrate diverse cultural perspectives into their schools. Principals can foster equitable schools rooted in critical self-reflection, sustain and support culturally responsive teaching, and provide students with education rooted in multiple cultural epistemologies if the application of culturally responsive leadership is simplified through the existence of helpful tools and resources (Gawande, 2009; Khalifa, 2018; Pratt, 2020).

Review of the Methods

Culturally responsive school leadership requires actionable practices to guide principals in fostering equitable and inclusive school environments. I developed and tested a reflective tool for principals to apply culturally responsive leadership in their daily practice. I designed this culturally responsive school leadership checklist to help principals critically reflect on their actions and ensure their decisions aligned with culturally responsive principles. The checklist provided a framework for principals to evaluate their leadership decisions regularly, promoting intentionality and alignment with best practices to address the diverse needs of their school communities.

To evaluate the tool's effectiveness, I conducted a qualitative study and field-tested the checklist to answer the following three research questions:

1. How can a checklist assist principals in applying culturally responsive school leadership in their schools?
2. How did principals use the checklist regarding their culturally responsive school leadership practice?
3. How did the checklist change principals' culturally responsive school leadership practice?

I developed a seven-phase process to create and test the checklist to ensure it aligned with Khalifa's (2018) behaviors associated with culturally responsive school leadership and Milner's (2023) tenets of frontline leadership. After I drafted the checklist's first version, I sent it to five school leadership experts for feedback. The second version of the checklist incorporated the feedback, and I sent this revised version to 10 school leadership experts. I applied Lawshe's content validity ratio (Gilbert & Prion, 2016) in reviewing their feedback to ensure that the

checklist was practical and informative for principals. I recruited 25 principals across North America to test the checklist in their schools over 10 days. The study included pre-interviews to understand their leadership context, guided checklist use, a one-question survey to capture real-time application insights, and post-interviews to reflect on their experiences. All 25 principals reported that the checklist improved their culturally responsive school leadership practices and enhanced their ability to critically self-reflect on their decisions. They also provided valuable insights to refine the checklist for broader use.

Data analysis revealed three key themes in how the principals experienced professional growth. First, the checklist fostered critical self-reflection, which enabled principals to examine their leadership actions through a culturally responsive lens. Second, it encouraged principals to support the development of culturally responsive teaching to guide their staff to adopt inclusive practices. Lastly, the tool helped principals focus on the right work and provided direction and clarity to their leadership to foster equity and collaboration. Together, these findings highlight the potential of this structured reflective tool to transform culturally responsive school leadership from an abstract theory into actionable daily practice.

Summary of Findings

The study sample initially included 40 principals, but ultimately, only 25 participants completed the pre- and post-interviews and tested the checklist over 10 school days. This sample achieved my goal of having principals from district, independent, and charter schools across North America test the checklist. The study included 23 schools with heterogeneous student populations and two with homogenous populations. The principals in the study came from various racial and ethnic demographic groups and had multiple levels of familiarity with culturally responsive school leadership. All the principals in the study stated that the checklist

assisted and enhanced their culturally responsive school leadership practice, particularly through critical self-reflection to promote and support culturally responsive teaching.

The study's main finding was that the checklist made being a culturally responsive school leader something principals could accomplish daily. After using the checklist, principals who previously doubted their efficacy viewed themselves as effective culturally responsive school leaders. The checklist improved the principals' communication skills, mainly when working with teachers and speaking to community members. Using the checklist, principals developed new approaches to student discipline, professional development, and student feedback.

The findings suggested the checklist achieved its purpose. The principals shared how they planned to improve their culturally responsive school leadership and support culturally responsive teaching and curriculum. Thematic analysis revealed that the checklist supported principals' critical self-reflection and helped them promote culturally responsive teaching. However, all 25 principals reported struggling to engage with community members around their concerns and welcome them into school because their support of students and teachers consumed all their time.

Discussion of Findings

Three themes emerged from the development and pilot testing of the culturally responsive school leadership checklist: critical self-reflection, developing and promoting culturally responsive teaching, and doing the right work with focus and direction. Critical self-reflection and developing and promoting culturally responsive teaching align with Khalifa's (2018) core behaviors for culturally responsive school leadership and Milner's (2023) tenets of frontline leadership. Overall, the principals reported that the checklist's prompts for critical self-reflection most influenced their leadership practices. The process of self-reflection assisted them

in envisioning new approaches and programs and in evaluating their own culturally responsive school leadership.

Developing and promoting culturally responsive teaching emerged as a second theme, given the principals in this study spent most of their time supporting teachers and students. The checklist clarified the extent to which their schools were inclusive and anti-oppressive learning environments. It also helped them develop a more empathetic approach to support and challenge their teachers in becoming culturally responsive educators.

Doing the right work with focus and direction emerged as a theme consolidating Khalifa's (2018) leadership behavior of promoting inclusive and anti-oppressive school contexts and Milner's (2023) eighth tenet of leadership, involving and centering young people. The theme of doing the right work shaped how principals adjusted their daily actions and envisioned their long-term goals as culturally responsive school leaders.

The checklist enabled all 25 principals to understand culturally responsive school leadership and evaluate themselves as culturally responsive school leaders. It allowed participants to envision the steps they could take individually and collectively with their faculty, students, and families to develop inclusive, equitable, anti-oppressive schools.

Theme 1: Critical Self-Reflection

During their pre-interviews, I instructed the principals to review the checklist at least once daily. The principals in the study found that daily self-reflection gave them new perspectives on understanding their schools and leadership practices. A novel finding in my research was that before they used the checklist, 23 principals assumed they were not performing at the level they believed they should be, given the need and urgency for them to be culturally responsive school leaders for their students and families.

Principals' training in culturally responsive school leadership is inconsistent, but they are expected to execute expertise in these areas as part of school leadership standards (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2018). The principals in this study perceived culturally responsive school leadership as a large and overwhelming task. As described by Principal P, "Every day I turn around, and it's like we don't have something for this group of kids, and I don't even know where to start." Fourteen principals attributed their perception of themselves as ineffective culturally responsive leaders to a lack of resources and tools to evaluate and reflect on their leadership (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Marshall & Khalifa, 2018). All the principals in the study reported a need for culturally responsive school leadership tools, affirming Gawande's (2009) findings that checklists enhanced performance and reduced error prevention.

Before using the checklist, 15 principals in the study described themselves as behind in their work as culturally responsive school leaders. All the participants articulated that they wanted to do more for their schools as culturally responsive school leaders. The checklist provided both groups with an understanding of culturally responsive school leadership and encouraged them to think about how they could do more at their schools. Daily self-reflection with the checklist gave three principals a greater understanding of the racialization of disciplinary practices in school and the need to consider implementing restorative practices (Milner, 2023; Ray, 2019). This was one way that principals used the checklist to understand identity and racialization within their schools and how they, as culturally responsive school leaders, could disrupt minoritization (Khalifa, 2018; Ray, 2019).

Critical reflection via the checklist in this study served as the first step to center minoritized students in school practices and to confront inequity, which supports the findings of other culturally responsive school leadership research (Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2021). Reflection

enabled the principals to identify their blind spots as leaders and envision ways to address these errors (Gawande, 2009; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015). Through critical self-reflection, principals perceived situations at their schools differently. They made culturally responsive and bold decisions, such as one principal's support for a second halal kitchen at their school and another principal pointing out to their data team that their school's celebration of test scores was only due to the White students' scores.

The process of critical self-reflection gave principals the voice to directly confront minoritization at their schools and effectively communicate that to various stakeholders. Three principals used the checklist to communicate effectively at meetings where they questioned inequitable practices and advocated for more inclusive ones. This was another novel finding, given that the body of research on culturally responsive school leadership does not address how critical self-reflection enhances communication skills. All 25 principals in the study credited the checklist with helping them identify ways to communicate their concerns and engage others to understand their perspectives. This enhanced communication and confidence further assisted the principals in their support and development of culturally responsive teaching.

Theme 2: Developing and Promoting Culturally Responsive Teaching

The principals' use of the checklist to support culturally responsive teaching was directly related to self-reflection. Critical self-reflection allowed principals to move from a state of frustration with teachers who were not culturally responsive to a state of more empathy for these staff members. All principals in the study began to develop clear, actionable strategies to provide professional development that would help teachers become culturally responsive in their classrooms and overall school practices. Principal F described this process by saying, "It brought

to light that it's going to take more from me to help by giving my teachers resources and learning opportunities to start seeing things differently.”

Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023) raised concerns about the need for schools to provide culturally responsive curricula to all students. However, 15 principals in this study already had curricula supporting culturally responsive instruction. These principals reported that a greater leadership challenge for them was engaging and supporting their teachers in using these curricular materials. The checklist reminded this group of principals that coaching and mentoring were the best way to address this issue and enabled them to realign their empathetic approach to a more collaborative one. Prior to using the checklist, the 15 principals considered culturally responsive leadership necessary due to an empathetic identification with their minoritized students. After using the checklist, they described becoming more empathetic towards their teachers, realizing that teachers required additional coaching and professional development to incorporate culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy. Ultimately, this broader approach towards understanding the needs of students, faculty, and the community, which is directly linked to leadership actions through increased professional development, aligns with both Milner (2023) and Khalifa (2018).

All 25 principals consistently voiced that further checklist resources could assist them because they regularly supported their teachers in working with culturally responsive curricula. The principals wanted more prompts and links that would support their work with teachers. Six principals wondered whether a later version of the checklist could link to culturally responsive teaching resources and asked if I could develop a companion checklist for teachers.

The checklist bridged culturally responsive school leadership research and the leadership frameworks and standards developed to provide actionable steps for school leaders. When giving

feedback on the checklist, the principals consistently described it as an essential resource to improve their leadership. These impressions directly support research findings that principals considered themselves unprepared for culturally responsive leadership due to a lack of explicit models, resources, and overall understanding (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2018; Suwak et al., 2024). The checklist is a novel tool for practitioners to access and understand the theory and apply it to empower minoritized students, respond to inequity, and develop inclusive spaces (Khalifa, 2018). The checklist helped principals provide feedback and initiate discussions with teachers about minoritization, culturally responsive teaching, and equity. It enabled two principals to plan professional development supporting culturally responsive teaching practices. The final theme of doing the right work with focus and direction explains how this study's principals used the checklist to further their visions of culturally responsive school leadership.

Theme 3: Doing the Right Work With Focus and Direction

The checklist enabled principals to develop a vision for their school about culturally responsive practices. It gave them an overall understanding of what their schools did well, and it allowed them to identify areas for improvement. All 25 principals emphasized the daily practice of consulting the checklist, which gave them a way to connect long-term goals with daily actions. As stated by Principal R, "I think just looking at this every day definitely keeps a lot of the big picture things in the forefront, which was definitely helpful." Through their use of the checklist, three principals developed new programs to learn about the needs and concerns of minoritized students and their families.

The checklist was intended to promote culturally responsive school leadership and help principals disrupt oppressive practices and address equity. These goals in isolation appeared

daunting for all the principals, and they credited the checklist with focusing their work and making it part of their daily routine. The principals consulted the checklist every morning to determine their daily priorities. All 25 principals stated they valued the checklist for making critical self-reflection on culturally responsive leadership a consistent practice. This directly aligns with research regarding the mindset associated with cultural responsiveness (Madhlangboe & Gordon, 2012). After completing the checklist, all the principals in the study reported improved self-perception as culturally responsive school leaders. Three principals expressed pride in reflecting on what they had done as leaders before using the checklist. After working with the checklist, three principals developed new programs to listen to their minoritized students and families. All the principals described a greater understanding of their efficacy as culturally responsive school leaders and patience in working towards making their schools more inclusive and equitable for all students. The principals' changed understanding of their leadership capacity led them to identify the need to be patient and consistent—key aspects of a culturally responsive school leader's mindset (Azorín & Fullan, 2022; Johnson, 2007; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2015; Vilorio, 2019).

Establishing social capital was something the principals were uniformly unable to do beyond listening to community members' concerns (Khalifa, 2018). The principals attributed this to the challenge of supporting students, teachers, and instruction. However, all the principals acknowledged the need to speak with community members and students about their concerns. One principal spent five minutes daily talking with a minoritized student at his school to learn more about their experiences. Another principal planned to hold sessions with minoritized families at their school to learn about their values and expectations and how responsive the school was to these overall goals and aspirations.

All the principals struggled to identify how their schools promoted community interests and self-determination (Khalifa, 2018). One principal expressed pride that their school was a community school equipped with a laundry, a medical clinic, and a food pantry. Three principals were proud of their schools' culturally responsive curricula. None of these principals believed they could support community organizations and needs in any substantial manner, due to their focus on students and teachers. When they provided feedback on the checklist, they questioned the overall usefulness of the section on engaging neighborhood and community concerns.

There remains a greater need for research to develop and test frameworks to assist principals to effectively address community concerns. To determine whether a culturally responsive school leader can engage with the community at the level described by Khalifa (2018), researchers need to conduct further studies and consider the leaders' responsibilities as instructional and cultural figures at their schools and their capacity to engage community and neighborhood concerns (Brown et al., 2022; Faas et al., 2018; Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023).

Limitations

The participants in this study were principals recruited from mastermind groups and communities of practice associated with developing inclusive schools. Participation in these groups represents an interest in improving one's leadership practice, particularly for the benefit of minoritized students. Seventeen of the principals who participated in testing the checklist already knew me through professional learning networks or through a colleague who facilitates principal masterminds. This study's participants demonstrated a greater commitment to working on their culturally responsive school leadership due to personal and professional connections. Additionally, in their post-interviews, 10 principals expressed concerns about whether the checklist would be practical for all principals. The principals in this study perceived their schools

as unique due to the high concentration of minoritized students, and shared they were invested in this work because they wanted to meet the needs of their students and families. These characteristics of the principals who chose to use the checklist may have influenced the findings about its overall efficacy, given their interest in enhancing their culturally responsive school leadership.

The principals who tested the checklist used it for 10 days. This was an arbitrary amount of time I selected to give each principal enough time to provide substantive feedback. A longer or shorter test period may have yielded other results.

Other limitations emerged regarding the design of the checklist. I based the categories for each column on Milner's (2023) and Khalifa's (2018) research. Still, other researchers could make different conclusions regarding areas to include within the checklist. Furthermore, only two of the academic experts who evaluated the checklist were specifically scholars of school leadership. This absence of further feedback from professional researchers could impact the overall quality of the checklist.

Implications for Practice

The overall efficacy of the school leadership checklist I developed in this study indicates that it can address a gap between culturally responsive school leadership theory and frameworks and the work done by principals in practice. The checklist design process resulted in a tool that defined culturally responsive school leadership and introduced principals to a method of critical self-reflection. The checklist addresses issues associated with principals not sharing a standard definition of culturally responsive school leadership, as well as the lack of accessible resources beyond frameworks for principals to apply it daily (Suwak et al., 2024). Testing the checklist demonstrated that it provided principals with ideas for coaching and mentoring teachers and

helped principals rethink disciplinary practices and ways to access minoritized students' and parents' voices and perspectives (Khalifa, 2018; Milner, 2023).

The checklist inspired three principals to introduce the tool to their assistant principals and school leadership teams to evaluate their cultural responsiveness further. Given the multitude of areas where the checklist changed practices and assisted principals in setting goals for themselves and their schools, the checklist has important implications for promoting culturally responsive leadership in schools.

This study aimed to create a viable checklist to enhance culturally responsive school leadership practices, based on Gawande's (2009) tenets for designing a checklist, to promote greater success in making schools equitable and inclusive for minoritized students. The research gap it addressed was the lack of a checklist for principals to reflect on and implement culturally responsive school leadership, as defined by Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023). The efficacy of the checklist in this study suggests that it can make an even greater impact on more principals and further enhance the school experience of countless minoritized students.

Milner (2023) and Khalifa (2018) both considered principals' role to be essential in making young people psychologically safe and having direct conversations with their school communities about how to confront and dismantle minoritization and oppression. Milner (2023) referred to this moment as a "go for broke moment" (p. 27). Milner (2023) advocated for principals to make a difference regarding addressing racialization in education by reframing the resilience of students, families, and educators and questioning traditional practices associated with school, such as "achievement gaps" among minoritized students in the post-COVID-19 educational setting. Milner (2023) suggested that principals question even standardized assessments and grading as elements of racialization (Ray, 2019) in schools. Khalifa (2018)

stated that principals should be present within their communities and advocate for community causes. Milner (2023) proposed that principals live within their school communities, be present at community events, and model this for their teachers. Both Khalifa (2018) and Milner (2023) envisioned principals who not only took an antiracist stance within their schools, but also sought to dismantle oppression, colonialism, and minoritization within their communities and education systems. The authors acknowledged that this level of commitment took years and required ongoing self-reflection, as well as publicly expressing their commitment to cultural responsiveness to teachers, students, and families.

While these attributes are highly commendable, my research with principals and my own experience as a school leader indicate that adopting these stances is far more complex for principals in the current post-COVID-19 educational environment. Throughout my discussions with the 25 participating principals in this study, they regularly mentioned they wanted to do more for their students and found working with teachers to cultivate cultural responsiveness the most challenging aspect of their work. Today, principals are responsible for their buildings' culture and academic performance, as well as supporting the growth of their teachers. All principals in this study stated they made the most noteworthy progress with their teachers through one-on-one conversations. This indicates that developing and supporting cultural responsiveness in teachers could take far more time than the 3-year plans suggested by Khalifa (2018). The checklist I developed serves as a way for principals to maintain their commitment to culturally responsive school leadership when applied in conjunction with actions suggested by Milner (2023) and Khalifa (2018) regarding the formation of schoolwide equity teams. The principals' most common suggestion for improving the checklist was for it to be linked to more

resources. In my development of future versions of the checklist, I need to describe how equity teams can embed cultural responsiveness into a school's core values.

The role of community advocate described by both Milner (2023) and Khalifa (2018) is unlikely for principals to implement on a larger scale. All principals in this study mentioned that they had not routinely sought out minoritized students to learn about their experiences at school, but after using the checklist, they thought about how they could hear from these students regularly. However, these 25 principals indicated that all their time was spent supporting teachers and students, instruction, addressing disciplinary issues, and maintaining overall school safety—areas they considered critical to make their schools equitable and inclusive. The principals pointed out that they needed to initiate and lead the process of taking action on teaching and disciplinary practices. They routinely stated that self-reflection showed them they needed to change their approach and to listen and learn more from their teachers and students. This level of introspection and developing appropriate responses to these issues takes time, and the principals in this study chose to apply their efforts to their students and teachers rather than community concerns. Given that the outcome of successful frontline or culturally responsive school leadership is the improved health, vitality, and success of a school, for principals to focus on what is directly happening regarding students, curriculum, teachers, and school programs is pragmatic and wise (Milner, 2023).

While principals are highly trained in instruction, learning, and data assessment, the same cannot be said for community organizing. Khalifa (2018) articulated a vision for principals to advocate for community concerns, discuss their vision in minoritized spaces, identify a representative community voice at school, and have teachers and administrators present within the community. Milner (2023) advocated for principals to live in the same community as their

school. Given not all principals understand what culturally responsive school leadership comprises, developing a process for deep community collaboration seems potentially a problematic use of a principal's limited time. The more principals bring community members into school to share their knowledge with students and take time to learn about community members' concerns and expectations of their school, the more equitable and inclusive the school becomes. A principal always needs more time to implement their vision and goals. The principals in this study continually focused on the communities at their schools because they understood their needs and actively wanted to do more to make their schools equitable and inclusive. The premise that principals should use their time to learn about community concerns that do not directly relate to school is unrealistic, given the ongoing need to support their teachers and minoritized students.

The checklist directly facilitates Putnam's definition of social capital, given that through being critically self-reflective and supporting culturally responsive teaching, principals are building a sense of belonging and trust with minoritized students and families for their school (Morrow, 1999). Establishing these positive partnerships, according to Putnam, has the potential to alter a community economically as well. The more a community supports and engages with schools and other civic organizations, the more established and prosperous the community becomes. Working as a principal in an urban setting, I know numerous families that chose to remain in the neighborhood because of their solidarity and support of the school. These families became active volunteers at school, but also expanded their activism to working with neighborhood improvement groups and local government. Khalifa's (2018) behaviors of a culturally responsive school leader and Milner's (2023) tenets of frontline leadership align with Coleman's (1988) thesis that schools can provide the same level of social capital as the family

unit if they are deeply mission aligned. Culturally responsive school leadership can enhance social capital when minoritized students perceive themselves as belonging to their school community and experience the same level of support from the faculty and leadership as they do from their families (Coleman, 1988). Principals can use the checklist to critically reflect on whether their schools are mission aligned to establish social capital for their minoritized students.

Principals stand to make gains for their minoritized students through critical self-reflection and being “warm demanders” of both their students and teachers (Khalifa, 2018, p. 158). The work a principal does is finite. Given the urgency of meeting minoritized students’ needs, principals should lean into areas where they can make the greatest gains regarding instruction and school culture. The purpose of developing the checklist was for principals to understand culturally responsive school leadership and have access to a resource to support its implementation at their schools. In developing and testing this checklist, principals remain the “frontline” in supporting teachers and improving student experiences (Milner, 2023, p. 30). Principals, therefore, need to remain focused on the issues of student experience and teacher support as their primary foci to enhance cultural responsiveness within their schools. Principals have the greatest influence on their schools, but they should concentrate their efforts and resources on making pragmatic decisions that bring discernible results for their minoritized students.

Future Research

There are several additional possibilities for research regarding the checklist. To develop the next version of the checklist, principals requested access to additional resources that would allow for quick consults to support culturally responsive teaching, establish social capital, and shift disciplinary practices. The principals also indicated an interest in creating a

companion checklist for teachers. The checklist was tested for 10 days; a more extended study over several months could provide further data about student achievement, disciplinary records, and teacher performance.

Given that community engagement was not an area the principals in this study could address, a study regarding when and how principals can and should engage with community and neighborhood concerns is needed, in addition to exploring what resources are available or needed. The checklist influenced three principals to adopt new approaches toward school discipline; further research into the long-term influence of the checklist on changing school discipline over time is warranted.

All pre- and post-interviews for this research were done between September and December 2024. On February 14, 2025, public schools received updated guidance from the United States Department of Education on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Trainor, 2025). This letter states that educational institutions indoctrinated students about structural racism in the United States and that diversity, equity, and inclusion promote racial stereotypes. Diversity, equity, and inclusion programs are interpreted as discriminating against certain groups of students and preventing them from fully participating in school. The letter concludes that if an individual suspects an educational institution of engaging in these practices, a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights may be filed (Trainor, 2025). The Department of Education provided further guidance regarding the letter in which culturally responsive practices were described as “discriminatory policy” because they might treat students of a different race differently, promote stereotyping, or create a hostile environment for other students (United States Department of Education, 2025). This definition demonstrates a lack of understanding of culturally responsive practices as they relate to disrupting racialization. I am certain that letters such as these will have

a chilling effect on schools' work expanding culturally responsive school leadership, teaching, and pedagogy. Further study regarding the use of the checklist by principals after this guidance from the Department of Education has the potential to disprove this assertion, given that use of the checklist in this research supported teachers and provided more opportunities for parents and students to share concerns and priorities.

The principals in this study frequently brought up that prior to participating in this study they were invested in enhancing their culturally responsive school leadership. They wondered whether colleagues whom they considered less aware of these theories would utilize the checklist. This guidance from the Department of Education could have an even greater impact on preventing further use of the checklist by principals lest they risk an Office of Civil Rights complaint. Future research into understanding how national and local politics influence and impact use and perceptions of the checklist is warranted at this time.

Conclusion

Culturally responsive school leadership creates a positive school culture and supports practices that enhance student achievement and engagement. This study addressed the problem of how to bring educational theory to principals to improve their minoritized students' experiences at school. Although a body of research exists on making minoritized students feel safe and supported in school, there are no tools to assist leaders in this. Through my analysis of culturally responsive school leadership theory and the input and support of experts and principals across North America, I created a tool that makes the research accessible to principals to enhance their work with teachers, students, and families. Principals have the greatest capacity to promote academic success and a positive academic identity among minoritized students due to their influence on instruction, school culture, and access to resources (Khalifa et al., 2016). This

process is slow and potentially ineffective without tools to clarify and prevent errors (Gawande, 2009). The checklist I developed serves as a missing element between theory and actionable culturally responsive school leadership practice in schools. In this study, the checklist helped principals evaluate their culturally responsive leadership practices and improved their overall perceptions of their efficacy. Through critical self-reflection, the principals enhanced their ability to support teachers, change disciplinary practices, and engage with students and community members.

Principals play an integral role in determining students' success at school. A principal's work to support and promote culturally responsive teaching and an inclusive school culture can make a difference in minoritized students' success in a racialized society (Ray, 2019).

Researching and creating this checklist was my effort to help every principal make every school more welcoming, safe, and empowering for the diverse student population that comprises North American schools. Every student deserves to attend an inclusive and equitable school; this checklist helps to make that possible.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Pre-Interview Questions

1. Please state your name and describe the school you lead regarding grades, served, location, urban, rural, suburban, grades served, student demographics, and whether you are part of a district, independent school, or charter.
2. What is culturally responsive school leadership?
3. What are you currently doing as a school leader that you would define as culturally responsive school leadership?
4. Where do you need to grow in terms of culturally responsive school leadership skills?
5. How would you like to enhance your culturally responsive school leadership skills?

Post-Interview Questions

1. How did using the checklist change your understanding of culturally responsive school leadership?
2. How did the checklist change or enhance what you do in terms of culturally responsive school leadership?
3. How did the checklist help you grow in terms of your culturally responsive school leadership skills?
4. What suggestions would you make to refine or improve the checklist for other principals?

Appendix B
Principal Participant Table

Participant Name	Identified Racial/Ethnic/Demographic	Geographic Region US/Canada	Elementary, Middle, High	Student Demographics
A	Pacific Islander Female	West	Middle/High	30% Latino, 30% Pacific Islander, 10% Asian, 10% White, 10% Other. 20% Economically Disadvantaged
B	Asian Male	West	Middle/High	30% Latino, 30% Pacific Islander, 10% Asian, 10% White, 10% Other, 20% Economically Disadvantaged
C	White Male	South	Elementary	50% Latino, 40% White, 10% Black, 40% Economically Disadvantaged
D	White Female	Northeast	Elementary/Middle	40% Asian, 30% Black, 10% White, 10% Latino, 10% other, 40% Economically Disadvantaged
E	White Female	Northeast	Elementary	60% Latino, 20% Black, 10% Asian, 10% Other, 80% Economically Disadvantaged
F	White Female	Northeast	Elementary	50% Asian, 40% White, 10% Other, 5% Economically Disadvantaged
G	Latina Female	Northeast	Elementary/Middle	40% Asian, 20% Latino, 20% Black, 10% White, 40% Economically Disadvantaged
H	White Male	West	High	50% White, 30% Latino, 10% Other, 25% Economically Disadvantaged
I	Asian Male	Northeast	Elementary	80% White, 20% Other, 8% Economically Disadvantaged
J	Pacific Islander Female	West	High	30% Latino, 30% Pacific Islander, 10% Asian, 10% White, 10% Other, 20% Economically Disadvantaged
K	Black Male	Northeast	Middle	40% White, 30% Black, 20% Latino, 10% Other, 60% Economically Disadvantaged
L	White Female	South	Elementary	60% Latino, 30% Black, 10% White, 96% Economically Disadvantaged
M	White Male	Northeast	Middle	40% Asian, 30% Latino, 20% White, 10% Other, 15% Economically Disadvantaged
N	Native American Male	Midwest	Elementary/Middle	100% Native American, 60% Economically Disadvantaged

Participant Name	Identified Racial/Ethnic/Demographic	Geographic Region US/Canada	Elementary, Middle, High	Student Demographics
O	White Male	British Columbia, Canada	Elementary	80% White, 20% Indigenous, 20% Economically Disadvantaged
P	White Male	Northeast	High	50% White, 20% Black, 10% Latino, 20% Other, 60% Economically Disadvantaged
Q	Black Female	Northeast	Elementary/Middle	60% Black, 30% Latino, 10% Other, 80% Economically Disadvantaged
R	White Female	Northeast	Middle/High	100% White, 60% Economically Disadvantaged
S	White Male	Northeast	Middle	30% White, 30% Black, 30% Latino, 10% Other, 100% Economically Disadvantaged
T	Black Male	Midwest	Middle	60% White, 20% Asian, 20% Other
U	Latina Female	West	Elementary	50% Latino, 40% Black, 10% Other, 95% Economically Disadvantaged
V	Asian Female	Northeast	Elementary/Middle	60% Asian, 30% Latino, 10% Other, 27% Economically Disadvantaged
W	White Female	Northeast	Elementary/Middle	50% White, 30% Latino, 10% Black, 30% Economically Disadvantaged
X	Latina Female	Northeast	Elementary/Middle/High	30% Black, 30% Latino, 20% White, 20% Asian, 80% Economically Disadvantaged
Y	White Male	Northeast	Elementary/Middle	50% Asian, 30% White, 10% Other, 2% Economically Disadvantaged

Appendix C

Expert Recruitment Letter

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I hope this email finds you well. I am Colin Hogan, a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at William Paterson University. I am contacting you because of your esteemed instructional evaluation rubric design expertise. I am developing a culturally responsive school leadership checklist as part of my dissertation, and your insights would be invaluable to the refinement of this instrument.

Research Purpose:

The primary aim of my dissertation is to create a comprehensive and practical checklist for school principals to assess and enhance their culturally responsive school leadership skills.

Your Expertise:

Given your background as a principal or professional researcher with expertise in instructional evaluation rubric design, I invite you to participate as an expert in this research study.

Expert Involvement:

Your role as an expert would involve assessing the content validity of the checklist and providing feedback on the overall refinement of checklist items. This will be accomplished through a Zoom interview, scheduled at your convenience. The checklist will be shared with you one week before our meeting, allowing ample time for a thorough review.

Interview Process:

During the Zoom interview, you can share your thoughts on the content and clarity of checklist items. This feedback will be instrumental in shaping the final version of the checklist.

Subsequently, there will be a second round of evaluation where you will complete an online survey, providing additional insights after I have incorporated feedback from the initial round.

Expression of Interest:

If you are interested in participating as an expert evaluator for this checklist, please email me at hoganc10@student.wpunj.edu. Your expertise is crucial to the success of this research, and your input will significantly contribute to the refinement of the checklist.

Confidentiality:

I assure you that all information shared during this process will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

Thank you for considering this opportunity. I look forward to collaborating with you and benefiting from your valuable insights.

Sincerely,

Colin Hogan

Appendix D

Principal Recruitment Letter

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist Research Study

Dear [Principal's Name],

I am Colin Hogan, a Doctor of Education Leadership student at William Paterson University. I invite you to participate in a critical research study to enhance culturally responsive school leadership.

Research Purpose:

My study focuses on developing and evaluating a Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist designed to empower school principals in fostering an inclusive and culturally responsive educational environment. To help students of color have greater success in school by creating and fostering a school culture and academic program that is both inclusive and supportive.

Study Details:

As a valued participant, your involvement in the research will consist of two brief interviews conducted over a web conferencing application. The first interview will take place before the study commences. After that pre-interview, you will receive a culturally responsive school leadership checklist to carry throughout your daily activities as a school principal. Please consult the checklist regularly to assist you in making decisions and conducting daily activities. The second interview will occur after two weeks of utilizing your school's Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist.

Interview Duration:

Each interview is expected to last at most 20 minutes, and the process has been designed to be convenient and efficient for busy school leaders like yourself.

Confidentiality:

All information shared during the interviews and throughout the study will be treated with the utmost confidentiality. Your identity and any identifying details will be kept anonymous to ensure the privacy and comfort of all participants.

Benefits of Participation:

As part of the study, you will receive a copy of the Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist, intended to serve as a valuable resource to enhance your school leadership skills in promoting cultural responsiveness.

Expression of Interest:

If you are interested in participating in this groundbreaking study, please respond by emailing me at hoganc10@student.wpunj.edu. Your willingness to contribute to this research is highly appreciated, and your insights will play a crucial role in advancing our understanding of culturally responsive school leadership.

Should you have any questions or require further clarification, please reach out to me at the provided email address. hoganc10@student.wpunj.edu

Thank you for considering this invitation, and I look forward to working with you on this critical initiative.

Sincerely,
Colin Hogan
Doctor of Education Leadership Student
William Paterson University

Appendix E

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist Version 1

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist January 2024

Directions: Take a look at the checklist at the end of your day or before you start a new day over the next ten days of school

Reflect on the most important professional decision you made yesterday and look at the checklist to see whether you used any of the questions below to guide your decision-making.

If one of the columns does not cover a situation, refer back to being critically self-aware.

Being Critically Self-Aware-Ask yourself	Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers-Ask Yourself	Engaging Student Neighborhood and Community Contexts-Ask Yourself
<p>Will this decision make minoritized students feel included and valued at school?</p>	<p>How did my actions and words support teachers and staff being culturally responsive?</p>	<p>How did I engage our students in making our school culturally responsive?</p>
<p>Did I check in with minoritized students and consult research to ensure that this decision will result in improving the school and making it more racially just?</p>	<p>Did my feedback to teachers and staff articulate how to view students' cultures as assets to enhance their learning and progress?</p>	<p>How did I create opportunities for student leadership and regular feedback for minoritized students?</p>

<p>Did I articulate the hard work students and teachers need to do to counter a society and culture that provides advantages based on race, gender, and ability?</p>	<p>How did I encourage faculty members to learn about their students' cultures as part of their professional practice?</p>	<p>Did I speak to community members about their priorities and concerns, and how am I using the school to help them?</p>
<p>Did I clearly explain how societal inequity plays a role in the current situation? My response is an attempt to disrupt that system.</p>	<p>When I addressed student academic or behavioral issues, did I seek solutions that promoted inclusion and did not push students out of school?</p>	<p>How did I welcome community members into school to enhance learning and share their cultural knowledge?</p>

Appendix F

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist Version 2

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist

Directions:

1. Look at the checklist at the end of your day or before you start a new day over the next ten days of school.
2. Reflect on a significant decision you made yesterday.
3. Look at the checklist to see whether you used the questions below to guide your decision-making or if it can help you improve something you are working on today.

Key Words

Culturally responsive- means collaborating, listening, and learning from all groups that are part of one's school community and working to disrupt and confront oppression and discrimination based on culture and identity.

Minoritized means groups of people that are marginalized due to systemic bias or oppression.

If one of the columns does not cover a situation, refer back to being critically self-aware.

Being Critically Self-Aware Ask yourself....	Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers Ask Yourself...	Engaging Student Neighborhood and Community Contexts Ask Yourself...
How does this decision make minoritized	How did my actions and words support teachers and	How did I engage our students in making

students equal members of our school community?	staff being culturally responsive?	our school culturally responsive?
How did I check in with minoritized students and consult research to ensure this decision is just?	How did my feedback articulate how to view students' cultures and identities as assets to enhance their learning?	How did I create opportunities for student leadership and continuous feedback from minoritized students?
How did I support my minoritized students in working hard and being successful?	How did I encourage faculty members to learn about their students' identities?	How did I speak to community members about their concerns, and how could the school help them?
How did I explain how societal inequity affects students and that we are attempting to disrupt that system?	When I addressed student academic or behavioral issues, how did I seek solutions that promote positive behaviors and keep students in school?	How did I welcome community members into school to share their knowledge and enhance learning?

Appendix G

Culturally Responsive School Leadership Checklist Version 3

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP CHECKLIST

DIRECTIONS:

1. Please refer to the checklist prior to the beginning of each of the next ten school days.
2. Reflect on a decision you made.
3. Look at the checklist to see whether you used the questions below to guide your decision-making or if it can help you improve something you are working on today.

KEY WORDS:

Culturally Responsive means collaborating, listening, and learning from all groups that are part of one's school community and working to disrupt and confront oppression and discrimination based on culture and identity that impact our school environments. The expectations we have for learning. How inclusive our curriculum and instructional practices are and the professional learning our school community engages in.

Minoritized

Means groups of people that are marginalized due to systemic bias or oppression. People that are members of multiple minoritized groups experience more bias.

Social Identity

Refers to a person's sense of who they are based on group membership such as, nationality, ethnicity, or gender.

Culture

Refers to the shared beliefs, practices and norms that shape the identity of a group.

Being Critically Self Aware

Is how a school leader reflects on their own biases and to identify and understand oppressive power imbalances experienced by minoritized students.



**If one of the columns does not cover a situation,
refer back to being critically self-aware.**

Being Critically Self-Aware	Developing culturally Responsive Teachers	Engaging Student Neighborhood and Community Contexts
Ask yourself....	Ask yourself....	Ask yourself....
Did my decision provide equitable opportunities for minoritized students?	How did my actions and words support teachers and staff being culturally responsive?	How did I engage our students in making our school culturally responsive?
In making the decision, did I check in with minoritized students and consult research to ensure the decision was just?	Did my feedback articulate how to view students' cultures and identities as assets to enhance their learning? If not, what do I need to do differently next time?	Did I create opportunities for student leadership and continuous feedback from minoritized students?
How did I support my faculty and staff in helping minoritized students work hard and succeed?	How did I encourage faculty members to learn about their students' identities and provide them with resources or professional development to do that?	How did I speak to diverse minoritized community members about their concerns, and how could the school help validate and respond to their concerns?
Did I take time to explain how societal inequity affects students and that we are attempting to disrupt that system, or did I avoid it due to fear of pushback and criticism?	When I addressed student academic or behavioral issues, how did I seek solutions that help keep students in school?	How have I welcomed diverse minoritized community members into school to share their knowledge and enhance learning?



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