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TLC : creating a culturally responsive school through effective teaching, leadership, and climate.

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TLC: CREATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL THROUGH
EFFECTIVE TEACHING, LEADERSHIP, AND CLIMATE

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A Capstone
Submitted to the Faculty of the
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in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Organizational Development

Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY

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A Capstone Approved on

October 30, 2017

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DEDICATIONS

Jessika Berry Benson

This dissertation is dedicated to my children Reese Olivia English and Joshua English who have been supportive and unselfish while their mother pursued her dream.

Joseph Ellison, III

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents who have always encouraged me to set my sights high and pursue my dreams, to my late Grandmother Hazel who taught me from an early age that I can do anything I set my mind to do, and to my wife and children for their unending patience and support. I am because you are. This work has meaning because you bring meaning to my life.

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Jessika Berry Benson

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Joseph Ellison, III

I would, first, like to thank God for salvation and the strength to persevere to pursue this lifelong dream. I would like to thank our capstone chair, Dr. Meera Alagaraja, for her guidance and support. I would also like to thank Dr. Georgia Hampton and Dr. Ahmad Washington, other committee members, for their critiques and assistance over the last year. I would also like to thank Dr. William Kyle Ingle for his insightfulness and support over the last three years as I matriculated through this program. I will be forever grateful to my capstone group members Jessika Berry Benson and Tamela Compton for their support throughout our educational journey. I would also like to express thanks to the members of my immediate family who have been my cheerleaders since day one: my parents Joe and Debbie, my brother Josh, Grandmother Ramona, Yvonne, and Tiffany – your encouraging words have been life to me. For all those far and wide who have prayed me through this process, thank you! And to my wife, Shannon: thank you for your patience, support, and encouragement throughout this process. To my children: Joey and Sydney, thank you for your continued love and understanding when Daddy was gone to do work. The unselfishness the three of you have shown has taught me a great deal about true love. I could not have done this without you.

ABSTRACT:

TLC: CREATING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL THROUGH
EFFECTIVE TEACHING, LEADERSHIP, AND CLIMATE

October 30, 2017

Jessika Berry Benson

Joseph Ellison, III

Educators in today's global community are held accountable for teaching to develop the whole child. This requires providing instruction and support to equip students both academically, socially and emotionally to prepare for real world experiences. Competencies such as self-awareness, decision-making and relationship building have proven to be essential to create student outcomes associated with prosocial behavior, mental health and smooth transition to college or career. Acquisition of these skills occur as a result of social emotional learning. In order for social emotional skills to develop and promote these outcomes key features of programs, quality of implementation and support of school leadership are critical. This dissertation seeks to assist education practitioners and leadership by detailing implementation of effective social emotional programs from the perspective of those providing instruction and support.

Culturally responsive leadership is distinguished from other leadership approaches because it is anchored in the belief that a leader must clearly understand his

or her own assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from himself or herself in order to lead effectively in multicultural settings (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Johnson (2006) asserts that culturally responsive leadership occurs when administrators merge curriculum innovation with social activism.

Effective leadership is critical to the success of any school – especially Priority Schools engaged in CSR. To ensure coordinated, long-standing implementation of cultural responsiveness, principals must directly engage in and support this work (Duke, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2015). Culturally responsive leadership is paramount in schools working with marginalized groups in order to address the inherent barriers to these students' academic progress. Since the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and the fostering of culturally responsive cultures rests on the principal, principals must lead in a culturally responsive manner in order to raise marginalized student populations to higher academic achievement levels.

Utilizing a qualitative, comparative case study approach, this study seeks to understand how principals implement culturally responsive leadership and how they mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students. The case study is bounded by the lived experiences of the participants with implementing culturally competent leadership and overcoming barriers to cultural competence in their schools engaged in CSR. This study will elucidate methods and strategies principals employ to address cultural and instructional barriers to increase student achievement.

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PREFACE FOR CAPSTONES

The University of Louisville's Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) program is designed for educational practitioners who seek to be competent in identifying and solving complex problems of practice in education, emphasizing the development of thoughtfulness and reflection. The Ed.D. program seeks to develop and apply knowledge for practice by addressing pressing social justice issues and problems of practice in schools and districts. Through course work and original empirical research, theory and extant research are integrated with practice with an emphasis on application of the research that is produced. All Ed.D. students at the University of Louisville have two options for the production of their research studies: 1.) a standard dissertation authored by a single doctoral student; and 2.) a capstone project that will consist of two or three doctoral students answering distinct research question(s) around a theme or topic. The capstone, such as the one you are reading, consists of a jointly authored introduction, which introduces the broad theme that ties the subsequent two or three individually authored studies together. Each individually authored study consists of its own introduction, literature review, methods, analysis, and discussion. The capstone concludes with a jointly authored implications for practice, policy, and future research.

JOINT INTRODUCTION

As the population of American public schools continues to change demographically, the need to better address the various needs of students grows. Because school populations are becoming more ethnically diverse, a new approach to teaching, leading, and shaping school culture is necessary. In the existing literature, the approach to effectively addressing these needs is identified as cultural responsiveness. Many names and labels are used to describe why it is important for schools to be more consistent with cultural orientations and backgrounds. These terms are virtually identical and include: culturally sensitive, culturally aware, culturally appropriate, culturally relevant, culturally proficient, and culturally competent (Gay, 2010). In this capstone, the term culturally responsive has been used. Culturally responsive educators work to improve the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds by engaging in practices to address discontinuities between school culture and home and community cultures and to empower educators to help develop students academically and psychosocially (Gay, 2010). Social emotional learning is a means to achieve a culturally responsive school culture and climate through fostering inter- and intrapersonal skills in students and staff. School culture, which enhances effective teaching and learning and

embraces various student backgrounds, is an input (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). Ecological systems theory states that youth development is shaped by environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Social emotional learning promotes positive interactions in schools and, therefore, contributes to a caring and safe environment where empowering relationships are developed (Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Elbertson, & Salovey, 2012). A school climate and culture inclusive of social emotional learning provides opportunities for all stakeholders to develop skills to enhance learning in a holistic way and also influence the school environment to foster achievement. High-quality, effective school leadership is key to high student achievement. Researchers have determined that both district-level and school-level leadership significantly impact student achievement (Duke, 2014; Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). This capstone school culture and leadership.

Purpose of the Capstone

The purpose of this capstone project was to discuss how a culturally responsive school can be fostered and nurtured to improve the academic achievement of diverse students. Specifically, this capstone project focused on creating a culturally responsive school through the fostering of a culturally responsive school climate and the implementation of culturally responsive leadership because the fostering of such a school is believed to more effectively support students from diverse backgrounds. Johnson (2014) posits that marginalized student populations will be best nurtured to high academic achievement when teachers effectively implement culturally responsive

teaching and engage in social emotional learning. This engagement occurs at its highest level when school leaders and the school community actively pursue it.

The first study of this capstone focused on the implementation of social emotional learning (SEL) in Priority Schools. Because these schools serve diverse learners, a positive and responsive school climate is necessary for student success. A number of studies focus on social emotional programming, but few focus on implementation in schools to effectively build a climate steeped in SEL which leads to increase academic and social success for all students. Previous studies have focused on leadership effects and school leadership in the context of comprehensive school reform (CSR) (Duke, 2014; Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Finnigan, 2011), but only a few collegiate studies (Gomez, 2015, Mitchell, 2015; Williams, 2016) have focused on effective school leadership paired with the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2015) assert, “research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness in teaching and instruction can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school” (p. 3). The second study in this capstone focused on culturally responsive leadership in action: the intersection of school leadership and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in secondary schools labeled as Priority Schools (formerly known as Persistently Low Achieving Schools) that are engaged in CSR.

Significance of the Capstone

The first study of this capstone aimed to use a comprehensive school reform model to improve the life outcomes of students from impoverished backgrounds who face negative academic, personal/social and career development. Social emotional learning

employed by the whole school aids school leadership in creating a school climate where students and staff feel included, cared for and ready to teach and learn. The goal is to foster a cultural responsiveness by way of infusing SEL into the academic curriculum to enrich the overall culture and climate experienced by everyone at the school.

Additionally, effective leadership is critical to the success of any school. Effective culturally responsive leadership is paramount to Priority Schools engaged in CSR because it ensures that the inherent barriers to the academic progress of marginalized student groups are addressed. To ensure coordinated, long-standing implementation of cultural responsiveness, principals must directly engage in and support this work (Duke, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2015). The second study of this capstone sought to understand how principals implement culturally responsive leadership and how they mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students. The goal here was to elucidate methods and strategies principals employ to address cultural and instructional barriers to increase student achievement.

STUDY ONE: INTRODUCTION

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (2015), social emotional learning (SEL) is the process which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge and skills necessary to manage emotions, set goals and maintain relationships. Specifically, it consists of the following competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (CASEL, 2015). The aim of SEL programs in schools is evident. Students who participate in social emotional learning via targeted programs or interventions develop and acquire skills that equip them to prevent drug use, violence and bullying. High quality and well-implemented SEL programs positively affect aspects of school climate (Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013) and foster positive outcomes for students including enhancement of social emotional skills, positive self-image and promotion of academic achievement (Sklad, Diekstra, DeRitter, Ben, & Gravesteyn, 2012). Legislators are taking note of the needs of our current student population in the United States. Students today face barriers that require a need to learn how to develop skills essential for navigating through social and emotional aspects of life to set the stage for academic success (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

On January 22, 2015 House Bill, H.R. 497 the “Supporting Social and Emotional Learning Act” was introduced, requiring national associations, such as the National Center for Educational Research, to conduct and support research as well as provide training and development for social and emotional focused education (Library of Congress, 2015). The Bill also required teacher training for the use, understanding and development of social emotional programs. Later in 2015 H.R. 850 the “Academic, Social and Emotional Act of 2015” defined social and emotional programming and its areas of competency which include self-awareness and self-management skills, social awareness and relationship skills as well as responsible decision-making skills and appropriate behaviors. This bill, if enacted, will amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act by including funds for professional development in practices that address the social and emotional development of students. Both pieces of legislation mentioned are sponsored by Congress members representing six states, setting the foundation for reform in education for social and emotional competencies on a national scale. When considering localized perspective of the importance of social emotional learning, it is critical to evaluate the influence of national legislation as well as school district administration. In the large midwestern school district where this study took place the district school board took action by creating a Social Emotional Learning department in 2016 was to address the needs of their student population. This act of assertion towards social competence is especially important in an era when children, adolescents and young adults use social media to communicate within an overall technological based society so the opportunities to develop social skills have been minimized. Many students in today’s schools connect to others via indirect means such as text, chat and virtual

statuses, which can hinder the development of essential social skills. Incorporating social emotional programs in schools is necessary to meet the needs of the 21st century student population.

The ability for students to reap benefits resulting from SEL based programs relies on implementation characterized by developing scope, plans and teacher practice (Elais, 2010). CASEL (2015) reported that although the research on program implementation has increased over the past decade, more is necessary to provide schools with information and tools to support successful evidence based programs. School based implementation has created challenges to the quality and fidelity of evidence based effective programs due to adaptations or methods for adoption that vary across models (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2004). Furthermore, there is limited knowledge on the measurement of implementation, factors that influence the quality of implementation and the relationship between implementation and outcomes for students and in the community. Even further the degree to which an educational program is implemented as intended has complex factors, which influence fidelity of delivery. One such component of quality is implementer characteristics. Teachers and school counselors, often implementers of SEL programs, perceptions, skills, knowledge and beliefs contribute to the quality of interventions and may indicate organizational readiness to predict implementation quality (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2004).

Purpose

The purpose of my study is to describe the context in which effective social emotional learning implementation takes place, to describe how teachers and school counselors experience implementation, and understand how their perceptions influence

implementation. The role of principal leadership is integral in implementation of innovation in schools therefore their role in SEL scaling up efforts is critical (Moolenaar, Daly, & Slegers, 2010). The potential for SEL to contribute to a culturally responsive school climate provides advantages for school administration in that a positive and inclusive school climate assists in closing the achievement gap and develops students holistically including academically. Therefore, I frame my dissertation with three research questions: (RQ1) What are the central defining features of social emotional programs or interventions in urban middle schools as perceived by teachers and/or school counselors? (RQ2) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience social and emotional programs implementation quality within their school? (RQ3) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience principal support of social and emotional programs within their school?

The key studies in this field have been conducted by researchers who developed the concept of social emotional learning including Weissberg, Elias, Greenberg and others who contributed to the establishment of CASEL. Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, (1997) wrote the book *Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for educators*. This book is referenced in much of the literature on SEL because it sets the foundational work to address the need for intervention, outlines how it will fit into the school setting, then how to sustain programs and finally how to evaluate and improve SEL in schools. Since the concept of social emotional learning was developed in the late 1980s and early 1990s the book became a blueprint providing information about SEL and guiding educators on how to incorporate it into schools. Thereafter a shift in research took place. The focus of many studies moved from the acceptance of SEL as a necessary

intervention for holistic student development to the importance of programs being incorporated in school-wide reform efforts and research on implementation to support scaling up from SEL in schools to school districts. Domitrovich and Greenberg (2000) conducted a study on high quality SEL programs to draw connections between implementation and student outcomes. Reported results indicate that many “effective” SEL programs failed to have explicit evaluation processes to monitor the program’s integrity. The findings revealed a need to evaluate SEL program implementation to increase the likelihood of positive outcomes in the event of program replication.

Greenberg, Weissberg, O’Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnick, and Elias (2003) conducted a landmark study on systematically incorporating SEL in schools. The study explored SEL implementation in the whole school setting by looking at how to best improve student outcomes via comprehensive school reform models to impact program improvement and sustainability. Development of a systematic process gives educators a guide on how to incorporate SEL into whole schools setting the stage for implementation in other schools and districts. Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor and Schellinger (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of effective school based SEL programs. The study explained the impact SEL had on the social/personal and academic development of students. It is widely cited because it included 213 studies in its analysis of comprehensive school-based SEL programs and yielded results of improved prosocial behavior and increased academic achievement in students. Zinsser, Shewark, Denham, & Curby (2014) conducted a qualitative study on how teacher’s beliefs influenced the implementation of SEL programs for preschool students. Teacher’s beliefs about emotions, socialization behaviors and SEL strategies as well as teachers’ perceptions of themselves as social

emotion socializers made differences in student's outcomes for those participating in the intervention.

The key studies mentioned outline a progression of research on SEL from providing support to incorporate in schools to evaluating implementation, then to support of comprehensive and scaling up efforts. The evolution continued by conducting analysis on effective programs to finally looking at factors to contribute to effective implementation. Studies on the secondary student population, studies conducted in context with detailed information on implementer perceptions and studies exploring program supports are waiting to be addressed in the literature. Lack of research in these areas speak to the significance of my study. Most SEL approaches focus on the preschool and elementary level, this is due to the fact that processes occurring in early childhood lay the foundation for adolescent development (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). However, research supports students' need for interventions from kindergarten through twelfth grade. In regards to program implementation, science tells us that there is an average 17-year theory to practice gap when it comes to application of interventions from controlled to uncontrolled settings. Research on implementation began in the early 2000s, at this point it is necessary to move from broad research on implementation and connections to effectiveness, towards collecting data rich with descriptions to understand the nuances under which effective implementation occurs. Implementers can affect student outcomes by influencing the student-teacher relationship, influencing the teacher's ability to model skills taught via SEL programs and their abilities affect classroom organization and management (Jones, Bouffard, & Weissbourd, 2013).

Exploration of SEL implementation from the implementer point of view is therefore supported.

Obtaining information regarding the influence of teacher's and/or school counselor's perceptions, beliefs and attitudes has on implementation quality and positive outcomes will provide evidence supporting professional development and inclusion of SEL in comprehensive school reform. With regard to policy this study has the potential to provide support efforts for introduced legislation to provide training for educators implementing SEL in schools and give administrators resources to promote a school environment conducive to SEL. Students from diverse backgrounds benefit academically and socially from a supporting school environment. Hoffman (2009) asserts that a positive, supportive and inclusive school climate should include SEL to address the need of a culturally diverse student population. This study aims to highlight the unique ability for SEL to contribute to the development of a culturally inclusive school environment. The state of a school's climate is directly correlated to its leadership. Implications for school leadership on creating social justice through SEL is apparent due to its relationship to school climate.

Since there is a potential impact on positive student outcomes related to school and life and implications for school reform, implementation of SEL is critical to the student population of today. A system of associated concepts and theories is necessary both to support and inform research. Therefore, my study is qualitative in nature and is guided by a conceptual framework for school based prevention programs that explore implementation from implementer characteristics (perceptions) and the school context. The importance of considering context makes case study an appropriate research strategy.

The type of evidence to support effective implementation via the implementer's point of view further support this due to the need for descriptive data to give detail to quantitative research on SEL. My study will use quantitative data from the Comprehensive School Survey (CSS) to identify schools effectively implementing SEL by way of student responses to SEL constructs on the survey. Qualitative data on school context, SEL program support and implementer perceptions will be gathered via interviews, observations and document analysis. Cross case comparison analysis is used to identify similarities between schools effectively implementing SEL and to describe perceptions of the teacher and school counselor administering the program to characterize conditions under which quality implementation occur.

Social and emotional competencies impact students academically and socially therefore the fidelity of programs meant to intervene and apply measures to equip students for success are of high importance (Payton, Wardlaw, Graczyk, Bloodworth, Tompsett, & Weissberg, 2000; SEL Research Group, 2010; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The literature is currently nascent of research detailing the context, associated support and characteristics of program implementers in order to give education leaders a guide on how to implement SEL in schools and school districts. My study is limited in sample size due to the cross analysis methodology; which calls for exploration of exemplary models of implementation. However qualitative research aims to generalization within the context studied, therefore data from two middle schools will be included in the study. I will collect data from middle schools with the highest scores on social emotional constructs of the Comprehensive School Survey. The data on effectiveness of SEL is limited to scores received as a result of the CSS. The

study also makes an assumption regarding the level of that implementation quality. To address this only schools in at least their second year of implementation will be included in the study. Lastly, Title I status will be used to operationalize the differences in school's diversity.

A list of terms used in this study are defined as follows:

social emotional learning – involves the processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions.

implementation – executing a program as it is intended

implementer – individual executing a program intervention

social competence – enhancement of personal and interpersonal effectiveness to prevent behaviors associated with negative outcomes in adult life

perception – the way one thinks or understands something

culturally responsive school climate – a school environment with a dynamic relationship between home/community culture and school culture

transformative leadership – a leader's ability to increase organizational members' commitment, capacity and engagement in meeting goals

My dissertation will proceed to review literature beginning with a conceptual framework to implementing effective social emotional learning. Then sections on the importance of social emotional learning in schools and impact of program implementation for school-based interventions will follow. Finally, literature on how

teacher's attitudes, belief, and skills influence the effective implementation of social emotional programs conclude the chapter.

STUDY ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

In the context of today's society, educators are charged with teaching students skills to support their holistic development. The prominence of school violence, dropout and low attendance has plagued the education system's ability to produce positive student outcomes (Poulou, 2005). Schools are held responsible for equipping students with the tools necessary to combat aforementioned issues. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) 2015, social emotional learning (SEL) is "the process which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions" (p. 5). Research supports utilizing social and emotional skills development in schools in order to prepare students for life and work (Poulou, 2005). When educators have effectively implemented SEL programs in schools; results yield positive student outcomes. However comprehensive social emotional curriculum embedded into education as a social system is necessary to increase development of skills to support overall success.

Social emotional learning when coupled with academic learning has been described as a national priority (Weissberg & Cascarion, 2013). The president and vice president of the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) described SEL skills as critical in preparing students to be good citizens and workers. Social and emotional programs help schools prevent and reduce counterproductive behaviors in students such as drug use, violence, bullying and dropping out (Poulou, 2005). Therefore programs are equipping students for life during school and when they transition beyond into the larger society. Effective programs intend to contribute to an inclusive school climate, being comprehensive in nature and seeking to foster positive student results. In order to achieve this, appropriate measures to ensure implementation quality are necessary. Studies indicate there are programs which are effective under controlled conditions but when put into practice do not yield similar nor consistent findings. Research examining SEL and prevention programs have been focused on proven effectiveness rather than evaluation of the process. Currently however, researchers have found that evaluation of effectiveness of programs is lacking in the body of literature. There are not only outcomes to consider but also the process by which outcomes are the result. This sparked exploration into service delivery or implementation and into the contexts and other factors that could influence sought after benefits of prevention programs. To this end the purpose of this qualitative study is to describe how social emotional programs' are implemented at two middle schools and to better understand how teachers perceive and experience implementation. The explicit research questions are as follows:

- (1) What are the central defining features of social emotional programs or interventions in urban middle schools as perceived by teachers and/or school counselors?
- (2) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience social and emotional programs implementation quality within their school?
- (3) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience principal support of social and emotional programs within their school?

This dissertation will explore implementation differences within and between middle schools administering social emotional learning interventions. Adding to the literature on social emotional program or strategy implementation in secondary settings will support a continuity of service from grade school to facilitate development through adolescence into adulthood.

I have structured this literature review into four parts. First, I will cover research on implementation science as a precursor to the section on a SEL conceptual framework; which will guide the methodology for the study. Then, I provide a broad overview consisting of the history of social emotional learning and effective interventions in the academic, personal and career development of students. Finally, I review studies aimed at connecting educator perceptions to school based prevention implementation to support the need to conduct the current study. I conclude with a summary.

Program Implementation

The comprehensive implementation of SEL in schools has been supported by the aforementioned research, and resulted in a surge of widespread implementation within various settings. Therefore, the implications for school-based programs aimed at

preventing risky behaviors not only affect student outcomes on the micro level but also on a larger scale (Durlak et al., 2011; Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnick, & Elias, 2003; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). This has caused a shift in the literature. Most studies on SEL focused on program effectiveness currently research on how to achieve effectiveness to help educators better understand contextual issues that influence implementation quality is more prominent (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2004). Implementation assessment is necessary to determine quality programming as it relates to successes for children and youth, but there is little scientific research on evidence based practices for preventative programs at schools (Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003; Fixen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, & Wallace, 2005; Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2004). However high quality implementation of social emotional programs in schools should be a priority for educators considering the possible impact on academic and personal/social student outcomes (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

Implementation refers to conducting an intervention as intended (Yeaton & Sechrest, 1981, p. 160). Implementation has also been referred to as treatment integrity, fidelity and adherence in literature related to program evaluation (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000). It is critical as a source for feedback on program improvement, is a means to document compliance to key program components, and can ensure legal and ethical guidelines are adhered to. Implementation contributes to internal validity and strengthens conclusions about a program's effect on development of competencies and prosocial behaviors (Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003). Implementation of programs is its own science in that it is a systematic way to transmit innovations amongst several

disciplines via evidence based programs. Focusing on the critical bridge between theory and practice is a daunting task for researchers. Issues with implementation of social programs have contributed to failure to meet desired outcomes (Gottfredson, 1984). According to Fixen, Naoom, Blasé, Friedman, and Wallace (2005) implementation is “a specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions” (p. 5). In this critically acclaimed synthesis of literature on implementation over 1,000 studies were cited to gather data from several domains including agriculture, business, health, engineering and social services. The purpose of the extensive review was to give practitioners the ability to use evidence based programs both effectively and efficiently by making sense of appropriate service delivery processes. Results asserted that implementation of an intervention are just as important as the practice in order to move from theory to service with good outcomes (Elias, Gager, & Hancock, 1993; Whitcomb & Merrell, 2012). Domitrovich and Greenberg (2000) conducted a study on 34 evidence-based effective prevention programs used in schools and found that only, 21%, had evaluated implementation and one-third of those programs linked variation in outcomes to implementation issues.

The need for implementation science grew from the research identifying a research-practice gap, which is described as a lag between clinical application to applied settings which can take upwards of 17 years to occur when considering research cross disciplinary work (Olswang & Prelock, 2015). To address the research gap Olswang and Prelock (2015) suggest more research is necessary to understand context, identify barriers to effective implementation, and engage practitioners into study methods to get a clear understanding of factors which have the potential to influence desired end results. In an

effort to increase capacity and community ownership of prevention efforts Everhart and Wandersman (2000) found that barriers in the process of implementation resulted from lack of communication, collaboration, and training of stakeholders. Specifically concerning SEL programs, the complexities of implementation plague practitioners. To address these issues researchers must gain awareness of implementers' points of view and their developmental levels (Elias, Bruene-Butler, Blum, & Schuyler, 2000).

To support further improvements to implementation quality research was conducted as a follow up to the Fixen et al. (2005) study. The initial study's purpose was to provide a guide to use the products of science in a systematic way to promote successful change. Several factors were introduced to outline under which circumstances in which the science and practice of implementation is improved to allow for broad positive impact. Betram, Blasé, and Fixen (2015) found through use of the frameworks created during their initial study that organizations have the ability to increase the likelihood of desired results by following explicit implementation drivers during stages within an overall process of administering an intervention. The authors recommend human service administrators consistently review established interventions, intentionally assign activities to program implementers during stage of implementation, allow for adjustments, and to check for fidelity during each stage of implementation. Overarching conclusions drawn from studies on successful SEL programs is they prevent negative student outcomes and promote positive behaviors and achievement; and were most successful if they are comprehensively integrated into the school climate and implemented with fidelity by staff whom are close to the students.

While it is apparent that teaching social and emotional skills is beneficial, there is a consensus in research highlighting a need to study how to teach SEL (Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, & Brackett, 2016). Previous research on effective SEL programs failed to address common issues that decreased sought out gains including insufficient coordination of services with other school operations and inattention to implementation. Brackett & Rivers (2014) found that the success of social emotional learning in students is dependent on implementation fidelity. In order to address these issues, educators need to know which aspects of implementation are of most importance and how to prepare for appropriate implementation to increase the likelihood of desired results. Implementation strategies have found to largely determine outcomes or effectiveness of school reform, so much so it is necessary to measure the degree of implementation quality before assessing outcomes and attributing them to a specific program (Desimone, 2002; Durlak & Dupre, 2008).

The quality of social emotional programs has been proven with research-based evidence over the last two decades but even the highest quality interventions have been inadequate in verifying program integrity (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000). The possible increases in positive student outcomes make the study's findings critical for districts, schools, and educators working with students from high poverty backgrounds. Information gleaned from this study is aimed at guiding school districts and administration with preparation efforts in implementation to ensure key stakeholders and implementers are given the opportunity to communicate, the tools and support to foster successful interventions for at-risk students. By identifying best practices for implementation of SEL programs based on educator perceptions, school staff and leaders

will be able to identify needs for professional development to support program execution throughout school districts.

A Conceptual Framework to Social Emotional Learning

In order to equip educators with a shared approach to program implementation, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, and Zins (2004) developed a framework with relevant material to communicate how to put SEL and other school-based preventative programs into action effectively and use the model to conceptualize implementation dependent on specific environments (Figure 1). The goal of the framework is to define implementation, introduce a broad conceptual model and identify factors affecting practice as well as quality. Implementation quality has five aspects: adherence, exposure, content and affective quality, participant responsiveness and program differentiation (Greenberg, et al., 2004). During the early 2000's researchers found a lack of literature on implementation quality due to few assessment tools for evaluation, the comprehensive program model produced by program evaluation theory consisting of causative or "how and why" the program is expected to produce results and prescriptive theory which describes how it should be implemented. The remaining portion of this section on the conceptual framework used to bound the methodology of my study will be described in this chapter. Later, in the study, a contemporary framework is used in to situate the findings within the most current theoretical guide for practice.

The conceptual model of school-based implementation includes causative theory which explains how the problem developed and informs the selection of strategies as well as how the program affects outcomes. Causative theory posits that desired outcomes take place when the intervention is implemented as proposed and accounts for other principle

mechanisms to mediate targeted change such as cognition and behavior. While prescriptive theory describes how to plan the intervention, how to assess elements within planned intervention and planned implementation support system, and discrepancies in each are identified to explained varied outcomes. While the quality of SEL interventions are widely acclaimed, the more important aspect to consider is the conditions under which implementation takes place and key variables involved as information in these areas have the ability to influence desired student payoffs. Many school-based prevention programs are high in internal validity or they show significant effect sizes under controlled conditions but lack external validity, with effect sizes that are not significant when generalized in uncontrolled settings (Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003). This supports a need to study implementation in context to understand under what conditions effective experimental trials take place (Greenberg, Domitrovich, & Graczyk, 2000).

Within the planned implementation support of the school-based implementation framework conceptualized by Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins (2004) the prescriptive portion of the theory provides a conceptual framework to guide the current research, it consists of planned intervention and planned implementation support. The prescriptive theory provides an implementation system, a standard for context and important factors including implementer characteristics (Chen, 1998). Planned intervention, is a portion of the prescriptive theory, it measures four dimensions: program model, quality of delivery, target audience and participants responsiveness; they are coupled with planned implementation support to measure implementation quality. Each dimension in planned intervention is broken into sub dimensions which specify how the program is intended to take place and each is prescribed based on evidence provided

through trial based research, while each is essential to create a roadmap and instructions for educators to follow. However, the planned implementation support is of utmost importance because “the strongest, most extensively evaluated program will fail without an adequate support system” (Greenberg et al., 2004). Planned implementation support focuses on the context in which the program or intervention will take place and implementers of the program.

Planned implementation support has five dimensions: pre-planning, quality of materials, technical support available, quality of technical support and implementer readiness. Pre-planning is any efforts a school puts into place to prepare for a student intervention Greenberg et al. (2004) assert there is little research on ways to assess or improve readiness of a context to predict program implementation. Teacher implementation information has the ability to inform administrators on strategies to support more effective quality (Malloy, Acock, DuBois, Vuchinich, Silverthorn, Ji, & Flay, 2015). Even further indicators of implementer readiness require adequate skills, beliefs and knowledge to successfully deliver a program (Greenberg et al., 2004). More specifically studies show “new research is warranted to study how the attitudes and behaviors of implementers and their support systems alter the quality of implementation and outcomes” (p. 37). The concept of implementation readiness is described as an organization’s capacity to effectively implement evidence-based interventions including those aimed at social emotional development (Wanless & Domitrovich, 2015). More research to identify aspects of school and teacher ability to execute programs used as catalysts for positive change in student outcomes as a result of social emotional learning is needed for predictive utility for implementation quality.

To complete the evaluation process associated with program implementation quality the intervention and its supports are not the only aspects to be considered, studies indicate that context is equally critical (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta 2015). The contextual factors describe the social system in which the program occurs. Implementation that produces positive outcomes as a result of psycho-social interventions depend on context (Yeager & Walton, 2011). Next, outside factors that influence implementation quality are described in four levels: classroom, school, district, and community. It is these factors that set the stage for effective administration of preventative programs especially at the classroom level since teachers and students are the most integral to implementation. At the classroom level implementer characteristics, classroom climate and peer relations make up the context factors within setting in which the intervention takes place. Chen (1998) created a framework that summarizes factors in relation to implementation: the implementation system (process, structure and training), characteristics of the implementer (teacher, school counselor, other staff) and characteristics of the school setting (climate, principal support, district support). The need for qualitative data regarding the context of school based prevention programs and interventions is critical to supporting the scaling up of comprehensive social emotional learning (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000). In a program development evaluation model Gottfredson (1984) concluded that an implementation evaluation structure that measures context and focuses implementers develop an organization's capacity to meet goals. Descriptions of the school climate, educator perceptions and program supports studied in natural settings to understand implementation of social emotional learning is the purpose of this dissertation. The aim is to provide rich information about the context in which

effective implementation of social emotional learning takes, understand necessary supports and describe teacher and/or school counselor perceptions connected to positive student outcomes.

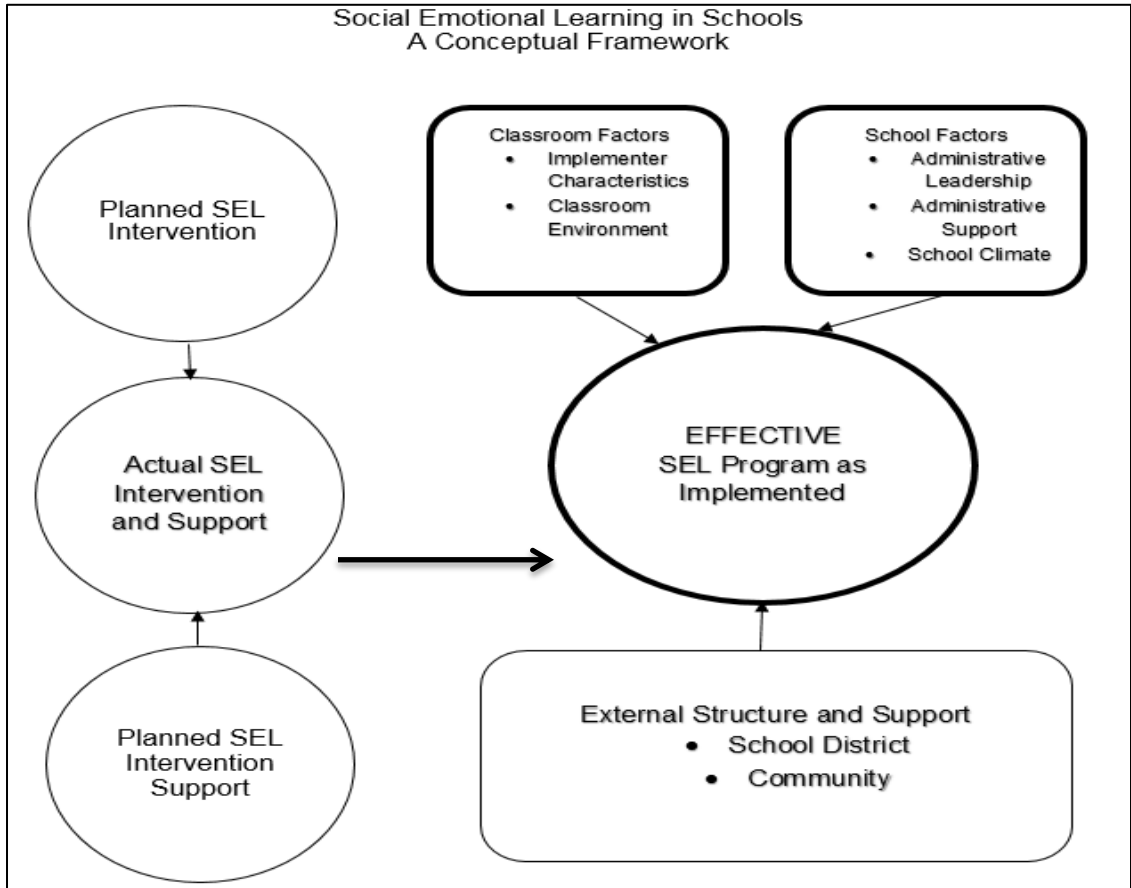


Figure 1. Social Emotional Learning in Schools Conceptual Framework. This figure illustrates an adaptation of the conceptual framework by Greenberg et al. (2004).

Social and Emotional Learning: History and Effectiveness

Historically the body of education and social service literature suggests that there are effective evidence based programs proven to support human development academically, socially/ emotionally and career. Social and emotional learning developed in the late 20th century as research evolved in the field of study on intelligence.

Intelligence is possessed by all individuals at different degrees and is defined as one’s

capacity to solve problems or fashion products that are valued in one or more settings (Gardner, 1983). The concept of multiple intelligences was studied in an effort to drive deeper learning in schools (Blythe & Gardner, 1990). Seven distinct modes of thinking were identified including linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, body-kinesthetic, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. However, schools heavily focus on linguistic and logical-mathematical while neglecting the others as well as students who have gifts in these areas. Goleman (1995) studied emotional intelligence and describes it simply as a different way of being smart. Mayer and Salovey (1997) describe emotional intelligence as the intersection of cognitive and emotional aspects of the personality. Emotional intelligence is “the capacity to process emotional information accurately and efficiently including that information relevant to recognition, construction and regulation of emotion in oneself and others” (Goleman, 1995, p. 2). Social emotional learning is a process to help increase students emotional intelligence or capacity to recognize, understand and manage emotions (Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, & Brackett, 2016). However, social emotional learning developed from the foundation of the idea that there was a need to teach youth skills to navigate between their own thoughts and feelings to be successful in work and life due to the many issues face today.

As a result of a surge in violence and low moral standards in American culture, society is moving toward more formal training in ethics and character building in schools. The movement towards including character education and moral instruction dates back to the early days of our nation (Lickona & Skillen, 1993). Dating back to 1838 and the Common School, Horace Mann believed in the following fundamental propositions: school is free, universal, available to all religious and social/ethnic backgrounds,

grounded in pedagogy by well trained teachers and is profoundly moral in character (Background, 2007). Character education is the long term process of helping young people develop good values or learning to care about others and to act upon values such as fairness, honesty, compassion, responsibility and respect for self (Elias et al, 1997). Character education is important because it helps to restore deficits in youth caused by the deterioration of the family and focus less on the common good. The goals of character education include the maturation of six cognitive qualities, three of which that are achievable outcomes of social emotional learning: awareness of moral dimension (social awareness), thoughtful decision-making and moral self-knowledge. Defining social emotional learning has evolved from simply identifying skills essential for youth to form healthy relationships, solve problems and function in life (Poulou, 2005) to explicitly outlining the knowledge, skills and attitudes which grow competencies within the five SEL domains (Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, & Gullotta, 2015). Self-awareness involves the ability to recognize one's own emotions and their influence on behavior, while self-management is centered on the regulation of emotions and doing so effectively under different circumstances. Individuals with self-awareness have a perspective that allows them to empathize with those from different backgrounds; where relationship skills are demonstrated through being able to establish and maintain healthy and beneficial relationships. Responsible decision-making is of importance because it allows one to make constructive and respectful choices based on safety, ethics, and evaluation of consequences. It is the skill development, which bridges the concept of character education and SEL. Social emotional learning is a broader concept focusing on skill acquisition that is "transferable across settings" (Elias et al., 1997). The key point of

distinction being the emphasis in SEL is on the producing thoughts, behaviors and mindsets in young people to be utilized in their life to promote social, emotional, academic and physical well-being.

The youth of the 20th century to present day have endured challenges which affect academic achievement due to social problems. It was the needs of the poor, low achieving students with behavior problems in New Haven, Connecticut who challenged the key figures in the social emotional learning movement (Weissberg & Shriver, 1997). Researchers piloted a program referred to as the Social Development Project using a collaborative model integrating education and mental health professionals, parents and community members to identify skills, attitudes and values to develop constructive behavior in at risk students (Elias et al., 1997). The Social Development Project helped the academically lowest performing schools improve attendance, discipline and achievement (Caplan, Weissberg, & Shriver, 1990). During the late 1980s to 1990s social emotional learning research increased and the Collaborative for Academic, Social, Emotional Learning was established, thus promoting social and emotional competency in adults and youth via implementation of comprehensive, school-based interventions (Weissberg & Elias, 1993; Caplan, Weissberg, Grober, Sivo, Grady, & Jacoby, 1992). To address the problems associated with at-risk youth the inclusion of character education, comprehensive social emotional learning and social competence training are all necessary to engage the whole child in learning and allow for them to utilize multiple intelligences in the process. Positive outcomes for students drive the work of education leaders, mental health professionals, legislators and the greater community. Competencies in academic, personal/social and career developmental aspects of life have

been associated with social emotional learning programs. Research suggests SEL is an effective method in which to produce desired outcomes. However, some believe a focus on academic achievement is imperative due to the current anecdotal and research supported evidence regarding the achievement gap in the United States.

As the era of high-stakes testing continues academics are at the forefront and focus of the vision and mission for most American schools. Historically school reform in the United States is very academically driven considering the focus on legislative standard based testings of the No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to the Top (2009). Nationally the emphasis on academic proficiency has continued with the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. Educational policy has a central tendency to require academic achievement standards be met but local districts and schools have a broader mission in that they must answer to the needs of their surrounding communities (Maynard, Solis, & Miller, 2015). The needs of the student population force schools to respond via non-cognitive support systems to cultivate equitable opportunities for development of the whole child. Social emotional learning has proven to have influence on student's academic ability and could therefore assist schools in meeting accountability benchmarks.

The presence of effective school based programs, which both prevent negative behavior in students as well as promote positive behavior has been solidified in the literature by meta-analyses. The SEL Research Group (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 studies on programs to demonstrate the current state of effectiveness as well as overall benefits to organizations and individuals. The schools featured had three types of SEL programs: those conducted in classrooms by school based educators (i.e., teachers or

school counselors), those conducted by researchers and multi-component programs that involved classroom instruction and other supports including school climate strategies. Research suggests SEL programs fostered significant improvements in the following areas: social and emotional skills, attitudes towards themselves, others and school, social classroom behavior, conduct problems, emotional distress, and achievement test scores and grades. The impact on student achievement highlighted an 11 percentile point increase higher than the control group of peers not participating in SEL programming (SEL Research Group, 2010). A met-analysis of literature on the effectiveness of social emotional and moral skills development the effect sizes were significant in improving social skills, reducing problem behaviors and enhancing academic achievement (Diekstra & Gravesteyn, 2008). Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, and Schellinger (2011) found similar results concluding students receiving SEL perform better than others on achievement tests. The most compelling research conducted within the meta-analyses syntheses was the impact SEL has on academic achievement; noting that over 280 studies were included in the analyses, findings located 11 categories that affected learning and 8 involved SEL.

Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnick, & Elias (2003) synthesized results found from approximately 800 studies and conducted meta-analyses on programs centered on components of SEL interventions. The study's aim was to summarize findings from meta-analyses describing effective school based programs to guide practitioners in developing comprehensive school reform models to produce positive outcomes associated with SEL and prevent prevalence of mental health associated behaviors. Research indicated improvements in quality of peer and adult

relationships, reduction of problem behaviors and growth in academic achievement. Similarly, in a worldwide meta-analysis on 76 controlled studies on effective SEL programs and interventions has positive effects on outcomes including social skills development, positive attitude towards oneself and others, prevention of antisocial behavior, and academic achievement (Dieskstra & Gravestijn, 2008).

Both academic and personal/social development are critical in preparing students for postsecondary education and career. Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron (2013) identified SEL skills as key attributes important for success in both college and career settings after high school. This research also supports the development of social emotional competencies or non-cognitive skills in relation to college success, especially pertaining to students from diverse backgrounds. The development of SEL competencies prepares all students both academically and socially for the real world. While research indicates SEL programs are effective and should be incorporated in schools there is evidence for the need to expand the reach beyond weekly programs and modest interventions (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). This is especially important for schools in urban settings who serve students from diverse populations who are typically the most at-risk and lowest performing and considering they often are in the highest need for intervention. Most urban schools are large and are not adequately equipped to meet the high needs of its students, so the ability to create an environment to proliferate student gains is imperative.

Students from culturally diverse backgrounds challenge educators due to their wide variation in abilities and motivation for learning and are at-risk for engaging in the negative behaviors addressed by social emotional interventions (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). The subject matter in my study is associated

with inclusivity of different cultures in schools where race is factor. As the diversity of our nation continues to grow, incorporation of SEL programs is crucial due to their unique ability to contribute to a culturally inclusive school environment by addressing differences in students based on how they express and respond to emotions (Hoffman, 2009). Critical race theory (CRT) consists of three tenets including the ingrained nature of racism, the importance of narratives, and interest congruence are embedded within this study as it is my belief that race is an influential factor in creating a culturally responsive school climate. Findings resulting from my research are meant to influence change to combat injustice in schools, this is the first tenet of critical race theory. My research will examine practices that affect student groups based on race and culture to address racism that exists in society and in the education setting. Therefore, findings from my research are meant to address inherent racism and injustice through examining practices to promote inclusiveness and support transformation of policies affecting those of racially discriminated against. Beyond race student diversity also extends to other differences in students that have the ability to affect student opportunities and inclusiveness in schools. Students learning differences at times have issues with social relationships connected to disabilities that impede emotional recognition and regulation (Elias, 2004). Many connections have been made between SEL and skills that help students with disabilities become productive citizens in a complex society; in that understanding lack of social skills is relevant to understanding academic and social difficulties (Elias, 2004). Research indicates that the diverse student populations in the United States can benefit from programs focused on the development of social and emotional skills (Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jackson, 2009). Well-functioning schools are

culturally responsive and integrate intervention and prevention programs to promote a positive climate (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003; Weissberg & Cascarion, 2013). SEL involves fostering social and emotional competencies to create engaging, challenging and supportive learning environments (CASEL, 2013). It is suggested that educators systematically teach, model, and facilitate the application of social and emotional competencies on a school wide level to help establish a safe, caring and engaging learning environment.

Researchers assert that schools implementing SEL programs help develop students holistically by way of positive effect on school climate (Weissberg & Cascarion, 2013). In order for students to benefit from the SEL competencies CASEL (2013) recommends programming be embedded in curriculum and instruction, supports and after-school programs by way of multi-phase school-wide initiative to influence student outcomes. The support of lawmakers interested in education reform fortifies the need for comprehensive SEL programs in schools. In order to accomplish this the development of an in-depth research-based comprehensive school reform model to improve student outcomes is necessary (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnick, & Elias, (2003). There is a history of support from the federal government for comprehensive school reform. In the Title I and Elementary and Secondary Education Acts state that effective reform involves whole schools rather than individual classrooms (Desimone, 2002). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2015) endorses evidence based, high quality SEL programs that are approached systemically in a school and district wide context. CASEL (2013) also describes high quality school-based SEL programs as intentionally and comprehensively

developed over multiple years. However, there has been much controversy on how to achieve CSR as a means for educational innovation and to generalize program successes across schools and within districts (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003). Utilizing an effective intervention on a large scale does not guarantee positive impact on student outcomes, program implementation or how the program is conducted must still be considered to increase likelihood of benefits (Durlak & DuPre, 2008).

The current literature on SEL supports the notion that a successful program is characterized by its ability to enhance youth development by assisting schools and students via a comprehensive school wide initiative, which thrives in and enhances a culturally responsive climate and produces expected student outcomes (Rivers, Brackett, Reyes, Mayer, Caruso, & Salovey, 2012). Effective SEL programs seek to increase social competence and decrease behavioral problems in youth as well as identifying interventions that will support academic achievement. Conclusions from meta-analyses on effectiveness include benefits enhancing self-confidence, communication skills, and academic performance (Greenberg et al., 2003; Diekstra, Sklad, Gravesteyn, Ben, & Ritter (2008). Skills development in coping, self-control and social competency were at the forefront to prevent youth substance and drug use as well as school non-attendance. Reduction in delinquency and drug use were progress indicators for students when programs were comprehensive in nature and were implemented by school-based teachers (CASEL, 2008b). In sum researchers found that students who are competent in their social and emotional abilities try harder, are self-motivated, set goals, manage their emotions and ultimately perform better at school. Controlled studies on SEL programs that have produced desired outcomes are characterized by criterion that include: a skills

driven curriculum, school-based context and is comprehensive in nature (Diekstra & Gravesteyn, 2008).

Educator perceptions as indicators of SEL implementation quality

According to Fixen et al. (2005), high implementer fidelity is a core component of implementation in order for evidence-based practices to be effective asserting certain practitioner characteristics must be considered during service delivery and inform training, consultation and evaluation needs to maintain programs and interventions. Much of the research on teacher perceptions related to student outcomes is from international outlets. Poulou (2005) conducted a study in British Columbia and found teacher's role in social and emotional development of children advocate for their involvement in the design and delivery process of programs. Collie, Shapka, and Perry (2012), researchers based in British Columbia and Ontario, Canada found that teachers' perceptions influenced their determination and motivation to implement programs aimed at developing social emotional skills in students and a positive school climate. In the study over 600 teachers completed questionnaires to quantify teachers' perceptions in relation to their experiences in efforts to relate their beliefs to teacher outcomes such as burnout, stress and efficacy. The authors posit these teacher outcomes are also related to student outcomes. In Australia, a qualitative study on teacher perceptions found that teachers attitude toward content was positively linked to student success (Bower, van Kraayenoord, & Carroll, 2015). The study found students who participated in social emotional learning interventions felt more connected to school and this was enhanced by the both classroom environment and teacher perceptions of how programs affected school connectedness. Ho, Lin, Kuo, Kuo, and Kuo (2008) found similar results, stating

teachers personal background affected students efforts to develop deeper learning (sensing, awareness, realizing) and school effectiveness (climate). Management of the classroom environment as well as how teachers teach, model and relate to students when SEL contributes to desired lasting effects on student development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). This demonstrates a need for the current study as it supports the influence of teacher perception on student outcomes however, it does not describe the conditions under which the learning occurred nor did it provide information regarding teacher perceptions on implementation as outlined within limitations of the literature of SEL in schools.

For the purpose of this dissertation the implementers are both teachers and/or school counselors, responsible for administering the program and/or SEL interventions. The holistic approach required to effectively implement social and emotional learning supports the need for collaboration among all stakeholders involved. The ever increasing diverse student population in American schools and the growing responsibility of educators to bridge the gap between student needs and preparing them for the future has impacted the role of the school counselor. School reform in United States beginning with the federal enactment of No Child Left Behind (2001) and more recently Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) charged school professionals to increase the quality of services to students in public schools where students from diverse backgrounds are most prevalent (Clark & Breman, 2009). In order to meet guidelines set by the national professional association of the 2012 American School Counselor Association (ASCA), counselors are to meet students' needs in the areas of academic, career and personal/social development (Goodman-Scott, 2013). Therefore school counselors provide interventions and

responsive services to students to provide social emotional learning. The role of the school counselor requires collaborative and/or consultation efforts with teachers and other educators to meet the diverse needs of all student populations (Clark & Brenman, 2009). Even further, counselors provide support and leadership via advocating for the inclusion of social emotional learning in classrooms to promote student success and support systematic reform to increase opportunities for student's growth (Van Velsor, 2009). School counselors play a critical role in the implementation of social emotional programs and interventions due to the nature of responsibilities as related to the goals of SEL, but also due to the leadership role they hold in schools. Counselors coordinate school wide efforts and evaluation of interventions related to academic, personal/social and career development of students (ASCA, 2012). The data required to evaluate initiatives makes school counselors an important stakeholder with typically established relationships with administrators (Van Velsor, 2009). The integration of professional competencies and standards of the school counselor allow for promotion of academic and personal social growth in students and qualifies them as implementers, advocates and leaders within the implementation of social emotional learning. As supporters of SEL, counselors are specially qualified to remove barriers to academic achievement (Betram, Blasé, & Fixen, 2015). Therefore this dissertation will describe teacher and counselor factors of social emotional learning implementation.

Kam, Greenberg, and Walls (2003) conclude that implementers of SEL influence maintenance and implementation of interventions when coupled with the support of leadership. Van Velsor (2009) states the leadership style and buy-in of a school's principal affect new program implementation. This author asserts principals with

transformative leadership style require the courage to advocate for a program, vision via stakeholder collaboration and integrity of intervention via commitment to ongoing improvement. Key components to effective implementation of social emotional programs involve school-based leadership. Issues concerning the establishment of a safe and caring school culture, building culturally inclusive climate and providing professional development needs are responsibilities of school leaders. Each of these components is paramount for the success of SEL in schools. Fostering a school culture and environment where all students have the ability to thrive is a large component of the role of school leadership. School climate has been associated with positive social-emotional outcomes (Hoy, 2012). Hoffman (2009), *Reflecting on Social Emotional Learning: A Critical Perspective on Trends in the United States*, states that schools promoting a systematic approach to social emotional learning encourage fundamental social and emotional skills improve the entire emotional, social, and academic climate of a school for all students. As administrators consider implementing school wide initiatives it is important to address the needs of the growing diversity within the American student body, as stated, social emotional learning creates an environment conducive to the various contextual differences in today's schools. However, the inclusion on non-cognitive content within the academic setting must have the support of leadership to be effective. Van Velsor (2009) states "the support of administrators facilitates the change necessary for SEL infusion into the curriculum and is critically important in fostering a school climate conducive to SEL" (p. 53).

Implementation of social emotional programs in schools is essential to support desired student outcomes. Jennings and Greenberg (2009) found evidence that teacher

characteristics, principal support and contextual support play a role in SEL outcomes and implementation quality calling for future research via qualitative methods. School administrators are held responsible for aspects of implementation that contribute to school climate and other contextual issues related to effective social emotional learning. Implementers are critical due to their impact on student outcomes. However few studies involving the potential impact teachers have on student's emotional regulation exist (Bracketts & Rivers, 2014; Meyer, 2016). Research on what teachers do to implement SEL effectively in the classroom setting are lacking in the literature (Meyer, 2016; Jacobs & Gross, 2014; Pekrun & Linnebrink-Garcia, 2014). Discussions with school consultants (counselors) have value that is not currently present in the literature regarding implementation therefore a qualitative data could provide guidance to education practitioners (Domitrovich & Greenberg, 2000).

Summary of Literature Review

This proposal aims to equip educational leaders, practitioners and researchers with insight into the importance of contextual factors and implementer perceptions that are critical to the service delivery process, which directs the path to, desired outcomes both for individuals, groups and society as a result of social emotional learning. This reveals a gap in the research regarding secondary school populations as a context to study implementation quality for SEL interventions. Results are intended to support efforts to scale up or expand implementation of SEL programs school, district and statewide, even providing evidence for national SEL standards and legislation. Durlak, Domitrovich, Weissberg, and Gullotta (2015) assert that future research should focus on exploring environmental conditions in promotion of particular skill sets are responsible for student

outcomes on different educational levels and from different cultural backgrounds (p. 14). The authors urge a focus on features of the environmental context, specifically the classroom and school climate, teacher practices and family and community partnerships. Even further is the proposal for studies to discover aspects of effective and efficient SEL programs and strategies and determine how to maintain programs aspects that contribute to positive outcomes, efficient delivery and what to measure when evaluating theory, implementation and outcomes. It is also suggested that special attention be paid to student's cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

The literature has revealed trends regarding methodology, population studied and area of focus. Most studies are quantitative in nature and provide evidence to support possible outcomes. Those purposed to illuminate issues related to implementation gather data via surveys and questionnaires, so more detailed data points are ignored, leaving practitioners little information to move from scientifically proven strategies to guides for practice. Most studies on SEL have focused on preschool and elementary aged populations (Cole, Martin, & Dennis, 2004; Jacobs, & Gross, 2014). Wanless and Domitrovich (2015) summarized findings of empirical studies to highlight recent research on baseline predictors of implementation quality of SEL programs. Each study included in the article were conducted in preschool elementary school settings. However, understanding emotional regulation in adolescence is important for youth adjustment as related to school-based outcomes as well as prevention of dysfunctional regulation in adulthood (Silvers, McRae, Gabrieli, Gross, Remy, & Ochsner, 2012; Riediger & Kipker, 2013). Also key aspects of social development and self-development occur during the middle school years making SEL instruction paramount to meeting student needs (Taylor

& Larson, 1999). The secondary school population faces many barriers to achieving academically and socially. Research has provided evidence that there are many social emotional interventions, which are effective in producing positive outcomes for youth under controlled conditions (Diekstra, & Gravesteyin, 2008). There is less literature regarding implementation and under what conditions effective social emotional interventions occur (Meyer, 2016). This dissertation will hone in on describing the implementation of an effective SEL program that produces desired student outcomes and describing implementer perceptions, skills, knowledge and beliefs connected to social and emotional constructs using qualitative methodology. The aim is to provide a rich description of effectively implemented SEL interventions and explore implementer characteristics considering their influence on student's increased social and emotional skills in students at the middle school level. This dissertation seeks to fill a gap in the current literature in the area of effective SEL program implementation and implementer readiness as it relates to quality of SEL programs in the middle school setting to provide education practitioners, school based leaders, and district administration in a comprehensive approach to integrating social emotional learning in schools.

STUDY ONE: METHODS

In the introduction and literature review I stated the purpose of this dissertation and provided evidence to its importance within the field of educational leadership. Social emotional learning is critical to the academic, personal/social and career development of adolescents due to the proven impact it has on school's climate and student outcomes (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Diekstra, Sklad, Gravesteyn, & Ritter, 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). The research questions guiding the study area as follows: What are the central defining features of social emotional learning programs in urban middle schools as perceived by teachers and/or school counselors? How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience social and emotional programs implementation quality within their school? How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience principal support of social and emotional programs within their school?

In this chapter, I describe the research design employed and provide the rationale to support the selection as well as discuss its limitations. The district context, data sources, data collection and data analysis will follow.

Soundness of qualitative research data is judged by the assessment of credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, & Spiers, 2002). In qualitative research there are terms to parallel those typically associated with quantitative methods. These terms are used to describe assessment of quality due to the focus on context, setting and participants within the research design as opposed to numerical data. Credibility parallels validity, dependability parallels reliability and transferability aligns with a form of generalizability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). However I will utilize tactics associated with the case study design, as such the terms validity and reliability will be referenced in the methodology and findings chapters of the dissertation. Associated ethical considerations and procedures to ensure participant protection will be discussed. In qualitative research the role of the researcher as an instrument is a key characteristic, the process by which researcher positionality will be explored is described in this chapter; whereas the exploration of research positionality will be discussed in sections addressing data analysis. The chapter will close by foreshadowing the presentation of results as a part of a summary.

Research Design

I will describe the process of implementing a SEL program as well as explore the implementation process, implementation quality and principal support as operationalized by teacher and/or school counselor perceptions in middle schools. Strengths of qualitative research include: usefulness in describing complex phenomena, ability to conduct cross-case comparison and analysis, provides an understanding and description of people's experiences, describe phenomenon embedded in the local context (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). A multiple case study design will be employed to describe

implementation at each individual school. While this contributes to a strength of the method it also contributes to a weakness in that the data analysis can be time consuming (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). The ability to give voice to teachers and counselors, as a social group, will contribute to the lack of rich self-reported research on SEL implementation in middle schools. Describing the experiences of individuals in context is a traditional aspect of a qualitative methodology and supports the employment of a case study approach (Richards & Morse, 2013). The goal of the current study is to explore similarities and differences across cases to describe effective implementation in order to inform efforts to implement SEL at more schools. This goal supports the use of the multiple case study approach, as Yin (2003, 2009) states that replication across cases to predict similar results is a defining factor of a case study design. However it can be described as a drawback in that the knowledge gained is only generalizable to specific settings and people based on how similar they are to those in the sample (Johnson & Christensen, 2000). Different viewpoints will be gathered through replication of procedures, which is in line with suggestions of a multiple case study design (Yin, 2003). Teacher viewpoints from each school included in the sample will provide a depth of information regarding the implementation process and associated teacher perceptions related to SEL programming. The use of the multiple case study design also has implications for the replication of effective implementation of SEL programs since the study of a number of cases chosen for better understanding will help theorize about a larger number of cases (Stake, 2000).

Qualitative data are meant to focus on the importance of context, collect rich thick information and to describe or define characteristics such as feelings and attitudes

(Creswell, 2013). Therefore qualitative methods are appropriate to gather information from teachers and counselors to describe the implementation process, quality of implementation and principal support. According to Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, and Zins (2004) implementation quality is the degree to which an intervention is conducted as it was originally intended while implementer readiness is indicated by adequate skills to carry out an intervention as well as knowledge, attitude, value and commitment to goals of the program. Lack of fidelity when implementing programs could be due to adaptations made to fit the context, barriers to implementation or implementer readiness.

In the literature review for the present study there was little empirical research with contextual aspects, to help understand how to deliver programs effectively. The purpose of the current study is to support efforts to describe effective program implementation as an implication for future practice in implementing SEL programs to additional schools. However, the environment under which interventions are conducted is necessary to consider for scale up efforts (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnick, & Elias, 2003). The approach used in the proposed research seeks to provide in-depth descriptions of teachers' and/or school counselors beliefs, attitudes and skills associated with administering a social emotional interventions regarding implementation as process, implementation quality and associated support from school leadership to inform practices to influence expected student outcomes.

The multiple case study design is necessary in this research due to the assumption that the replication of SEL interventions with exemplary outcomes is related to the evaluative research question. Yin (2013, p. 61) states "questions seeking to know how

and why an intervention has been implemented smoothly” with an intention to inquire about how and why outcomes occurred for the purpose of replication is rationale for the use of a multiple case design. Also, the purpose of the study is to provide support for school leaders and district leaders to replicate SEL interventions to other schools, so the analytic benefits of a multiple case study are most substantial. The use of two cases, in this instance schools, allow for the possibility of replication by identifying factors associated with implementation, implementation quality and support educational leaders will have in-depth information to guide efforts to increase SEL on a larger scale.

Context of the Study

According to the Kentucky Department of Education 2015-2016 District Report Card, the school district has 96, 581 students in grades kindergarten through 12th grades and 66% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. The student population consists of 46.6% white students, 36.1% black, 9.6% Hispanic and approximately 8% is made up of other races. Approximately 12% of students participate in special education programs. The teacher population in the district is 75% female and 84% white, and 82% of teachers have a Master’s degree, Rank I status or higher degree. The average student-to-teacher ratio is 15:1. According to the district Strategic Plan the focus areas for the district are learning, growth and development, increasing capacity and improving culture and improving structure and integrating systems. The data for initial phase of sampling for site selection comes from a school district in large Midwestern city. There are 25 middle schools in the school district with a total population of 21, 416 students. In specific regards to the school district’s efforts to support social and emotional learning, a department centered on assisting in implementation readiness and support was created as

a part of the district's vision centered on deeper learning in all students. The Social Emotional Learning department is involved in researching how to implement programs to foster a healthy and positive school culture. The purpose of this department is aligned with the focus of my study. Therefore, I communicated my plans with the district leadership involved. The work of the department is unique in that it is the first district that administered effort to support social competence in students, historically the work has been grassroots in the sense that much of the work began and was supported at the school level. This is the case for the research sites that were explored in this study.

Data Sources

This study will first seek to explore effective social emotional program implementation, and then describe teacher perception of implementation quality and principal support of SEL programs. Effective SEL will be determined by school administrator questionnaire as well as student outcomes by way of responses to items on the district's Comprehensive School Survey (CSS). The school administrator questionnaire will determine if the overall design and implementation of the SEL intervention meets effectiveness criteria. Questions regarding the comprehensive nature of the intervention, intentionality, training and supports were included in the questionnaire sent to principals based on student behavioral data on the social emotional constructs from the CSS. The CSS has social emotional constructs that were used to operationalize student outcomes since the items in the construct measure SEL competencies. Teacher input on working conditions in schools will be used to describe participants in the analysis section of this study. The Teacher, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) survey is completed by K-12 educators in the state and is designed to

provide input about working conditions in schools. The TELL provides educators with information on data, tools and support for school improvement. The survey has 8 constructs that reflect teaching conditions including technology and supplies available, community and parent communication, teacher involvement in decision-making and data and support for instructional improvement. Both descriptions of the SEL implementation process and teacher perceptions, skills, knowledge and beliefs regarding implementation quality and principal support will be gathered through semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis as part of a multiple case study design.

Data Collection

The two middle schools selected as research sites will match in size, type and diversity of student population within each school in the study. This is a form of critical case sampling strategy, which is used to permit local generalization and maximum application of information to other cases (Creswell, 2013). Critical sampling strategy is appropriate for this study as the research seeks to identify conditions under which effective implementation of SEL programs. According to CASEL (2015) effective social emotional programs for middle and high schools are characterized by three criteria: overall design, implementation and research evaluation (p. 11). Overall design is comprehensive and intentional in promoting students development across all SEL competencies: social awareness, self-awareness, self-management, decision-making skills and relationship skills. Also the programming or interventions must occur over multiple years and students must be engaged in their learning and have opportunities for practice. Regarding implementation training and ongoing support must be provided to schools and implementers. Finally evaluation of interventions must be evidenced by positive impact

on student behaviors reflected by statistically significant main effects ($p < .05$) between comparison groups (CASEL, 2015 p. 11). Therefore the research schools must meet the criteria as set forth by the CASEL effectiveness guide as well as be similar in student demographics to better match comparison sites and increase validity of findings. Title I status will be used to operationalize student diversity and match schools based on student demographics by socioeconomic status. Title I schools have high concentrations of poor families therefore Title I status will be used to help control for differences in student outcomes based on factors not associated with the SEL intervention. The administrator questionnaire was conducted with personnel from each school in March of 2017 to confirm that each school and potential participants met CASEL effectiveness requirements to be research sites for this study.

The research participants are teachers or school counselors in middle schools who are in at least their second year of implementing a SEL program or intervention and who have been trained and had support available to them for implementation. During this second phase of the sampling process, the snowball strategy will be utilized to select teacher or counselor participants. Permission and information from school administrators is necessary to identify teachers implementing the program in selected schools. This snowball technique is necessary because school administrators know which cases or participants are information rich which is consistent the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013). Gatekeepers, in this case school administrators, will give information to identify which teachers will allow for exploration of perceptions to indicate implementer readiness. Access to schools and SEL implementers is dependent on district and school administrators could affect the sampling process. Implementers from two middle schools

matched based on school size, type and diverse with the highest rates of SEL attainment based on CASEL effectiveness criteria and identified by school administrators will be included in the sample for the study to describe the cases with greatest impact on student outcomes. The sampling techniques outlined allow for few cases to be described in depth with rich information for the purpose of locating best practices for implementation of SEL programs, while also addressing the importance of context in a qualitative design and has implications for more cases or schools. Once the approved IRB was received from the school district and university permission for research and participant suggestions were received from school administrators, this took place in April 2017.

The sampling process for this study will take place in two phases: (1) selecting research sites or schools and (2) selecting classrooms based on gatekeeper access and information regarding SEL interventions within the school. Purposeful sampling allowed sites (schools) and participants (teachers and school counselors) to be chosen based on their ability to inform understanding of the central phenomenon of the study, which is in line with the qualitative approach (Creswell, 2013). The study focus is on middle schools implementing SEL programs for at least 2 years as much of the current research is on preschool and elementary schools. Semi-structured interviews (See Appendix 1A and Appendix 1B) and observations (See Appendix 1C) will take place to collect equivalent data to compare across settings and the opportunity to clarify emergent themes. Appropriate consent forms and protocols with the description of the study and purpose along with the approved College of Education, University of Louisville and school district Internal Review Board document will be shared with participants before interviews begin. Confidentiality forms, interview questions and verbal explanations of

all associated forms will be discussed with participants also. According to Siedman (2013) in-depth interviewing is a way of making meaning from stories to gather detailed information about a phenomenon. The purpose of the interview in this dissertation is to provide rich data about the implementation of effective SEL interventions via teacher and counselor perceptions regarding the implementation process, quality and support. The goal is to reconstruct the teacher or counselor's experiences in context implementing SEL interventions to pinpoint information about why and how these experiences and perceptions contributed to desired student outcomes. School visits will occur over a 3 month period from April to June 2017 in visits or interactions to enable data true to the context. Interviews were recorded via an electronic device and transcribed verbatim after each visit and analysis of other pieces of data will take place after each visit to guide focus for further data collection. Participants were sent transcripts to check for accuracy.

Data collection in this project focuses heavily on interviews of teachers and school counselors working within middle schools where effective SEL programs or interventions are taking place and are in at least year 2 of implementation as well as meet CASEL effectiveness criteria. Access to teachers and counselors in the district was obtained by the school's principal and approved by the school district assistant superintendent received in March 2017. Individual contact will be made via email to set up time for interviews and/or observations. During site visits artifacts will be obtained. The interviews will be organized into a three-interview series conducted in the individual offices or classrooms of participants at their respective schools and lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes each. The three-interview series allows the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience in context and allows for reflection (Siedman,

2013). Transcriptions will be returned to participants for member checking to add to the validity of data collected during the interview. Each interview will be prefaced by informing the participant of the purpose of the study, initial questions were used to help participants give basic background details to set the foundation for how SEL interventions were initially introduced, and how implementers were trained as well as process and procedures related to support and evaluation. Interviews will consist of seven to ten core questions with probing questions interjected as necessary and expansion questions were posed as themes emerged.

The purpose of the interviews is to get the implementer's perspective of the implementation process, implementation quality and principal support of SEL interventions. Physical artifacts such as training materials, instructional resources and evaluative documentation will be analyzed to assist with revising the interview protocol questions if necessary this is meant to increase the reciprocity of the researcher-participant relationship and act as a guide in creating interview questions (Riehl, 2007). Questions within the interview protocol are directly aligned with the CASEL effective program guide and the school based conceptual framework for program implementation. The three-interview process will structure each interview by: (1) experiences in context of SEL and its implementation at their school, (2) perceptions of SEL implementation quality and (3) principal support of SEL implementation. The final visit will allow for a reflection of meaning interview to address the "emotional and intellectual" connections to the experience of SEL implementation (Siedman, 2013). Observations of SEL instruction and administrator support meetings were conducted using audio/visual technology and observation protocol for recording of descriptive notes and reflective

notes. Data collection took place from April to June 2017 and followed these steps in no certain order: collect documents and physical artifacts, conduct observations, and conduct interviews.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was framed by the three research questions. I plan to analyze the teachers and school counselor's experiences in SEL implementation and perceptions of implementation quality and principal support. The first step in the process will be to analyze the physical artifacts or documents and observations of instruction and related professional meetings to orient myself with the context and raw data before delving into detailed information from interviews. Analysis of the context will set the foundation for meaning received from individual stories derived from the semi-structured interviews. Physical artifacts and direct observations are contributors to strengths of data analysis in that they cover actions in real time in regards to context and they allow for insight into cultural features and technical operations that are key to implementation of programs in schools (Yin, 2013). Conducting these analyses initially will organize the data in a systematic manner in which to narrow data from broad to more specific (Yin, 2013).

The inductive approach to analysis will be employed to use the details from raw data to derive themes through interpretation of interview data to allow for findings to emerge from frequent concepts connected within the words and phrases of participants (Thomas, 2006). The goal is to seek what emerges from the data as important from the participant's point of view to lead to findings (Siedman, 2013). Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. I will transcribe interviews to become familiarized with the data and benefit from the verbal and non-verbal recreation of the

interview (Siedman, 2013). A system of open coding will be used initially to corroborate ideas from document analysis and observations. Once all interviews have taken place the coding process as suggested by Thomas (2006) will guide the analysis: (1) preparing data from interviews, (2) close reading of transcripts (3) open coding using a highlighting system (4) creation of categories using electronic coding system (5) overlapping coding and uncoded text and (6) continuing revision of and refinement of category system. Interview transcripts will be sent to participants to check for accuracy and to inform judgment and check for similar points of interests. This form of member checking also contributes to credibility (Thomas, 2006). Themes or categories foreshadowed during document analysis and observations will be noted in preparation for the semi-structured interviews I created categories next to identify dimensions of SEL implementation that are related to effectiveness and student outcomes. Coding will take place in a two-step process. First a close reading of transcripts followed by markings to indicate labels that may suggest possible categories. Next computer assisted qualitative analysis software will be employed to create categories from passages or excerpts within interview transcripts to make thematic connects within and among them (Siedman, 2013). Then an overlapping coding and uncoding will take place allow for passages to emerge and others to die out as the analysis continues. Lastly a category system will organize passages into computer file folders for review by assigned category to locate interesting themes to make meaning of factors that contribute to effective SEL program implementation.

Cross case analysis will be used to analyze the data from each classroom to aggregate findings and make them more robust (Yin, 2013). Each case will be treated as

a separate study using the same methods. Word tables from one or more uniform categories will be used to locate cross case patterns from which to draw conclusions based on similarities within cases and differences between cases. Describing aspects of SEL implementation that influence student outcomes by synthesizing rich data from multiple sites will reveal factors essential to effective implementation and scaling up efforts.

Data Verification

Yin (2013) outlines four tactics to test case study designs for quality. Evidence for three of the tests will be provided to address validity and reliability in the current study. Tactics to address construct validity and reliability tests were utilized in this dissertation. Construct validity “identifies correct operational measures for concepts being studied” (p. 45). Triangulation of data and use of a research based conceptual framework contribute to the trustworthiness of methods and therefore findings. Triangulation of data by use of interviews, observations, and document analysis will assist with validity and credibility over repeated visits. Themes that emerge from the data will help to illuminate experiences of teachers and reveal possible barriers to implementer quality and have implications for student outcomes and for overall school climate. Reliability “demonstrates that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results” (p. 45). Use of the same case study protocols during observations and interviews as well as documentation of steps of data collection operations add to replication of procedures. The use of the multiple case study design enhanced the transferability of the findings.

Researcher Positionality

This project is of personal value due to my interest in to support holistic student growth and development. As a school counselor who is dedicated to educating students, supporting staff and the community it is of great importance for me to understand experiences of educators and leaders who play an integral part in implementing interventions that support student development in areas consistent with professional responsibilities of school counselors. School counselors are uniquely trained to address the needs of the whole child and are held professionally responsible to their academic as well as social, emotional and career development. Therefore, the implications of this study were important to me in that they provided evidence to the integral role school counselors play in the achievement and success of students. The outcome of this work could support advocacy efforts of not only the inclusion of school counselors in schools but also to help centralize their role on student development as opposed to administrative tasks. The project is framed by a social constructivism paradigm due to goal to seek understanding in the world in which individuals work and live (Creswell, 2013). This is especially significant in the present study because to understand the experiences of teachers and counselors the research relies on the participants' views, this is a key goal of the project as the literature lacks perspective of implementer of SEL interventions.

As a researcher using a qualitative design my position could affect findings due to my own known or unknown biases. It is important to explore these as I will act as an instrument within the data collection procedure of the dissertation. The role and position of the researcher is embedded in both processes and outcomes of educational research (Milner, 2007). As such I identify myself as an African American female researcher

interested in how SEL is implemented to add to the literature on how it has the ability to contribute to a culturally responsive school climate. I reveal this as an attempt to be accountable to the people and communities with whom I am conducting research as the context of the dissertation takes place within an urban and diverse school setting. I plan to acknowledge race and cultural differences that could affect data analysis and findings. Milner (2007) suggests a framework for researchers to use to account for racial and cultural positionality that include researching the self, researching the self in relation to others and engaged reflection and representation. I plan on self-reflection via memoing, or taking notes during observations and interviewing to reveal and account for my seen and unseen biases. Researching myself in relation to others will be achieved via analysis of physical artifacts, I plan to gain knowledge about the context where the study will occur to understand how my own interests could affect findings. Finally the engaged reflection and representation portion of the framework will be addressed in my study via the interview follow-up after transcription has taken place. As a part of the follow up questions will be posed to the participant to check for accurate depiction of perspectives gained via interview and observations as well as and interpretation of the narrative.

Summary of Methodology

This dissertation will employ qualitative inquiry methods by way of a multiple case study design. The approach to analysis is inductive in nature to develop a descriptive case using a cross case analysis technique. Qualitative inquiry seeks to understand the how and why of a phenomenon. This study seeks to understand how SEL programs or interventions are implemented by exploring implementers or teachers and/or school counselors. The experiences and perceptions of teachers and school counselors of SEL

implementation, implementation quality and principal support are explored with a multiple case study. The Jefferson County Public School District will be the context in which the study will take place, it is a large urban school district and is diverse in student population by race and socioeconomic status. The JCPS Comprehensive School Survey will be a data source for the sampling process, which will determine research sites. Two middle school classrooms in Title I schools where effective SEL interventions have taken place for at least two consecutive years will have pertinent documents analyzed, be observed and implementer interviews will take place to develop a description of effective SEL implementation for the purpose of scaling up efforts, increasing positive student outcomes and supporting a culturally responsive school environment. Cross case analysis will be employed to identify similarities and differences between and within cases to aggregate and strengthen findings. The aspects of methodology within this dissertation address construct and external validity and reliability to provide evidence to the quality of the design. Synthesis of analysis across cases will finalize the procedures and set the foundation for interpretation of results to make connections to the purpose of the study.

Descriptions and themes gleaned from data analysis processes will be interpreted in the findings section. I plan to continue the use of first person to report findings and make connections from my experiences in data analysis to interpretation. According to Yin (2013) the relationship between the case study design, findings and previous theory of are of utmost important for academics. Therefore in the next chapter I will present findings in relation to the conceptual framework. To be consistent with the multiple case study strategy a question-and-answer format will be used for reporting purposes. According to Yin (2013) this format has advantages to report a multiple case study in that

it presents information gathered from within each case and allows readers to make their own cross case comparisons. I plan to use the same set of questions to cover each individual participant and use quotes to report responses. Finally initial discussion points to connect findings back to related literature will set the foundation for communication of information to a variety of audiences.

STUDY ONE: ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study is to describe of effective social emotional learning implementation in schools from the perspectives of professional implementers. The need for social emotional learning in schools has become prevalent in American education from the national and local arenas most recently due to the Every Student Succeeds Act regulations that recognize non-academic factors in accountability and student issues. In this chapter I will report the findings resulting from data collection and analysis. It is organized into two sections. In the first section I describe the schools that acted as research sites, briefly give background information about the research participants then provide a summary of the overall design approach used at each school as the foundation for implementation. In the next section I describe the process utilized to complete data analysis with data matrices, and explain results organized by how they relate to each research question. Then as a precursor to the discussion chapter, I connect findings to the original conceptual framework for social emotional learning in schools used to inform the methodology for this study. Finally a chapter summary closes the section. The school district where this study took place was described in the methodology. To summarize, the school is located in the midwestern region of the United States. It is public, large and in

an urban/suburban setting. For the purposes of this study, the schools included in the sample were selected based upon social emotional learning effectiveness and because they are similar in student demographics in order to increase validity of findings. SEL effectiveness was determined via a school administrator questionnaire that provided information on the school's overall design, years of implementation, training and support availability and positive outcomes. The school and student characteristics of each research site were matched. Both schools are categorized as large in size with over 400 students and each school has Title I status.

School Background

The Jefferson Boys School (pseudonym) is a middle school with a magnet program. According to the 2017-18 parent school choices pamphlet supplied by the school district the school has a magnet program that “offers a specialized learning environment that is gender-specific and provides a rigorous academic curriculum focusing on Next Generation skills.” The school is gender specific for boys placing emphasis on leadership skill development and integration of service learning into the school environment. It has 590 students in grades 6th through 8th, 34 % of students are white and 56% are minorities. Most of the student population lives in poverty; over 90% qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Results from the CSS, a survey completed by students, parents and teachers, indicate over 80% satisfaction with the Jefferson Boys School (JBS). The TELL survey results for teachers at JBS suggest that teachers are over 90% satisfied with their facilities and resources, community support, professional learning opportunities and the instructional practices and support offered at the school. Teachers are also 97% satisfied with school leadership's ability to address teacher

concerns and create a trusting and supportive environment.

In the school district school counselors are classified as administrators and part of the school leadership team. At JBS their school counselors and teachers implement social emotional learning lessons and manage their school wide program. Responses to the administrator questionnaire conducted prior to data collection indicate that the school has a structured advisory period where social emotional learning has taken place on a biweekly basis for four years. Teachers and counselors use research-based SEL specific lessons. There is a SEL steering committee that leads and guides the school's implementation while the administrative team provides support, evaluation and improvement efforts. Results from the critical sampling process revealed that the school has one of the highest scores on social emotional learning construct items of the Comprehensive School survey when compared to other Title I schools.

The Hayes School (pseudonym) is a unique school within the school district due to its optional school of study and it services students from grades six through twelve. According to the 2017-18 parent school choices pamphlet supplied by the school district the school offers the optional Environmental and Life Science program that "integrates physical and biological concepts with the study of environment and solutions to problems." The school places emphasis on students learning to think critically about human interactions with nature and how to become global citizens. It has a total student population of 1933 students in grades 6th to 12th, 43 % of students are white and 57% are minorities. There are 910 students in middle school grades. School district parent and teacher survey results indicate over 88% satisfaction with Hayes. The TELL survey provides educators with data, tools and support for school improvement focusing on

working condition constructs. The survey results for teachers at Hayes suggest that teachers on average based on percentage of teacher agreement of statements made on each construct are over 80% satisfied with their facilities and resources, community support, professional learning opportunities and the instructional practices and support offered at the school. Teachers are also 86% satisfied with school leadership's ability to address teacher concerns and create a trusting and supportive environment.

Research Participants

Julie Olmstead, School Counselor

At the Jefferson Boys School their school counselor, Mrs. Julie Olmstead (pseudonym) was a participant for this study. When interviewed she explained that the social emotional learning program implemented at the school was organized by a steering committee, has a shared vision and research-based lessons, strategies and interventions. Mrs. Olmstead is the school counselor for the 7th grade students at JBS. She has worked at the school for four years. Her professional background began with a teaching certification in reading and advanced math. She later made the transition to school counseling, and she also has a degree in mental health counseling. Her knowledge base regarding social emotional learning is apparent, as she was able to describe social emotional learning concepts during her second interview. She stated, “social and emotional learning is helping kids learn how to deal with their emotions effectively, how they can come up with strategies to use when they get into times and situations that help them develop the social skills necessary to get along with others, and be able to function in a group setting.” This demonstrates an understanding of key components of social emotional learning, specifically management of emotions, skill development and

maintaining relationships. Further in the interview she continued to demonstrate her integral role in implementing social emotional learning at the Jefferson Boys School.

Haylee Witt, Teacher

Haylee Witt (pseudonym) is a social studies teacher and a research participant for this study. Ms. Witt is a teacher leader at the Hayes School; she is the head of her 8th grade team. She is considered a novice teacher because she has been in the profession for less than 5 years. Ms. Witt has been at Hayes for three years and the highest education attained is a Bachelor's degree in teaching. Her professional background began with an alternative teaching certification. Teaching is her second career; she describes it as a choice and passion for her. School administrators describe Ms. Witt as a gifted educator. She is also very active with school district initiatives, frequents professional development, is an educational activist and is loved by her students. Ms. Witt demonstrated her passion for teaching and growing student learners and leaders during the classroom observation for this study. During her interview she explained that she believes that the purpose of social emotional learning in schools is to create student leaders in the classroom. Ms. Witt stated, "For those kids that can't naturally work in a group, it is allowing all of them to be successful instead of one kid being the leader and driving the group and those other kids sitting back because they don't really know what their place is. Not only I feel like does it help the kids stay in the classroom but it also helps all kids be successful or find their place in the classroom or I guess even find their voice, really."

Ms. Witt also collaborates with a special education teacher for one class period per day. She explained during an interview that the social emotional learning program

began at Hayes before she started working at the school. Ms. Witt suggested that the core purpose of social emotional learning implementation at Hayes is for it to be embedded into teaching strategies.

Overall SEL Program Design

At the Jefferson Boys School the overall design for SEL implementation was described by Mrs. Olmstead, the school counselor. She explained that the social emotional learning program began at JBS due to the needs of students and parents and in order to help decrease adverse effects including behavioral issues. A group of teachers and Mrs. Olmstead formed a committee to research social emotional learning. The SEL steering committee attended conferences, reviewed lessons and conducted needs assessments from parents and students to begin planning to implement a comprehensive, school wide SEL program at JBS. The SEL program is administered during the school advisory period, which takes place on a bi-weekly basis.

Information from the administrator questionnaire indicated that the Hayes School has a structured advisory period where social emotional learning takes place on a daily basis for 20 minutes. School personnel refer to advisory program as the CARE program or Creating A Respectful Environment and it has taken place for over five years. Results from the critical sampling process revealed the school has one of the highest scores on social emotional learning construct items of the Comprehensive School survey when compared to other Title I schools. Mrs. Witt explained that social emotional learning program implemented at the school has been organized in previous years by a teacher leader however currently assistant principals lead initial implementation, at the beginning of each school year. There isn't a shared vision and research-based lessons are not used

by implementers. Lessons are created by teachers and include 3-4 lessons that are school wide while others are strategies learned during CARE which are then embedded in academic instruction or targeted interventions at Hayes.

Data Analysis

In the methodology chapter, I described how data collection took place within this study. Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations and physical artifacts were collected to describe the experiences of teachers and counselors as implementers of social emotional learning. The purpose was to understand the context under which effective implementation takes place, implementer perceptions of implementation quality and associated school administrator support. Data analysis in this study was framed by the study's three research questions:

- (1) What are the central defining features of social emotional programs or interventions in urban middle schools as perceived by teachers and/or school counselors?
- (2) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience social and emotional programs implementation quality within their school?
- (3) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience principal support of social and emotional programs within their school?

My overall coding process of analysis took place in two cycles, structural coding then pattern coding. Structural coding relates segments of data to research questions used to frame interview questions and results in a categorization technique often enhanced by frequency counts (Saldana, 2009). Structural coding in this study was used via computer software to extract portions of the interview data into similar categories by color-coding

words and phrases. Once patterns of phrases and words were identified they were grouped into categories in a continuous process until saturation occurred as indicated by the overlapping of five reoccurring codes that emerged, I named these factors. The findings for this study answer each research question with these factors. In this chapter, visual representation of these factors are described and situated within the areas of interest in this study, namely implementation and administrator support of social emotional learning in schools. Data matrices in the form of tables and figures provide visual representation of the results from data analysis. This section is organized by presenting a table or figure and connecting the visual information to each research question and finally using analysis to show how data from this study connects to the social emotional learning in schools conceptual framework described in the literature review as a foundation for the discussion and implications.

The purpose of this study is to determine from implementers point of view which characteristics are essential to effective SEL in an uncontrolled setting within the context of a middle school. In order to follow which data sources informed the analysis demonstrated by each table or figure, Table 1 is a guide to indicate the source of data utilized in the analysis of information collected in the study.

Data analysis in this study relies heavily on interviews so the findings displayed in most of the visual representations are derived from interview data. However, observations and physical artifacts helped to validate information from interviews and uncover instrumental differences in how each implementer approached their role in providing social emotional learning. Specifically differences in instruction and implementation that were uncovered during interviews were supplanted by details

gathered during observations that highlighted divergent classroom management styles and physical artifacts provided evidence of the overall planning process to prepare for SEL interventions. Follow-up interviews helped to ensure accuracy within data collection procedures and solidified the presence of a knowledge base around SEL from each implementer, a finding from previous interviews. Observations, physical artifacts and follow up interviews validated findings that answer each research question later in this chapter.

Table 1

Data Analysis and Sources

Data Analysis Table/Figure #	Data Type			
	Interview	Observation	Physical Documents	Follow-up Interview
2	✓			
3	✓	✓	✓	
4	✓	✓	✓	
5				✓
6	✓	✓	✓	✓

✓= data source used for table/figure

An inductive approach was used during analysis of all data collected in that important categories in the data were identified. Patterns and relationships connected the data and demonstrate the influence and evaluation of effectiveness which is legitimized through the discovery process of analysis. An emic focus is used to represent the context under which effective social emotional learning takes place described by the participants or implementers terms and point of view. The frequency counts in Table 2 identify the

occurrence of the central defining factors in the interviews, the number of occurrences determined the level of influence each factor potentially has on SEL effectiveness at the schools. An influence rating of 5 indicates strongest influence based on number of occurrences of the factor was identified in the data while an influence rating of 1 indicates the weakest influence rating based on the least amount of occurrences of the factor was identified in the data.

Table 2

Factor Frequency Table

Factor	Influence Rating	Total Frequency	School 1	School 2
Implementation	5	82	56	26
Instruction	4	63	20	43
Structure	3	29	15	14
Knowledge	2	28	14	14
Administrator Involvement	1	18	10	8

Influence rating key-- 5= strongest, 1=weakest

In Figure 2 the central defining features of effective social emotional learning as described by implementers are defined and visually represents findings for research question 1.

Findings from semi-structures interviews conducted with a teacher and school counselor at schools with effective social emotional learning programs garnered five central defining features of effective implementation. The defining features identified in

this study are: structure, instructional approach, implementation processes, administrator involvement and a social emotional learning knowledge base.

Central Defining Factors Supporting Effective SEL Implementation Prediction (RQ1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none">A. Structure or an arranged time period and schedule organized within the school day for SEL instruction or planning. This time and schedule could consist of a class period, small group or individualized interventions taking place in an alternative setting.B. Instructional Approach or method utilized to deliver SEL curriculum, strategies or interventions. Approaches include explicit SEL lessons, embedded strategies or targeted interventions based on student needs.C. Implementation or process of executing a plan for SEL into practice in schools, this includes using a method of instruction, schedule and associated support.D. Administrator involvement in execution of SEL implementation including training, resources, personnel development, support, and evaluation and improvement efforts focused on staff and student needs.E. Knowledge is a demonstrated acquisition of information indicating an understanding of SEL concepts, purpose and associated student outcomes as related to school implementation.

Figure 2. Central defining factors supporting effective social emotional learning implementation prediction. This figure describes key factors associated with effective social emotional learning implementation.

Connection to the Conceptual Framework

It is important to understand that SEL program effectiveness as defined in my study is the result of an evaluation of desired outcomes. Implementation influences the program's ability to achieve outcomes by accurately measuring effectiveness. In the literature review of this study a portion of the conceptual framework originally developed by Greenberg et al. (2004) and Chen (1998) was utilized to frame the research questions and methodology. In order to inform the practice of educators with the most up to date

research and evidence based information to guide to social emotional learning effectiveness and implementation an updated framework was used to organize the findings of this study before the final discussion. Researchers in the field of social emotional learning implementation and evaluation assessed effective programs in practice by criteria including overall program design, implementation and research evaluation (CASEL, 2015). Factors that contribute to the implementation quality of SEL include: the implementation system (process, structure and training), characteristics of the implementer (teacher, school counselor, other staff) and characteristics of the school setting (climate, principal support, district support) (Chen, 1998). The most recent framework for putting SEL into practice was published during the data collection of this study in 2016. It combined both program effectiveness and implementation into activities associated with the demonstration of characteristics and criteria found in previous research. This evolution within the body of research on SEL marks a movement from theory to practice or processes into action steps that educators can take towards translating concepts into real outcomes. This framework provides a theory of action for educators in an effort to address two major issues that have emerged from research on school wide social emotional learning, they include: translating evidence-based interventions successful in to practice and providing infrastructure and capacity for system-wide implementation of evidence-based interventions (Oberle, Domitrovich, Meyers, & Weissberg, 2016). Using this framework to guide the findings of this study will make the information gleaned from this work more meaningful for practitioners. This is a goal of this research, to inform practice, support scale-up and influence positive student outcomes.

There are six activities in the theory of action: (1) shared vision among stakeholders (2) assessment of needs and resources for implementation (3) SEL specific professional development (4) evidence-based SEL instruction (5) integration of SEL practices in school and (6) embedded cycles of inquiry for continuous improvement. This theory of action combines evaluation and implementation of effective SEL programs. The purpose of the theory of action and all associated factors identified in this study is to create a practical blueprint for educators to follow in their efforts to systemically implement SEL in schools (Oberle et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this study I categorized the six activities identified in the effective SEL theory of action framework by Oberle et al. (2016) into the three characteristics of effectiveness provided by CASEL (2015), which include design, implementation and evaluation and the ten factors that contribute to implementation quality defined by Chen (1998) (see Figure 3). This allows the findings from this research, although framed in the context of a concept; to be connected to research supported action steps to take as a predictor of program effectiveness.

The ten factors developed from findings of this study related to SEL implementation are: comprehensive, research-based, shared vision under the design category, embedded instruction, implementer engagement, application, culturally responsive under implementation and organizational support, training & development and evaluation & improvement for the evaluation category.

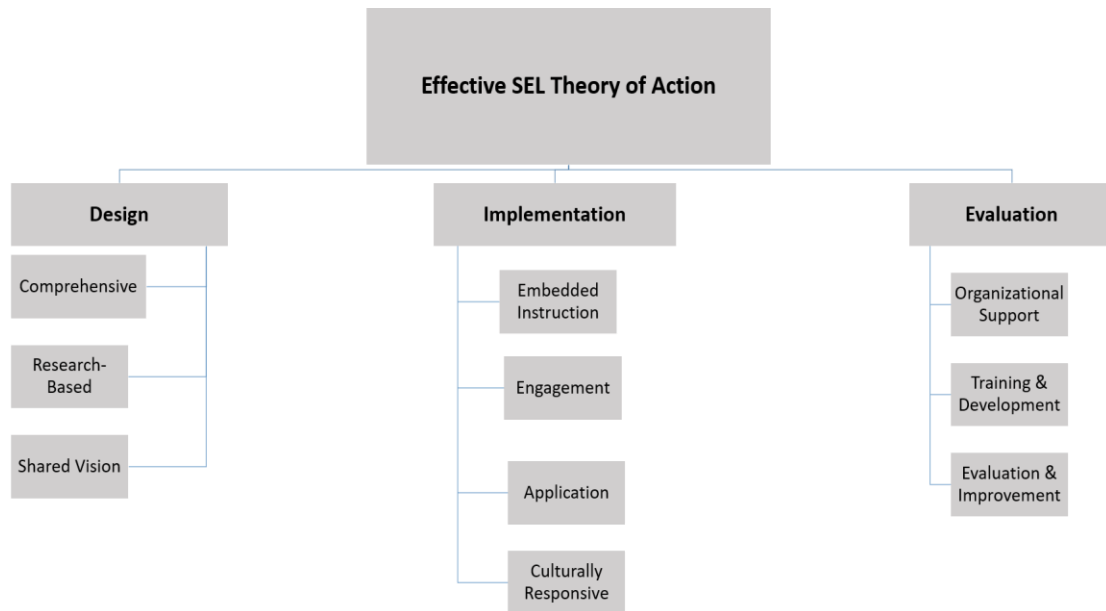


Figure 3. Effective SEL Theory of Action adapted from Oberle et al. (2016). This figure demonstrates the connection between the conceptual framework criteria for effective social emotional learning implementation and factors identified in the current study.

I further separated the factors by concepts in the research questions of this study to help translate theoretical concepts into practical strategies and to provide structure for systematic implementation in schools. In the methodology of this study the implementation framework developed by Chen (1998) included the implementation system, implementer characteristics, and the school setting. The ten factors connected to the theory of action as identified in detail from the implementer’s point of view for each research site via Table 3 and Table 4 answer research questions 2 (RQ2) and 3 (RQ3). There are five factors each for implementation quality displayed in Table 3 and administrator support displayed in Table 4. Each table is a data matrix checklist organized by school where a check indicates an observable presence of the factor within the interview, classroom observation or physical artifact data. Factors highlighted in color indicate the presence of the factor at both schools.

Table 3

SEL Implementation Quality – System and Implementer (RQ2)

Factors					
	<u>Research-Based</u>	<u>Embedded Instruction</u>	<u>Implementer Engagement</u>	<u>Application</u>	<u>Culturally Responsive</u>
JBS	✓		✓	✓	✓
Hayes		✓	✓		✓

✓= factor observable at school

Table 4

SEL Administrator Support – System and School Setting (RQ3)

Factors					
	<u>Comprehensive</u>	<u>Shared Vision</u>	<u>Organizational Support</u>	<u>Training & Development</u>	<u>Evaluation & Improvement</u>
JBS	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Hayes	✓		✓	✓	

✓= factor observable at school

At this point each factor will be defined and a supporting statement from the data will be presented to demonstrate the concept from the implementers point of view. The first five factors were present in the data for one school, the last five factors were present at both schools which based on this analysis indicates the importance of integrating these factors into SEL implementation to increase effectiveness. The use of **research-based** and evidence-based programs in schools is becoming has been supported by state and federal agencies and are an important component of SEL implementation because they increase likelihood of positive outcomes. Mrs. Olmstead from JBS explains how their steering committee identified research-based lessons and curriculum as a part of their implementation plan:

We actually did research on programs... we read and read and read about different schools' advisories and what was working, what wasn't working. When we went to the conference, we actually went to about ten schools, and watched what they were doing. And, so then we brought that back, and that's kind of how we started and decided what we needed to do. (April 20, 2017)

Social emotional learning in schools is most effective when strategies and interventions are integrated into academics and daily routines while being supported within the schools mission. **Embedded instruction** is demonstrated when students experience SEL in the classroom, during social interactions and targeted supports across grade levels and settings. At the Hayes School Ms. Witt's classroom structure and processes were apparent during her classroom observation. She referenced SEL in practice while addressing student relationships and decision making. During her interview she stated the following concerning embedded instruction:

I haven't been explicitly trained (on SEL competencies)...[but] other strategies I've learned just for the embedded instruction like to do it whenever I'm teaching my normal class. I think that whenever you teach...[and are] trying to help them become more aware of themselves, of their behaviors or how they are a citizen of the classroom, that's going to keep them in the classroom because they're not going to be taken out (of class) for little behaviors.

Teaching students to use skills to make decisions, recognize and understand emotions and build healthy relationships is the key to developing SEL competencies. The ability to provide opportunities for **application** of skills at schools when interacting with other students, teachers and school staff is characteristic of high quality SEL integration. JBS demonstrates students making practical applications within their SEL program. Mrs. Olmstead describes one such occurrence in the following statement:

I may conference with the student in the middle of the class, and then we kind of discuss a little bit about what could happen, what does it look like? A lot of times, we'll kind of role-play something to try to show them, "hey, this is the way you're

doing it, let's role-play that. This is the way it could be done. Let's role-play that." And, then they're the ones that draw the inferences between the two.

Incorporation of a **shared vision** among all stakeholders is critical for leaders to establish consensus and buy-in at schools. A clear understanding of the potential impact of SEL and its associated outcomes on the school's priorities influence the ability of the program to transform the school based on its needs. The school leadership and SEL steering committee are responsible for sharing and modeling components of the vision. The steering committee at JBS created a vision during the planning meetings to prepare for SEL implementation at their school, this statement describes it:

And, I will say, in the research things that we did, we looked at what worked, what didn't work, what their vision was, what their goals were, and then, with all the research, we kind of put it all down, and then we pulled it together for it to fit our population.

Continuous **evaluation and improvement** to assess program effectiveness based on the vision and the schools needs increase accountability and support improvement. Cycles of inquiry to monitor implementation and provide assistance to implementers can help to ensure high quality practices. Mrs. Olmstead explained that she and other administrators at JBS systematically visit classrooms during their advisory period where SEL takes place at their school. They evaluate each lesson at the end of the school year to make improvements and students and parents are also surveyed for feedback. When speaking about their administrative team and evaluation during advisory class time she states:

Administrators are in the classrooms all the time, and teachers don't even bat an eye because we just come in, walk through. We see someone struggling, we'll sit down and work with them a little bit, and that's APs, principal, counselor, service coordinator, it's just normal. We do the needs assessment continually. At the end of the year, every lesson, there's an evaluation. And then we do surveys from

parents and students, every semester, in the semester that go back and will list all the lessons, and they get to comment about each of the lessons.

In the methodology, I explained that cross case analysis would take place in this study as a part of a replication strategy since the purpose this study is to provide recommendations for school leaders and districts when systematically implementing SEL in schools. A multiple exemplar approach resulted in JBS and the Hayes school as research sites. At this point in analysis the common central defining factors of effective implementation have been identified, influence of each factor has been displayed, and explanation of five characteristics associated with a recommended theory of action have been defined. In order to construct an interpretive synthesis from prior concepts and relate them back to the conceptual framework used to frame this study a cross case comparison analysis is necessary. The comparison analysis suggests that five factors present at both research sites are essential to effective social emotional learning implementation to foster a culturally responsive climate in schools. The five factors common to both schools are implementer engagement, cultural responsiveness, comprehensive implementation, organizational support and training and development. These findings indicate that implementer engagement and cultural responsiveness are integral aspects of implementation quality while comprehensive implementation, organizational support and training and development are essential to achieve necessary administrator support in schools integrating SEL programs. The next section is organized into definitions of each factor and examples from the data to describe each factor from the implementer's point of view and in their voice. Each factor definition is derived from the CASEL Safe and Sound Guide (2013) and the systematic SEL framework for school wide implementation (Oberle et al., 2016).

Literature on school reform and SEL suggest for effective implementation in education is **comprehensive** in nature. School wide SEL is effective and sustained when it unifies academic and non-academic programs aimed at increasing positive student outcomes for overall development and prosocial behavior. At JBS the following statement indicates the comprehensive structure in their school:

We have an advisory period. They meet twice a month, and that was set up three years ago. And, I can tell you the rest of the levels. We have an officer that comes in and works with kids once every two weeks. We have SOS, we have small groups. We have about six topics small groups in each grade. We have individual counseling, like this semester, we have five interns, and so likes to give me interns. So, we are able to provide a lot of groups and a lot of individuals.

At the Hayes school social emotional learning is a part of their daily schedule for students and teachers. Ms. Witt explains:

Everybody has a CARE group. It's everyday, CARE is essentially our homeroom.

Organizational support encompasses responsibilities of both school and district level administrators to provide effective leadership to transform the school environment into one that is collaborative, communicative and helps with problem solving. In this study both implementers described their experiences with school level principals including support available in the form of resources, time and materials for social emotional learning implementation. When describing supports from the principal and assistant principals at JBS Mrs. Olmstead states:

And that way, altogether, we can come up with a solution, but we try to make sure that the whole staff is actively engaged, and we do that by our walking around. We also noticed, and we have, like I said, the Colt's congratulations. We send those to teachers, too, "I noticed that you were modeling something for Johnny today, great job." And, then we have to send out three compliments to teachers that we see something happening.

At the Hayes School one way assistant principals support SEL implementation is to model behaviors for students and staff members. Ms. Witt describes it this way:

Assistant principals modeling those types of [behaviors] things so then teachers will be using those skills and then also the teachers will then pass that on so then students are receiving that modeling from the teachers.

Implementer engagement is a demonstrated awareness of what social emotional learning is and its purpose in schools. Teachers engage students by using instructional methods to create a caring atmosphere where students feel safe and nurtured. It is characterized by a perceived need and relevance for programs and interventions as well as associated benefits. Implementers at both schools made statements indicating a knowledge base around the reason SEL is an instructional component in their school and how it has impacted students. At JBS, Mrs. Olmstead stated the follow to demonstrate knowledge base and outcomes associated with SEL:

Social and emotional learning is helping kids learn how to deal with their emotions effectively how they can come up with strategies to use when they get into those times and situations, helping them develop the social skills necessary to get along with others, to be able to function in a group setting...

Absolutely. Our suspension rate is down. Our bus referrals are down. Our absence percentage is way up. When I came, we had probably 75%, and we're in the 90s now. Grades are higher. Three years ago, we had so many kids in post-year recovery. It was ridiculous. And, this year, he might have ten kids up there in a period.

Ms. Witt, at Hayes indicates a knowledge base of the purpose of SEL with the following statements:

Working with kids and trying to help them become more aware of themselves, of their behaviors or how their citizen of the classroom, that's going, keep them in the classroom because they're not going to be sent out for little behaviors.

If kids don't feel supported in just their general wellbeing and they feel like they're in a safe place or they feel like the teacher really cares for them and is helping them be a better person, they're not going to do the academic work.

Cultural responsiveness refers to a school environment with a dynamic relationship between home/community culture and school culture. A culturally responsive school is characterized by providing developmentally appropriate instruction as well as being respectful of and inclusive of culturally diverse student groups within the school setting. At JBS, specific SEL interventions for students with disabilities and SEL lessons were modified for students with linguistic differences were developed and implemented, an example is described below:

We have a huge ESL student population, huge. And, we're getting 60 more next year. But, we do second steps with our EBD rooms. In our MMD unit, she has started doing yoga in the morning, and then meditation. And, without ESL kids, our ESL teachers in this building are just truly amazing, and they do a lot of stress relief because of the language barrier, and so, they do a lot of going back to where they're from, and pulling it into what the expectations are here. And, they also do a lot of, because there's so many religions from so many countries, they do a lot of letting the kids talk about their religion, so they can kind of understand that it's okay they're different, but we have to respect all cultures and all.

Ms. Witt at Hayes explained that she has been trained on how to apply culturally responsive strategies in her classroom and the importance of teacher reflection to address the needs of diverse students.

I don't know if this is a method but for me it's really important to me. I became a teacher through Teach for America. I was a total science major and a lot of that is I'm white and I taught 92% Hispanic, 7% African American and 1% other. I think out of my whole teaching two years, I had one white student. We did a whole lot of work about really examining our bias among yourself and checking our own privilege and I feel like that I tried to be very aware of that myself in terms of how I engage kids.

I've been going to their sessions because I say I feel like sometimes culture responsive teaching or culture responsive education is a buzzword and it's like let's say that. Let's go to training and say "Yeah, I went to that" and check it off the box. I say for here at Hayes, I would like to not just talk about it but be about it and not just say let me put ten books of somebody that is Hispanic, that has a Hispanic protagonist, in my library and direct kids to that. It's trying to make sure that it's inter-weaved in everything that we do.

The need for high quality, continuous **training and professional development** is required in order to increase the effectiveness of SEL in practice and SEL implementation. Professional development to expose SEL to implementers, enhance instructional practices and to provide coaching and feedback are necessary for pre and post implementation. School based training took place in both schools. At JBS the steering committee conducted training while at Hayes assistant principals provided it. Mrs. Olmstead offers the following about professional development at their school:

We do a different kind of PD here. We have EBD every other Wednesday here in the building, and every teacher doesn't have to go. They have to attend a certain number during the year, and so, different teachers teach different things, and then the teachers that feel they need that, so maybe classroom management, so those teachers just go to that. Or, it might be managing children with major emotional issues, so we have PD on that. And, so the experts within our building do all kinds of PD's, and lot of times, the teachers will go to something the districts provided or something else by the district, and then they come back and do a PD, and then the teachers can kind of get that information.

Ms. Witt at Hayes explains how training at Hayes was performed by their assistant principal:

We had an assistant principal. Like I said, there's one for each grade so Ms. Principle (pseudonym) is our 8th grade one and I'm pretty sure 6th and 7th did the exact same thing. Right before the beginning of school whenever we were all here in the building, it actually might have been on the official teacher day, but we all met. Actually, it might have been in here so all the 8th grade teachers were in here and Ms. Principle bottled it. She basically had a question or a chart paper up there about why 8th grade is the best grade. You know, something for us.

Summary

In summary, I reported findings resulting from data collection and analysis. In the first section I described the research sites. The Jefferson Boys School and Hayes School, both are large middle schools in an urban/suburban school district serving a student population where many live in poverty. District data information from surveys completed by

students, teachers and parents show satisfaction with each school. The research participants are Mrs. Olmstead, a school counselor at the Jefferson Boys School (JBS) and Ms. Witt, a social studies teacher at the Hayes School. At JBS, Mrs. Olmstead and a group of teachers who formed a steering committee spearheaded the SEL implementation. Mrs. Olmstead acted as both a consultant and implementer of SEL. When school administrators at the Hayes school described Ms. Witt as an exceptional and gifted teacher. Data from Ms. Witt indicated that she approached SEL in her classroom primarily via embedded instruction where students learned SEL via strategies she used combined with teaching techniques in her classroom. Data analysis results were framed by the study's research questions and visual presentations were provided for each. Findings that emerged from the data are in order by research question. To answer research question 1 (RQ1) the central defining features of SEL as perceived by those implementing programs are structured time for SEL, instructional approach employed, implementation process, administrator involvement and SEL knowledge base. Frequency counts of factor occurrences in the data suggest that implementation process is the most influential followed by instruction, structure, knowledge and administrator support. In order to answer question 2 (RQ2) it is important to review implementation quality and conceptual frameworks that guide assessment of quality. Implementation quality in the context of this study is how well a social emotional program is put into practice and delivered to students in middle schools. A conceptual framework by Chen (1998) summarizes the overarching SEL in schools framework that guided this study. Chen (1998) defined implementation in 3 broad categories: implementation system (process, structure and training), implementer characteristics (specific to teachers, school

counselors and other staff) and school setting (climate, principal support and district support). A more recent framework developed by CASEL (2015) more explicitly defined these categories in a theory of action for educators that defined factors related to SEL evaluation and implementation in more concise terms that better describe perceptions of the implementers in this study. Therefore I used factors from the theory of action since they were related to the broad categories in the framework related to implementation. Of the ten factors identified five related to implementation quality. The remaining factors are related to administrator support. The implementation quality factors answer research question (RQ2). Teachers and counselors perceive and experience SEL implementation quality at their schools via the following factors: research-based (implementation system), embedded instruction (implementation system), implementer engagement (implementer characteristics), application (implementation system) and culturally responsive (school setting). At JBS the use of research-based programs and strategies, implementer readiness via knowledge base, student opportunities for application of skills and having a culturally responsive school setting contributed to implementation quality. At the Hayes School cultural responsiveness and implementer engagement were also present, however embedded instruction or integration of SEL strategies into the academic classroom was also present. The administrator support factors answer research question (RQ3). Teachers and counselors perceive and experience administrator support of SEL implementation at their schools via the following: comprehensive (implementation system), shared vision (implementation system), organizational support (school setting), training & development (implementation system) and evaluation & improvement (school setting). At JBS all five factors related to administrator support

were present while at the Hayes School their SEL program had administrator support in that SEL was utilized school wide, with transformative leaders and training and development opportunities. When comparing the research sites and implementers after initial data analysis took place differences emerged. When examining implementation quality factors it is clear that at the Jefferson Boys School they focused more on preparing their school environment and system for social emotional learning. However at Hayes preparing teachers for classroom implementation seemed to be their area of most concern. The administrator support factors at the schools are varied also in that at Hayes they lacked a shared vision and an evaluation and improvement plan. This difference could be attributed to the role each implementer played in planning and actual SEL implementation. At JBS, the school counselor who is a member of the administrative team was also an implementer. Access to school wide decision-making and participation in planning could account for the differences in administrator support.

In the next chapter, cross case comparison analyses identify factors at both schools to connect findings to the conceptual framework used to guide this study as a precursor to its contribution to the literature. In the final chapter of this study a more detailed description of how these findings build upon the conceptual framework, add to the literature on SEL in schools and how they contribute to fostering a culturally responsive school. The limitations of this study as well as implications for SEL scale up efforts and professional development will also add to final recommendations resulting from this study.

STUDY ONE: DISCUSSION

In the final chapter of this dissertation I present a discussion to explain conclusions drawn from my research on social emotional learning implementation in urban middle schools with effective programs. The chapter is organized into four sections. First I review the problem, purpose and research questions that guided the study. Next, I summarize the findings, situate my research into a contemporary framework of social emotional learning and explain implications. Then recommendations for school and district leaders are discussed as well as limitations of my study and suggestions for future research. Finally I present my final reflections and conclusion.

Problem, Purpose and Research Questions

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was initially signed into law in 2015; it takes full effect in the 2017-18 school year beginning in the fall of 2017. A few key aspects of this new law relate to social emotional learning. States' system of accountability must include a non-academic measure to factor within their system to measure student success (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).

Possible indicators are educator engagement and school climate, which are both related to social emotional learning. ESSA also recommends activities to support safe and healthy students, supportive environments and instructional practices to help build relationship skills (Ferguson, 2016). Educators and assessment specialists are taking note, the ACT has responded to the new non-academic element in ESSA by creating a new version of its college entrance exam that measures social emotional learning (ACT, 2017). Also in the accountability system of some states there is an Opportunity and Access indicator that focuses on the importance of the development of the whole child. It specifically focuses on the development of essential skills in middle school as well as whole child supports including those address academic and social issues that challenge student success. As education legislation in the United States evolves American society is required to face and be accountable to the prominent problems that are evident in our youth population. The achievement gap consists of students who achieve lower test scores, lower grades and higher retention than other students; social emotional factors contribute to achievement motivation and success, which could impact gains in students at-risk (Becker & Suniya, 2002). Students who are racially and ethnically diverse make up most of those at-risk and falling behind academically and being disproportionately disciplined, social emotional learning programs have shown to reduce racial and ethnic disparities by way of improving school climate (Skiba, Shure, & Williams, 2011). Other research concerning students' academic success found that dropout risk is not only influenced by academic engagement but also that there are social emotional skills that discriminate the difference between students who graduate and those who do not (Davis, Solberg, de Baca, & Hargrove Gore, 2014). Students who successfully finish high school struggle

with persistence in college if they do not address issue that are ameliorated by SEL programming (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013). Educators and mental health clinicians agree that integration of social emotional learning into the school climate supports risk prevention and mental health promotion (Cohen, 2014). Many mental health issues manifest as behavior problems in students (Slaten, Irby, Tate, & Rivera, 2015). However Moore McBride, Chung and Roberson (2016) found that when a social emotional learning program was offered in middle school disciplinary issues reduced. Educators are exposed to the challenges the millennial generation has because of school data and daily interactions with students. The achievement gap, dropout, decreased college and career readiness, decreased academic engagement, mental health issues and violence in schools are symptoms that lead to negative outcomes for young people (Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, 2013). Research has shown that source of these problems are connected to lack of social emotional propositions such as self-management, relationships skills, social awareness and decision-making (Becker & Suniya, 2002). Therefore there is a need for school reform to increase comprehensive social emotional learning in schools to develop programs that promote remedies for social factors of underperforming youth. In order for schools to enhance student outcomes via SEL, consistent and continuous and systematic implementation is critical (Oberle et al., 2016). Achieving implementation quality in SEL programs affects achievement of positive outcomes (Durlak, 2016). While this is true there is limited research on practices to promote quality SEL in schools to guide school and district administrators and to increase teacher buy-in (Osher, Kidron, Brackett, Dymnicki, Jones, & Weissberg, 2016). Therefore the purpose of this study is to identify how educators

implementing social emotional learning in schools perceive defining features of effective SEL, implementation quality and administrator support. An aim of the study is to inform school and district leaders due the potential SEL has to foster a culturally responsive and inclusive school climate for the betterment of the whole child. This study was framed by the following research questions: (RQ1) What are the central defining features of social emotional programs or interventions in urban middle schools as perceived by teachers and/or school counselors? (RQ2) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience social and emotional programs implementation quality within their school? (RQ3) How do teachers and/or school counselors perceive and experience principal support of social and emotional programs within their school? In the next section I give answers to each of these research questions in the form of a summarization of findings and associated implications.

Summary of Findings & Study Implications

The goal of the my study is to describe implementation of effective social emotional learning in schools to inform school leadership in their efforts to adopt comprehensive social emotional learning programs and support scaling up to more schools. Findings from my study are meant to assist in identifying factors associated with central features within effective programs, along with implementation quality and school administrator support.

In summary, based on my research, the following central defining features are characteristic of effective social emotional learning in schools:

- Structure
- Instruction

- Implementation
- Administrator Involvement
- Knowledge

Findings resulting from my research regarding factors characteristic of implementation quality and administrator support of effective social emotional learning in schools are:

- Cultural Responsiveness
- Implementer Engagement
- Comprehensive
- Organizational Support
- Training & Development

The central defining features of effective SEL programs as identified above were present at both schools. Implementation factors related to implementation quality and administrator support at both schools are as follows: cultural responsiveness, implementer engagement, comprehensive, organizational support and training & development. Table 5 demonstrates how these common factors are related to the SEL in schools framework used in the methods section of my dissertation and are organized by implementer rather than school.

Descriptions of the contextual features present in the classroom environment, educator characteristics and administrative supports studied in the school setting to understand implementation of social emotional learning is the purpose of this study. The conceptual framework used to frame this study demonstrated the disparity between planned SEL and actual implementation to account for adaptations that take place due to

differences in school context and student population. The framework explicitly demonstrates the difference associated when moving from theory to practice. In this study both schools have met criteria set by CASEL for effective SEL, therefore actual and effective SEL are the same. All ten factors of effective social emotional learning implementation present at the research sites are considered in data analysis (see Figure 3), they are categorized into groups based on the SEL theory of action. A check mark on Table 5 under each theory of action component means each factor listed under that component was present in the data collected at each school. Analysis of each implementer separately indicates that the school counselor at JBS planned for the design, implementation and evaluation components of their social emotional learning program. While the teacher at Hayes indicated that their school planned the design and implementation of social emotional learning but neglected to plan for evaluation. The actual SEL program at both schools met effectiveness guidelines set by the Collaborative for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2015). At Hayes, all implementation factors were present as perceived by the teacher. While the design and evaluation factors were present at JBS as perceived by the school counselor. These findings suggest presence of all factors is not necessary to achieve an effective SEL program and that the professional nature of the implementer and the role they play in achieving effective implementation matter.

At Jefferson Boys School the school counselor, Mrs. Olmstead, was an implementer and participant in this study. Data collected indicated that the use of research-based interventions and strategies, implementer readiness via knowledge base, student opportunities for application of skills and having a culturally responsive school

setting contributed to implementation quality and therefore also the effectiveness of the SEL program. During interviews the school counselor reported that SEL program interventions and strategies were researched based, she demonstrated a clear understanding of SEL concepts and provided evidence of differentiation in instruction for diverse students based on both developmental and linguistic differences. During a classroom observation at JBS students were given the opportunity to apply skills learned during a lesson on relationship building and teamwork. Mrs. Olmstead used a game to teach about the SEL concept and then allowed students to identify behaviors associated with maintaining relationships with others.

Table 5

Social Emotional Learning Implementation Evaluation (Conceptual Framework)

	Planned SEL			Actual/Effective SEL		
	Design	Implementation	Evaluation	Design	Implementation	Evaluation
Implementer						
School Counselor (JBS)	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Teacher (Hayes)	✓	✓			✓	

✓= factor observable at school

At the Hayes School cultural responsiveness and implementer engagement were present, however in contrast to the Jefferson Boys School embedded instruction by way of integration of SEL strategies into the academic classroom was also present. Ms. Witt is a teacher at the Hayes School and participant in this study. She revealed during her

interviews that social emotional learning in her school has encouraged her to reflect on her practice as a teacher working with students from diverse backgrounds and that she understands the purpose of social emotional learning by explaining the need for students to be self-aware to help them develop into global citizens. During the observation of Ms. Witt's classroom and from documents gathered integration of social emotional learning strategies within the social studies teaching was apparent. Social awareness skills were modeled during class and Ms. Witt also referenced concepts learned during direct social emotional learning so students could use skills in conjunction with academic work. The differences in how each school achieved effective social emotional learning implementation seems to be related to the implementer in terms of the type of professional, their function and the context in which they participate in implementation. When a teacher was the implementer of SEL, cultural responsiveness and embedded SEL instruction in the classroom was key in achieving effective implementation. The implementer practiced informed instruction based on previous trainings on cultural responsiveness, she practiced SEL in conjunction with academic content and engaged in the implementation process with a knowledge base of its purpose. This suggests that the role of the teacher in guiding instructional practice for SEL implementation in the classroom is necessary to achieve positive student outcomes. In contrast this research study found that when a school counselor was the implementer of SEL the design and evaluation components including comprehensive, research-based, shared vision, organizational support, training & development and evaluation & improvement contributed to effective implementation. The implementer in this case lead and consulted with both teachers and administrators to form a steering committee, select research-based

programs and evaluated the system to adopt SEL school-wide. The role of a school counselor includes addressing the social and emotional development of students therefore a knowledge base associated with SEL concepts is inherent in their training. Also in the case of the school counselor at JBS she was a school administrator so participation in school wide programming and evaluation for improvement were responsibilities connected to her professional role at the school. When considering similarities and differences across cases to describe effective implementation to inform school professionals this information suggests that the both a teacher and school counselor should be involved in social emotional learning in schools.

The findings from the cross case analysis suggest factors that are integral to effective social emotional learning implementation in schools. Each factor is closely related to those identified in the conceptual framework. School factors mentioned as part of the conceptual framework are administrator leadership, administrator support and school climate. Parallel factors as findings of the analysis of this study are comprehensive, organizational support, training and development. Classroom factors in the conceptual framework are implementer characteristics and classroom environment; in the findings of the study parallel factors are implementer engagement and cultural responsiveness. These findings corroborate the factors on the conceptual framework and further identify more specific descriptions for which factors are most important to effective SEL implementation in middle schools as perceived by teachers and school counselors. Follow up interviews for each study participant revealed the need for professional development to reflect on practice and explicitly learn SEL strategies to embed in academic instruction.

Connecting these findings to a contemporary systematic conceptual model for school wide SEL created by CASEL (2015) has the potential to inform schools and districts with similar characteristics to those in this study. The conceptual model illustrating system-wide SEL in educational settings is pictured in Figure 4. While the model has shown an evolution in the development of a conceptual framework with more explicit information for school districts, consideration for school characteristics is needed (Oberle et al., 2016). It gives a more details but still a broad reference for school and district leaders to follow as a blueprint for a big picture snapshot of the process, outcomes and support necessary to be prepared to initiate SEL in schools.

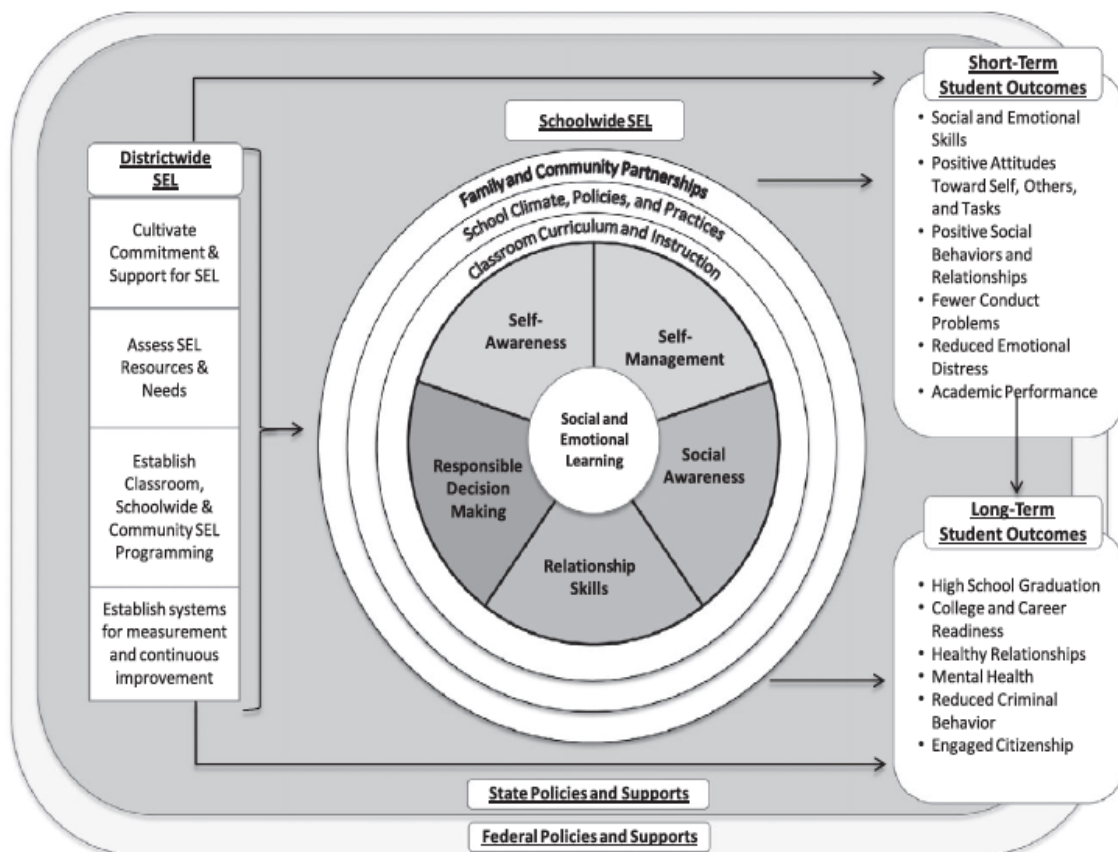


Figure 4. System-wide SEL in Educational Settings. This figure is an illustration of a conceptual model of comprehensive SEL in school from Oberle et al. (2016).

While planning social emotional learning programs is important research continues to show that effective programs and plans must be coupled with high quality implementation. Implementation quality in research is typically operationalized by fidelity to a program but conditions that support implementation are also being studied (Osher et al., 2016). Durlak (2016) identified five factors that influence implementation quality of SEL programs via prior research reviews, they are community level factors, staff characteristics, program features, school features and professional development. Findings drawn from my study are similar to Durlak's (2016) factors but from the implementer's point of view so they corroborate and add validity to these claims. When considering implementation science evolving from theory to practice can take many years to accomplish and how implementation quality is operationalized could change dependent on stage of implementation (Osher et al., 2016). According to Fixen, Naoom, Blase, and Friedman (2005) there are six stages of implementation: (1) Exploration and Adoption (2) Program Installation (3) Initial Implementation (4) Full Operation (5) Innovation and (6) Sustainability. Findings from this study operationalize implementation quality at the full operation stage since the schools studied were at least 2 years into implementation. In summary this research provides classroom and school factors specific to school wide implementation of social emotional learning and builds upon current research on implementation quality by operationalizing implementation quality at a specific stage in implementation (see Figure 5). Based on my research implementer engagement, cultural responsiveness, comprehensive, organizational support and training & development are factors that influence quality at the school and classroom level in the full operation stage of SEL implementation. This evolution of frameworks

indicates an orientation of SEL toward practice, future research and policy (Osher et al., 2015). Findings that operationalize implementation quality and administrator support have implications for school and district leaders by identifying factors to associate with broad categories provided by researchers. In essence assisting in moving from concepts to strategies for systematic comprehensive social emotional learning in schools. In the following section I provide recommendations based on the synthesis of information gleaned from this study.

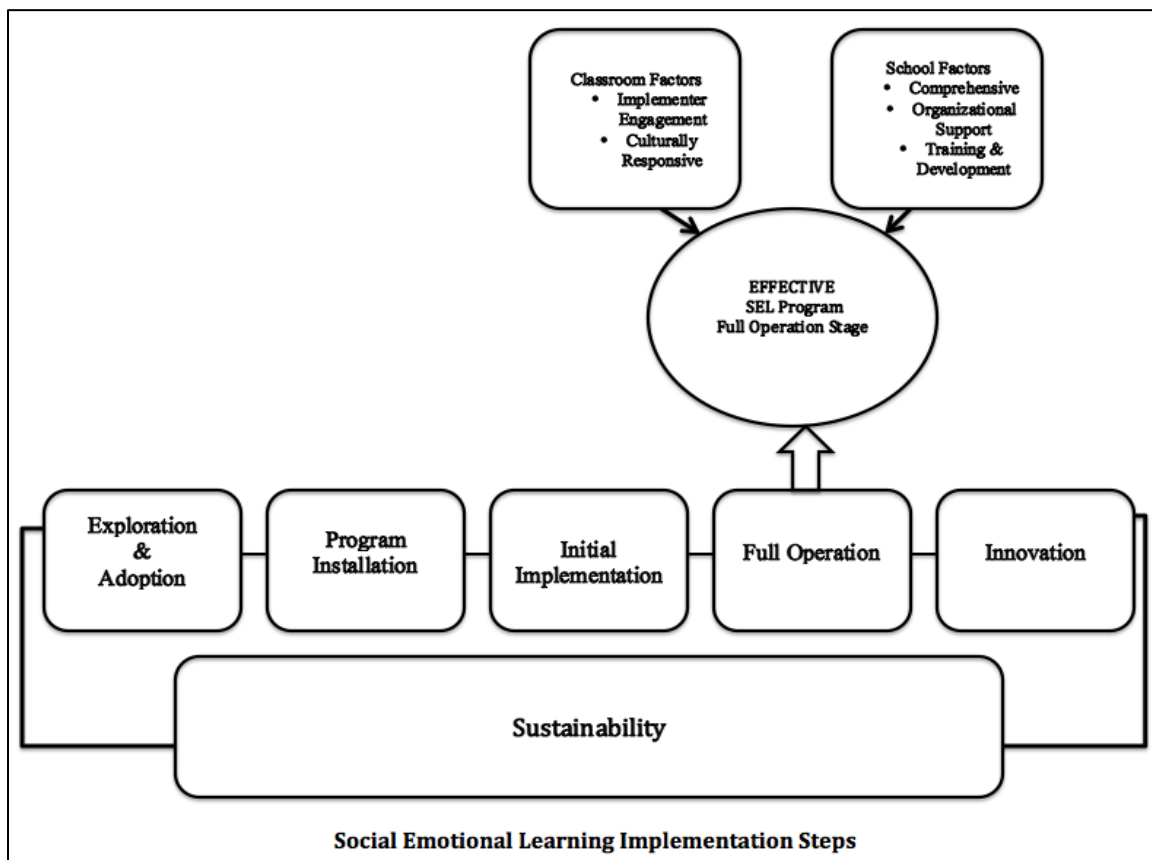


Figure 5. School and classroom factors of school wide SEL in the full operation stage of implementation.

Recommendations, Limitations and Future Research

The purpose of this study is to provide a rich description of effective social emotional learning implementation in middle schools as perceived by teachers or school counselors executing programs. Lack of qualitative data about implementation aspects in in context for secondary school settings were lacking in the current literature researching SEL. To this end this qualitative study describes how social emotional programs' are implemented at two middle schools to better understand how educators perceive and experience implementation. The goal of the study is to provide education practitioners, school based leaders, and district administration in achieving comprehensive approach to integrating social emotional learning in schools. I recommend the following from a narrow to broad scope concerning education reform (1) research-based evaluation and implementation at the school level (2) professional development provided via school administrators (3) involvement of both teachers and school counselors in implementation (4) scale up efforts focused on creating a school climate conducive to SEL (5) research to identify school and classroom factors necessary to be successful at each step in the implementation process and (6) SEL to foster a culturally responsive school climate.

Research-based evaluation & implementation

At the school level the ability to achieve sought after student outcomes is paramount, this is achieved by ensuring SEL is effective in classrooms. Based on findings from this study I recommend the following for school-based implementers: build a knowledge base about social emotional learning before implementation, reflect on teaching practices and personal social or emotional competencies. Educators should use research based self-evaluations to gauge their baseline knowledge of social emotional

learning. They should also read and study to find out which programs or interventions will work best for the capacity of their staff and to address the needs of their student population. Based on the findings from my research using evidence and research based strategies in planning and implementation will help schools to achieve sought after gains in student behavior and post-secondary transition. Factors like implementer engagement and their professional development have shown to affect implementation and therefore student outcomes. In order to achieve positive outcomes for students, implementers must have a deep understanding of SEL, why it works and how it can complement academic instruction (Osher et al., 2016)

Professional development

Training and professional learning opportunities for all staff members in a school implementing comprehensive social emotional skills is essential to increase positive outcome potential for students and all school personnel. School level principals seeking to transform their school through SEL are required to support implementation to achieve perceived gains. One of the key components to effective implementation of social emotional programs is providing professional development. Furthermore implementation quality is dependent upon acquisition of adequate skills to carry out interventions as well as knowledge, attitude, value and commitment to goals of the program (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins 2004). I recommend professional development on the following based on findings of this study: SEL purpose, programs, concepts, instructional practices and supporting infrastructure to shift the school focus to an inclusive and positive school climate and culture. Training on SEL approaches also has the potential to increase teacher capacity by improving overall instructional skills and management due

to opportunities for reflection. By training school staff on best practices for implementation of SEL programs school based leaders will be able to support program execution and create sustainability at school and throughout school districts.

Involvement of Teachers and School Counselors

Teacher and school counselor involvement in SEL implementation is necessary to achieve effectiveness. Schools were effective in social emotional learning when a teacher or school counselor were implementers but the results of this study show that it is for different reasons. The nature of focus of each professional seems to determine how effectiveness is achieved. The school with a teacher implementer was success at the classroom level via instruction while the school with a counselor implementer was successful in via the school wide portions of implementation with program design and evaluation. This suggests that involvement of both a teacher and school counselor would allow a school to increase effectiveness by being able to use the function of each professional in design, implementation and evaluation components. The explicit and required inclusion of school counselors has the potential to create a synergy between the role counselors play in schools and the national responsibilities and professional competencies they are held to..

School Climate for Scale-up

In the broadest aspect of systematic recommendations I offer suggestions to school districts working to guide comprehensive social emotional program implementation. Efforts for scaling up program implementation allows classroom and school recommendations to support meaningful guidance for many schools and students. School districts are charged with creating a vision and strategic plan to assist in the

establishment of safe and caring school cultures and for diverse districts a culturally responsive culture is often paramount. Therefore I recommend school districts implementing social emotional learning to: build departments and hire personnel to support SEL evaluation and implementation quality and use research and evidence-based programs that address cultural differences.

Research on Effectiveness during Each Step in the Implementation Process

Research states that student outcomes are influenced by the effectiveness of the SEL program and its level of implementation quality (Durlak et al., 2015). Therefore research and/or evidence-based evaluation and implementation assessment of SEL programs either before or during each step in implementation is key. Findings in this study, conceptual frameworks and a theory of action referenced can be used or for schools and school districts similar to those in this study to inform assessment efforts in the full implementation step. However research to inform school leaders during all phases of implementation would likely increase efforts across diverse school settings. I also recommend gathering input and feedback from implementers like in this study at each step in implementation as it has the potential to increase teacher buy-in and implementation quality.

SEL to Foster a Culturally Responsive School Climate

The potential for social emotional learning to improve the culture and climate of schools has implications that address diversity; increase equity and foster cultural responsiveness. SEL helps individuals to navigate challenges created by institutional racism and structural inequity (Osher et al., 2016) therefore it is neglectful to ignore the need for SEL in schools with diverse student populations. I recommend school districts to

encourage and empower schools to be culturally responsive by providing systems and resources to implement social emotional learning with fidelity. By fostering a culturally responsive climate school districts address two looping problems in schools the achievement gap and discipline practices.

Limitations

The research methodology employed in this study was designed as a multiple case study to operationalized key features, implementation quality and administrator support of a teacher and school counselor at two middle schools in a large urban school district. The research design and approach was utilized to allow for cross case analysis to identify common factors to replicate to other cases. However the sample size is limited to two schools; which restricts the ability to the transferability of findings to other settings. Schools within a similar school district may find information from this study more useful for practice than others.

The data collected in this study took place during one school year. According to Devaney, O'Brien, Resnik, Keister, and Weissberg (2006) it takes approximately 2 to 5 years to build SEL implementation at full capacity. Therefore my study is a snapshot into an implementation cycle in process. Since the amount time to fully implement SEL in practice does not align with the research period for this study it limits application of findings.

Future Research

My study explored perceptions of a school teacher and counselor concerning social emotional learning implementation during a school year. As stated in the limitations section this study is restricted to one school year and the literature review

reveals that meta-analyses on SEL implementation are mostly focused on quantitative methodology. A longitudinal study that is qualitative in nature could provide invaluable knowledge to educators engaged in the important work involving social emotional learning. This study and studies referenced support gaining teacher buy-in to increase implementation quality, as they are key to executing strategies and interventions associated with positive outcomes. However school administrators, or principals and assistant principals are key contributors as well. I propose future research to get the point of view of principals regarding their perceptions of effective SEL, their responsibilities in implementation as well as district level support. Finally, an overarching goal of this study is to provide educational leaders with information to foster a culturally responsive climate. I feel that SEL researchers should also be responsible for considering cultural differences when associating outcomes to practice. I suggest disaggregation of outcomes based on race is necessary to understand how race could influence implementation.

Final Thoughts

Key components to effective implementation of social emotional programs involve school-based leadership. This dissertation is mean to inform school reform by way of providing information for school principals, counselors and teachers. The establishment of a safe and caring school culture, building culturally inclusive climate and providing professional development needs for the teaching and learning of the whole child are responsibilities of school leaders. Each of these components is paramount for the success of SEL in schools. As administrators consider implementing school wide initiatives it is important to address the needs of the growing diversity within the American student body, social emotional learning assists in creating an environment

conducive to the various contextual differences in today's schools. SEL has positive effects on academic performance, enhances social competency and reduces mental health manifestation. In order to benefit from social emotional learning in schools transformative leadership utilizing research describing evidence based practices to help achieve positive student outcomes is critical. It is my hope that this dissertation provides a guide for practitioners to use while working to implement comprehensive social emotional learning in their schools and school districts. Leaders must be willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve change for students in diverse populations who often demonstrate positive outcomes related to social emotional learning. This study supports efforts to lead with vision and courage and integrate and implement SEL with integrity to transform schools and foster a culturally responsive school climate.

STUDY TWO: INTRODUCTION

Leadership is influence. That's it. Nothing more; nothing less... He who thinketh he leadeth and hath no one following him is only taking a walk. – Maxwell (1993, p. 1)

Effective and relevant classroom instruction is rooted in positive, asset-based teacher beliefs (Johnson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Milner, 2012, 2013; Pollack, 2012). School culture which enhances effective teaching and learning and embraces various student backgrounds is another input (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998). Effective school leadership is key to high student achievement. Researchers have determined both district-level and school-level leadership to significantly impact student achievement (Duke, 2014; Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Students from marginalized groups, as identified by both race and socioeconomic status, consistently perform worse on high-stakes accountability assessments than their same-aged peers who are White or more affluent (Lee, 2002). One way to leverage higher academic performance from marginalized students is the

implementation of culturally responsive teaching¹ (Buehler, Gere, Dallavis, & Haviland, 2009; Delpit, 1998; Fraise, & Brooks, 2015; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). The intentional creation of culturally responsive school cultures which support the implementation of culturally responsive teaching is essential to leveraging higher academic performance for these often marginalized students (Bustamante, Nelson, & Onwuegbuzie, 2009; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Goldenberg, 2014; Richards, Brown & Forde, 2007; Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

While the impact of school leadership has been examined with some depth, of key importance is the role of leadership in schools enacting comprehensive school reform (CSR) (Duke, 2014; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). A focus on the work and effectiveness of public schools is not a new phenomenon. Accountability pressures significantly increased with the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and its intent to spur a reduction in the nation's achievement gap while expanding the federal role of education in states and school districts through an increased emphasis on high-stakes accountability. This increased federal involvement also increased the interest in and adoption of CSR efforts in schools and districts that did not meet accountability.

Although the most recent iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 has shifted significant

¹ Many names and labels are used to describe why it is important for classroom instruction to be more consistent with cultural orientations and backgrounds. These terms are virtually identical and include culturally sensitive, culturally aware, culturally appropriate, culturally relevant, culturally proficient, and culturally competent (Gay, 2010). In this portion of the capstone, the term culturally responsive has been used.

control to state education agencies and local schools to reform lower performing schools, effective local school leadership is still an essential component in improving underperforming schools. All CSR models stipulated in federal legislation apply pressure to school leaders with the possibility of principals losing their jobs if low performing schools do not yield improvements in student achievement among the various subpopulations served by their schools. Critical to the implementation of school turnaround and CSR is effective school leadership (Duke, 2014; Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Finnigan, 2011; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood et al., 2004; Norton, 2002; Orr, Berg, Shore, & Meier, 2008). John Maxwell (1993) says plainly, “Everything rises and falls on leadership” (p. viii). While the hiring of effective teachers is important, certainly, Maxwell’s (1993) point proves true about leadership in schools.

Purpose of the Study

Previous studies have focused on leadership effects and school leadership in the context of CSR (Duke, 2014; Duke & Jacobson, 2011; Finnigan, 2011), but only a few master’s and doctoral studies (Gomez, 2015, Mitchell, 2015; Williams, 2016) have begun to focus on effective CSR school leadership in conjunction with the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2015) assert, “research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness in teaching and instruction can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school” (p. 3). This study sought to focus on the intersection of school leadership and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in secondary schools labeled as Priority Schools (formerly known as Persistently Low Achieving Schools) that are engaged in CSR. This intersection is culturally responsive leadership in action – the essence of this

study.

Conceptual Framework

The implementation of any model for culturally responsive leadership is important because it grants permission for stakeholders to learn from each other while meeting the needs of a diverse student population (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Because of the diversity of student populations in urban Priority Schools implementing CSR, teachers' implementation of culturally responsive teaching is critical and must be supported by school leadership. Consistent with the tenets of transformational leadership, culturally responsive leadership models serve as conceptual frameworks and encourage continuous inquiry of how schools function and shift organizational frames to meet the needs of a diverse population (Burns, 1979; Nahavandi, 2006). These models provide effective frameworks for the implementation of culturally responsive leadership but do not clearly elucidate *how* principals execute this work or address barriers to this work – the focus of this study.

Three key models exist to guide school leaders in the implementation of culturally responsive leadership. Terrell and Lindsey (2009) posit a Cultural Proficiency Continuum which acts as a guide for school leaders' engagement with stakeholders and movement toward culturally responsive practices. Jones and Nichols (2013) conceptualize a different continuum called the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum which focuses on leaders' progression to a more culturally responsive attitude and approach to leadership. Vassallo (2015) developed a five-step model for culturally responsive educational leadership designed to guide school leaders through reflection in order to challenge personal biases and hindrances to culturally responsive leadership. All

three models present a framework for gauging a school leader's level of culturally responsive leadership.

For the purposes of this study, the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum developed by Jones and Nichols (2013) was integral to the study design. This conceptual framework categorizes leaders with regard to their level of implementation of culturally responsive leadership. In the model, the first two categories of leaders are described as “diversity leaders” who make symbolic gestures through initiatives that lack the ability to have a substantive impact on practice and culture (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 115). These leaders typically view students all the same, with no regard for cultural differences. In contrast, the last two categories of leaders are described as “culturally competent leaders” who develop, implement, and sustain observable outcomes that reflect a significant level of cultural responsiveness in their schools (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 118). Through the analysis of collected data, each study participant will be categorized in relation to the descriptors explicated in this model.

Research Questions

This study will address the importance of culturally responsive leadership with regard to the implementation of culturally responsive practices in secondary Priority Schools engaged in CSR. The research questions which will guide this study are:

- (a) How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership?
- (b) How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students?

Scope of the Study

This study utilized a qualitative, comparative case study approach in the collection and analysis of data to investigate the aforementioned research questions. Yin (2003) states that a case study is an empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context for exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory purposes. Using case studies depends on three things: “(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavior events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (Yin, 2003, p. 5). Creswell (2014) describes case study research as involving “the study of a case within real-life, contemporary context or setting” (p. 7). The case study is bounded by the lived experiences of the participants with implementing culturally responsive leadership and overcoming barriers to cultural competence in their schools while engaged in CSR. According to Yin (2011), all case studies seek to develop a deeper understanding of a single or small number of cases set in their real-world contexts. More pointedly, case study research assumes that “examining the context and other complex conditions related to the case(s) being studied are integral to understanding the case(s)” (Yin, 2011, p. 4).

This study focused on interviews, reflective feedback data, and document analysis with four principals in Priority Schools in a large, urban school district located in the southeastern United States. Diversity in student populations, including often marginalized populations, is a key characteristic of the Priority Schools in the district of focus. In this sense, a boundary exists between the case and contextual conditions (Yin, 2011). These schools and their performance data can be neither described nor discussed separate from the diversity that permeates their student populations. The influence of

leadership is important relative to the success of these schools. Since the research into effective implementation of culturally responsive leadership in Priority Schools is somewhat novel, a case study approach was selected; case studies are commonly used in the study of educational cultural competence (Stake, 1995). This case study approach afforded the researcher the opportunity to tell these principals' stories while capturing how their work is influenced by the demands of high-stakes accountability structures, comprehensive school reform efforts, and the culturally responsive needs of the students they serve.

Significance of the Study

Effective leadership is critical to the success of any school – especially Priority Schools engaged in CSR. To ensure coordinated, long-standing implementation of cultural responsiveness, principals must directly engage in and support this work (Duke, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2015). Culturally responsive leadership is paramount in schools working with marginalized groups to ensure the inherent barriers to these students' academic progress are addressed. This study sought to understand how principals implement culturally responsive leadership and how they mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students. This study elucidates methods and strategies principals employ to address cultural and instructional barriers to increase student achievement.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are used in this study:

Comprehensive School Reform: A programmatic approach to raising student achievement by employing proven methods and strategies that foster coherent schoolwide

improvements. These methods and strategies are scientifically based and proven effective through research.

Cultural Responsiveness: In a school setting, the recognition of the cultural and historical experiences of marginalized student groups as legitimately influencing how students learn and achieve in educational settings.

Culturally Responsive Leadership: Occurs when school leaders merge curriculum innovation with social activism. It is anchored in the belief that school leaders must clearly understand their own assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from themselves in order to lead effectively in settings with diverse student populations (Johnson, 2006; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Culturally Responsive Teaching: Pedagogy that uses clear cultural referents to communicate knowledge, skills, and attitudes to empower students intellectually, emotionally, politically, socially, and academically.

Effective School Leadership: leadership that forwards equity so that all students are academically served in a positive way regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status.

Priority Schools (formerly known as Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) Schools): Indicates the lowest-achieving five percent of schools as determined by the academic performance of all students in terms of combined proficiency in reading and math on state assessments or a graduation rate below 60 percent over the span of three years (in the state where the study will be conducted).

Organization of the Study

This study in the capstone is organized as follows: a section to review the literature on culturally responsive school cultures, culturally responsive teaching

(including teachers' practices and beliefs), school leadership and its effects, and culturally responsive leadership. Then, a section presents an explanation of the methodology, the research design, data sources and collection, data analysis, and procedures of the study. A section presents the results of the study and an analysis of the collected data. The final section summarizes the study's major findings and presents implications for future research and school leadership practice.

STUDY TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school. – Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis (2015, p. 3)

In this section, I have provided a review of the current literature on school leadership and cultural responsiveness as well as their role in student achievement. Additionally, I have examined the limited research on the implementation of culturally responsive leadership and the barriers to this leadership approach in the context of comprehensive school reform (CSR). This study utilized a qualitative, comparative case study research design in order to investigate two research questions: (a) How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership?, and, (b) How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students? While some research exists on culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, much is left to be learned about the ways principals ensure schools are steeped with cultural responsiveness through their leadership. This study attempts to fill that gap by investigating how principals implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to cultural competence to achieve increased student achievement.

Cultural responsiveness has been defined in several, yet complementary, ways. Jones and Nichols (2013) posit a comprehensive definition of cultural responsiveness, The acceptance of the significance of sociopolitical, economic and historical experiences of different racial, ethnic and gender subgroups as legitimate experiences that have a profound influence on how people learn and achieve inside and outside of formal and informal education settings (p. 8).

Cultural responsiveness is about more than just race. Cultural responsiveness is about understanding how varying experiences impact students, learning how to embrace diversity, and fostering connections between school staff and the diverse populations they serve (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Culturally responsive practices are more likely to occur in schools where principals engage in culturally responsive leadership and work to overcome the barriers that arise against it (Bustamante et al, 2009).

This literature review addresses the following key areas: school leadership, student achievement, and school reform. Secondly, culturally responsive teaching, teacher practices and beliefs and their impact on student outcomes will be examined. Finally, culturally responsive school cultures and culturally responsive leadership, specifically how its implementation has been researched, are addressed. Through this examination of literature, the gap in understanding how principals undertake culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to it is exposed.

Culturally Responsive School Cultures

Culture is specific to each organization, and schools are no different. Schein (2004) states that organizational culture focuses on the cultures and subcultures of organizations and defines them by shared experiences, rituals, stated values, and

underlying assumptions. Furthermore, Bolman and Deal (1997) explain organizational culture as “beliefs, values, practices and artifacts [that] define who [members] are and how they do things” (p. 250). Fraise and Brooks (2015) build on this definition by adding that culture reflects the norms, traditions, and customs of a certain group comprised of both formal and informal dynamics. School cultures are impacted by the broader culture or societal context of the school. Schools cannot exist devoid of their broader context – be it the school district or society at large.

Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) established the connection between culture and the thinking, behaviors, and practices of school stakeholders. The issue of values is centric to school cultures; schools must be a place where multiple values can and do co-exist (Gray, 2000). A culturally responsive school is one that “honors, respects and values diversity in theory and practice” so that teaching is relevant and learning is meaningful for students from marginalized groups (Klotz, 2006, p. 11). Klotz (2006) reiterates the position of another researcher (i.e., Little, 1999) and provides a foundation for implications of a future study (i.e., Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007) regarding the need to shape schools to be more culturally responsive through the organization of the school, school policies, and community involvement. Ultimately, school cultures should take all cultures into account with formal and informal policies, procedures, and curriculum. Schools should be a place where students feel safe to be themselves (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). For this reason, school leaders must possess a clear understanding of the current status of their schools’ cultures and work to shape them to be more culturally responsive. This is more so the case for school leaders working under the pressures of CSR. The need for cultural responsiveness is often greatest in schools implementing

CSR because they often serve marginalized populations. A balance must be achieved between school improvement mandates and serving the unique cultural needs of these student populations.

When seeking to transform a school culture into a more culturally competent one, students are not neatly categorized into any one or more racial and ethnic identities. Warikoo and Carter (2009) agree that many factors exist when transforming school culture and believe that there is a cultural explanation for ethno-racial differences in K-12 schools and academic performance. Certain ethno-racial identities and cultures are subtractive from the goal of academic mobility while defining the ethnic cultures and identities of others as additive. Warikoo and Carter (2009) suggest cultural explanations for ethnic stratification in academic achievement must outline which aspects of culture matter, when and how those cultures are linked, and when ethno-racial culture identity is activated for students. This fosters an understanding of the relationship between multiple dimensions of culture and race.

Principals must clearly understand the current condition of school culture when seeking to ensure cultural responsiveness. Various tools have been developed to assist school leaders in objectively assessing the status of their schools' cultures in order to better uncover opportunities to undertake more culturally responsive behaviors. Bustamante et al., (2009) examined the significant impact of school culture by using the Schoolwide Cultural Competence Observation Checklist (SCCOC), a tool designed for use in conducting school culture audits. The research findings from the use of this tool in the field inform further focus and study on school leaders as an integral part in guiding culturally responsive skills, pedagogy, and knowledge through the examination of

personal biases, privilege, and beliefs about others who are different. Bustamante et al., (2009) concluded that school leaders greatly impact school culture through the areas of school vision and mission, curriculum, student interaction and leadership, staffing, teaching and learning, parents and the outer community, conflict management, and assessments. Any analysis of school culture must address the myriad aspects of the school environment – especially those which directly relate to cultural responsiveness.

Culture, therefore, is the umbrella under which cultural competence thrives. The culture of a school as an organization reflects its values, beliefs, and traditions over a period of time (Deal & Peterson, 1999). The impact of school culture is an important variable when examining the effect an educators' beliefs and biases have on culturally relevant teaching (Bustamante et al., 2009; Goldenberg, 2014). Fostering a school culture and environment where all students have the ability to thrive is a large component of the role of school leadership. Riehl (2000) explored how educational administrators address the needs of diverse student populations showing that administrative tasks – including defining diversity, creating an inclusive school culture and programs, and building relationships between the school and the surrounding community – can promote equity and social justice. School leaders should actively define diversity at their schools, engage in instructional practices to service diverse student populations, and participate in organizational networks to address their own histories and experiences (Riehl, 2000). Incorporating these factors into educational practice and the art of administration can guide transformative practices to create more inclusive schools.

School culture transformation, like cultural responsiveness, does not focus solely on addressing issues of race. Schools must also promote a systematic approach to social

emotional learning (SEL) that encourages fundamental social and emotional skills that improve the entire emotional, social, and academic climate of a school for all students. SEL highlights a clear link between cultural norms and emotional expression, which can be correlated with teacher connections to diverse students and may affect student educational opportunities (Hoffman, 2009). Emotions and responses to emotion are different across cultures. To change the climate of a school to one that is positive, supportive, and inclusive, educators should include SEL that addresses cultural differences in students (Hoffman, 2009). Little (1999) posits that institutional change to foster more cultural responsiveness should occur on three levels: organizational (staff structure and the use of physical space), policies and procedures (their impact on the delivery of services to students from marginalized groups), and community involvement (how families and communities can seek out ways to become involved in the school). Current research literature fails to address cultural diversity, politics of power, and risks to educational opportunity, all of which should be addressed through social emotional learning as a way to create a more inclusive school culture for marginalized students.

Culturally responsive services can improve both student achievement and behavior. Standards blending, the integration of core academic and school counseling standards, can serve as a culturally responsive service strategy to assist in closing the school achievement gap while enhancing SEL (Schellenburg & Grothaus, 2011). Blended standards allow students to make connections by drawing them into learning and making learning more relevant, which in turn enhances the cultural responsiveness of instruction. This connection also affords teachers the opportunity to learn the cultural backgrounds of students, creating a stronger sense of community and cultural competence

in learning environments. It is paramount, then, that school leaders implement culturally responsive leadership to foster the environment from which culturally responsive school cultures can emerge.

Clearly, various factors influence school culture. School administrators must actively guide transformative practice that leads to the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in an environment that nurtures it. Schein (2004) reminds us, “when we examine culture and leadership closely, we see that they are two sides of the same coin; neither can be understood by itself” (p. 10-11). Tools have been developed to assist school leaders in determining the condition of a school’s culture so that implementation of culturally responsive practices can be accomplished with fidelity. Marginalized student populations will be best nurtured to high academic achievement when teachers effectively implement culturally responsive teaching and engage in SEL that lead to a sense of inclusiveness for all students. The power to foster a school climate that is conducive to both rests with school leadership. Johnson (2014) found culturally responsive practice stems from leadership creating inclusive school environments to support classroom teachers in utilizing culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy to increase student achievement. While this is true, the literature offers little on exactly how principals ensure the presence of a culturally responsive school culture and address challenges that emerge while creating it.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching (sometimes called culturally relevant pedagogy) is an effective practice model seeking to incorporate students’ cultures into academic work, help students accept and affirm their cultural identities, and help students develop critical

perspectives to challenge inequities in school. It is culturally responsive teaching as pedagogy that empowers the collective of students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Culturally responsive teaching focuses on both academic and nonacademic success (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Culturally supported and learner-centered instructional contexts capitalize on the strengths students bring with them by identifying, nurturing, and utilizing these strengths to help students reach academic success. A culturally responsive instructional environment helps students feel included regardless of their cultural or linguistic background (Richards, Brown, & Forde, 2007).

Research is clear about the impact culturally responsive teaching has on the achievement levels of students of color; when students of color feel a connection to the curriculum and the school in which they learn, they are more likely to achieve at higher rates (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Culturally responsive teaching requires a strong understanding of self, others, and the educational context whereby teachers and students work together to reflect on their own values, cultures, and knowledge and seek collective understanding (Fraise & Brooks, 2015). Educators' personal beliefs and biases significantly impact their approaches to curriculum and pedagogy when teaching diverse learners (Buehler, et al., 2009). This is especially important when examining the work of educators who serve marginalized student populations because these students often possess negative attitudes toward their ability to succeed academically. Culturally diverse populations succeed in schools where common practices to encourage empowerment and high expectations for student achievement are employed; culturally responsive teaching stresses the importance of both

immediate and long-term usefulness of education (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Johnson, 2014). Therefore, school leaders must encourage teachers to utilize culturally responsive teaching to improve student achievement because school leadership impacts classroom instruction (Orr et al., 2008; Riehl, 2000).

Spanierman, Oh, Heppner, Neville, Mobley, Wright, Dillon, and Navarro (2011) found teachers' self-examination of their worldviews, biases, and self-efficacy in teaching diverse populations to be critically important in the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. Through their mixed methods study, Spanierman et al. (2011) explored the development and impact of multicultural teaching by gathering data from 506 pre- and in-service teachers through three interrelated studies. An exploratory factor analysis suggested a 16-item, two-factor solution of multicultural teaching skill and multicultural teaching knowledge. The Multicultural Teaching Competencies Series (MTCS) demonstrated internal consistency and meaningfully related to measures of racism awareness and multicultural teaching attitudes. The developed scale determined if training programs effectively produced culturally responsive teachers by measuring the skills/behaviors and knowledge of culturally responsive teachers. Spanierman et al. (2011) concluded that relationship building and establishing clear expectations in the classroom were critical factors associated with the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Empirical studies have concluded the need for culturally responsive instructional practices because of the connection between educators' beliefs, their practices, and student achievement (Johnson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2012, 2013; Pollack, 2012). This section of the literature review

offers insight into the research on culturally responsive teachers' practices and the impact of this pedagogical approach on student outcomes. These impacts include an affirmation of cultural identities, the development of critical perspectives that can be used to challenge inequities, empowerment for academic and social success, and increased academic outcomes for students of color. Also discussed is the significance of teachers' beliefs and biases, the root of culturally responsive teaching as pedagogy, as teachers approach teaching students in marginalized populations.

Culturally Responsive Teaching, Student Outcomes, and Teacher Practices

While research studies have discussed the importance of school leadership in CSR and with marginalized student populations, the need for culturally responsive instructional practices is also clearly established (Johnson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2012, 2013). Much attention has been given to culturally responsive teaching and its impact on student achievement (Buehler et al., 2009; Delpit, 1998; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009). Teachers' understanding of the necessity of diversity in the curriculum is critical to the implementation of culturally responsive teaching. Educational researchers have extensively documented the connection between educators' beliefs, their practices, and student achievement (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Pollack, 2012; Milner, 2010). Ladson-Billings (1995a) posits that culturally responsive pedagogy includes the following as culturally responsive teacher practices: utilization of students' culture as a vehicle for learning, learning from each other's families to affirm cultural knowledge, and usage of students' "home" languages to express themselves in a way in which they are knowledgeable and comfortable.

Using critical case study and action research, Young (2010) presents an actionable approach to increasing the understanding and implementation of culturally responsive teaching by focusing on the efforts of a group of administrators and teachers at one urban school. Working collaboratively with the study participants, Young (2010) defined, implemented, and assessed culturally responsive pedagogy as a viable tool to help teachers understand how to put theory into practice. The participants then worked together to uncover the root of the lack of cultural responsiveness in their school and discovered deep structural issues related to teachers' cultural bias, the nature of racism in the school setting, and the lack of support to adequately implement culturally responsive practices. The ensuing recommendation was to use inquiry-based dialogue among scholars and practitioners to more consistently utilize theory prescribed in academic research in classroom instruction (Young, 2010). The principal limitation of this study is the lack of a model on how to guide this inquiry-based dialogue and how to foster the openness necessary to engage in such a courageous conversation as a school staff seeking to shift teacher practices.

Race, student beliefs, and school leadership all have a bearing on student achievement. Students from often marginalized populations sometimes possess negative attitudes toward their ability to succeed academically. Culturally diverse populations in schools require common practices to encourage empowerment and high expectations for student achievement; this common set of practices emerges within the implementation of culturally responsive teaching (Johnson, 2014). Marginalized student populations will be best nurtured to high academic achievement when teachers effectively implement culturally responsive teaching and engage in SEL that leads to a sense of inclusiveness

for all students (Johnson, 2014). Professional practice of this nature stems from school leaders creating inclusive school environments to support classroom teachers in utilizing culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy to increase student achievement.

Gay and Kirkland (2003) emphasized the critical consciousness of teachers and defined culturally responsive teaching in terms of teachers' knowledge base about cultural diversity. The need for teachers and leaders to identify current levels of cultural competence, with relation to both knowledge and skills, is paramount for increased implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices. Gay and Kirkland (2003) assert measuring multicultural competence with an instrument like the Multicultural Teaching Competency Scale (MTCS) to assess pre- and in-service teachers could guide practice by providing baseline data for leaders who desire to increase cultural responsiveness in practice (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Spanierman et al., 2011). Teachers and leaders must both carry positive beliefs about cultural responsiveness for it to become a conscious and embedded tenet of professional practice.

Goldenberg (2014) discusses student engagement and the role of teachers in understanding the non-dominant cultural capital of their students. Using a historical approach, Goldenberg (2014) synthesized data regarding the source of minority students' educational deficits based on disparities in appropriate and equitable classroom instruction. Rather than focusing on achievement gap outcomes, this study aimed to explore interactions between teachers and students that will be productive for students that fall into the achievement gap. An additional aim of the study was to review the importance of school culture and provide steps to improve student engagement to inform the pedagogical practices of teachers. Through a review of research, Goldenberg (2014)

concluded that if the most significant measure of the success of schools – student achievement – is going to be increased, teachers must consistently employ a culturally responsive pedagogy because the process of teaching and learning occurs in schools. Teachers must turn theory into practice and embrace “students’ cultural capital” to increase achievement (Goldenberg, 2014, p. 132).

Teacher Beliefs

The implementation of culturally responsive teaching is often prefaced by teachers’ philosophies and ideas regarding their belief that all students can succeed, that a teacher-student relationship is fluid and equitable, and teachers continuously expanding their knowledge base when incorporating methods for teaching diverse students (Buehler et al., 2009; Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). The beliefs teachers hold have a bearing on student achievement because beliefs influence thoughts and actions. This is especially important when examining the work of educators who serve marginalized student populations. Educators’ personal beliefs and biases significantly impact their approaches to curriculum and pedagogy when teaching diverse learners (Buehler et al., 2009).

The acknowledgement of race is key to ensuring the practice of culturally responsive teaching. Banks (2001) asserts:

A statement such as ‘I don’t see color’ reveals a privileged position that refuses to legitimize racial identifications that are very important to people of color and that are often used to justify inaction and perpetuation of the status quo. (p. 12)

Color consciousness is a concept closely associated with color blindness, which encompasses multiple meanings drawn from legal, educational, and social science

traditions. In an educational sense, teachers' need to see race and racial inequalities as a historical artifact and recognize how discrimination functions in society in order to build the skills necessary to work with students from diverse backgrounds (Ullucci & Battey, 2011). Since color blindness is an attitude and a new form of racism that renders racial and ethnic identity irrelevant, it must be counteracted. In the discussion of the findings of their study focused on providing interventions to teachers to counteract color blindness, Ullucci and Battey (2011) present four interventions to ensure color blindness does not thwart cultural responsiveness in teaching practices: challenging neutrality on the part of White teachers by racializing Whiteness; validating the experiences and perspectives of people of color; naming racist educational practices and developing a race-consciousness; and, challenging neutrality in policy and seeing institutional racism. These interventions are necessary to effectively challenge color-blind orientations in teachers and help them to foster culturally responsive practice.

Cochran-Smith (1995) bridges the importance of teacher beliefs and student cultures with curriculum planning. The author contrasts images of teaching and learning that underlie a lesson plan-centered approach to learning to teach with those that underlie an inquiry-centered approach. This approach allows the teacher's inquiry and research to play a central role in teacher education and is based on the notion that teachers and children together construct knowledge and curriculum through their ongoing classroom interactions by drawing on cultural resources and both shared and unshared experiences. In this theoretical article, Cochran-Smith (1995) identifies five perspectives on race, culture, and language diversity that are essential to preparing teachers who teach with an atypical approach: reconsidering personal knowledge and experience, locating teaching

within the culture of the school and community, analyzing children's learning opportunities, understanding children's understanding, and constructing reconstructionist pedagogy. Cochran-Smith (1995) brings to bear the fact that teacher's beliefs about marginalized students impacts the planning of learning activities which influences the amount of academic success marginalized students experience.

Pollack (2012) focuses on informal "teacher talk" about students and how it indicates teachers' beliefs. Through the examination of participants' journal entries, group discussion, and interviews (using a grounded theory approach), Pollack (2012) critically examines casual, everyday teacher discourse about students perceived to be racially or culturally different and uncovered three dominant, deficit-based themes in the teachers' informal talk: telling it like it is, placing blame outside educators' sphere of influence, and depiction of the "other." Teachers in this study used racially coded language to reference race while supposedly adhering to the social norm of colorblindness. Pollack (2012) found that the key to curbing negative, discursive language is to sharpen critical listening in order to sensitize educators to the negative impact of deficit thinking and conversation. This heightened awareness must first occur in school leaders so they can improve other educators' sensitivity to negative teacher talk about students (Pollack, 2012). Pollack (2012) raised the need for further study to uncover the root of informal teacher talk – specifically its content, nature, and effects. Great sensitivity must be employed by teachers of marginalized students to ensure that culturally responsive teaching is implemented and positive beliefs about diverse students' achievement are held.

The beliefs exposed through informal teacher talk are often showcased in the interactions teachers have with diverse students and their families. These beliefs speak to the level of cultural responsiveness an educator holds. Nelson and Guerra (2014) qualitatively examined educator beliefs related to culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students and families along with participants' knowledge of culture and its application in practice. Data analysis was conducted through the lens of constructivist grounded theory, which led to the development of a continuum of cultural responsiveness. Citing Rokeach's (1968) book entitled *Beliefs, Attitudes, and Values: A Theory of Organization and Change*, Nelson and Guerra (2014) establish the connection between educators' personal values and beliefs and their practice (as cited in Nelson & Guerra, 2014). Nelson and Guerra (2014) examined 111 practicing educators' cultural knowledge and their ability to apply it in various scenarios related to teaching culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse students. Results revealed the majority of participants had a general awareness of culture but also held a number of deficit beliefs about diverse students and their families leading them to address visible aspects of culture while overlooking less obvious ones. Participants gave little consideration to the social aspects of schooling such as identity, culture, language, and relationships, which are at the heart of culturally responsive teaching and leadership (Nelson & Guerra, 2014). If personal beliefs are not consciously considered and attended to, educators' practice will never evolve to be more culturally responsive.

Milner (2010, 2012, 2013) challenges teachers to move their attention from achievement gaps to opportunity gaps. He states that a persistent challenge in addressing opportunity gaps has to do with how teachers are educated. Educators' approaches to

curriculum and pedagogy are strongly impacted by personal beliefs, biases, and conceptual frameworks – especially when teaching diverse learners. Milner (2010), therefore, invites teachers to actively engage in a paradigm and mindset shift to alter their thinking, ideologies, belief systems, and overall worldviews in terms of how we look at student achievement.

As school populations continue to become more diverse, the need for the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy increases. Student achievement, the driving force of education, is strongly influenced by the expectations that teachers and school leaders establish and the framework through which student achievement is conceptualized (Goldenberg, 2014). Researchers have concluded the need for culturally responsive instructional practices because of the connection between educators' beliefs, their practices, and student achievement (Johnson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2012, 2013; Pollack, 2012). Schools engaged in CSR must be staffed with educators who possess the “willingness to undertake school reform” and the “capacity to engage in a deep and searching change process” in order to teach in a culturally responsive manner (Berman & Chambliss, 2000, p. 4). Ultimately, educators must assume responsibility for students' poor performance and adjust instructional practices accordingly (Garcia & Guerra, 2004). This instructional implication is paramount because the schools most commonly labeled as Priority School often serve marginalized student populations who need to be taught in a culturally responsive manner in order to achieve high levels of academic success and the proficiency that has been legislatively mandated.

School Leadership, Student Achievement, and School Reform

A focus on the work and effectiveness of public schools is not a new phenomenon. Accountability pressures significantly increased with the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) with the intent to spur a reduction in the nation's achievement gap. This gap has broadened between social classes, races, ethnicities, and genders including group differences in achievement based upon standardized tests and grades, overall educational attainment levels, academic tracking, access to effective teaching, placement in special education programs, and state and local investments in education (Sadovnik, Cookson, & Semel, 2013). This gap produces an often marginalized population of students for schools to serve. Via NCLB, the reduction of this gap was to have been achieved by holding states more accountable for the education of all students – especially those traditionally disadvantaged – through a requirement that all students score at the “proficient” level by the year 2014. Effective school leadership, specifically culturally responsive school leadership, is necessary to ensure the implementation of culturally responsive teaching with students in marginalized groups and to give these students a greater chance at reaching proficiency.

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) expanded the federal role of education in states and school districts through an increased emphasis on high-stakes accountability. A reiteration of NCLB, known as the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA), allocated some \$3 billion to states for the improvement of underperforming schools through Title I School Improvement Grants (SIG) (American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Duke, 2014; Title I – Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged, 2009). This unprecedented

improvement approach shifted focus from a mere allocation of additional federal funds to fostering competition among school districts for federal funds if those districts were willing to implement one of four federally supported improvement strategies: turnaround, restart, school closure, or transformation (Taylor, 2010). State education agencies (SEAs) were responsible for determining whether schools were to be classified as “In Need of Improvement” (INI) or “Persistently Low Achieving” (PLA) (now Priority Schools in the state in which this study was situated). The SEAs then determined which of the four intervention models would be instituted in each failing school. Although the most recent iteration of NCLB, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 has shifted significant control to SEAs and local schools to reform lower performing schools, effective local school leadership is still the essential component in improving underperforming schools as these four models remain in play.

The turnaround model, in which the principal is removed and at least 50% of the staff is reconstituted with new programs also implemented, is often the selected improvement strategy as it is intended to quickly and dramatically improve a school. While all four school reform models stipulated in ARRA and ESSA apply pressure to school leaders, the transformation model could be argued as placing a greater emphasis on the role of principals because they are the only staff who lose their jobs in the implementation of this reform. A linchpin, therefore, to the implementation of the turnaround model is effective school leadership. In a case study focused on two principals in the throes of CSR, Duke and Jacobson (2011) identified 11 characteristics these leaders exhibited: energy, optimism, a sincere regard for students, a focus on resources and energy based upon data, visibility, relationships with students, a

commitment to the work of CSR, achieving quick wins and building on them, relationships with feeder schools, plans for remediation and intervention, and hiring the right staff. While this is a long list of necessary characteristics for school leaders, it is by no means an exhaustive list. Regardless of what reform initiatives come and go, what remains true is that school leadership levies a significant impact on student achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Researchers have also established the importance of school leadership on school climate and culture and have provided some insight into how successful school leadership looks within the context of CSR (Finnigan, 2011; Norton, 2002; Orr et al., 2008; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1994). Cultural responsiveness is a key to effective leadership in the midst of CSR. Khalifa, Gooden, and Davis (2015) plainly state in their meta-analysis, “research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school” (p. 3). The need for the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy is often greatest in schools with a Priority School label because of the often marginalized student populations they serve. To lead a diverse school effectively, school leaders must exhibit the determination and flexibility necessary to “adapt our schools to the cultural backgrounds and values of the communities they serve” (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001, p. 542). This includes fostering a school culture where culturally relevant teaching can occur.

Duke (2014) posits that ensuring effective leadership in low-performing schools (that is, Priority Schools) is “a fundamental social justice issue” (p. 81). To this end, Duke (2014) puts forward a five-part theory of action for leading school turnaround. He

states that leaders in low-performing schools must build an awareness of the problems to be addressed and the obstacles to be overcome, understand why these problems and obstacles exist, present a plan that gives the necessary focus and direction to guide action and ensure maximum impact, possess the competence needed to lead staff in addressing problems and overcoming obstacles, and be committed to lead staff in addressing these problems and overcoming identified obstacles. While these competences are critical to CSR, school leaders must also develop ways to mitigate the barriers presented to leadership of this nature.

Gardiner and Enomoto (2006), in a cross-case analysis, examined the work of principals as multicultural leaders. First, they reinforced the critical nature of the role of the principal in ensuring the implementation of culturally responsive teaching practices, maintaining high expectations for all, and responding to the unique needs presented by the diverse populations in their schools. To ground these findings, interviews, document analysis, and observations were conducted with six principals. Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) found that these principals engaged in three tasks that set them apart as multicultural leaders: fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive instructional practices, and building connections between schools and the community. While these principals noted a lack of formal preparation to carry this work forward and faced some resistance to the implementation of their work, this study did not delve into this issue of resistance – specifically, how these principals addressed and counteracted the resistance they faced to fostering an understanding of multiculturalism and utilizing more inclusive strategies in their schools.

Several characteristics of successful principals are identified in the literature on school improvement, including focusing on instructional leadership, fostering organizational stability, initiating and sustaining change within buildings, and engaging staff within the school learning community (Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Orr et al., 2008). Additionally, shaping school culture is a responsibility of the school principal. This is often accomplished by establishing common values and beliefs rooted in stakeholders' experiences in the school (Deal & Kennedy, 1981). The CSR literature consistently presents the role of the principal in shaping a culture of success in a school as paramount. Therefore, it can be surmised that the principal's role in the lack of success of a school is equally strong. Efforts to improve a school and establish culturally responsive practices must start with its leadership.

With regard to Priority Schools, the need for culturally relevant leadership has never been greater. Empirical research tells us that leadership has a significant impact on student achievement. In fact, when considering the prevalent factors on student success, school leadership has been identified as the second most impactful variable in student achievement – second only to classroom instruction (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Closing the achievement gap is a prevalent goal in the United States, as exemplified by the legislative mandates of NCLB, ARRA, and ESSA. Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn (2011) explore research literature on culturally responsive and antiracist pedagogy in order to inform the practice of school leadership and explore connections across the areas of theory, research, and practice within the field of education. Their synthesis of existing research literature connects the cultural

responsiveness of educational leaders to closing the achievement gap by providing a framework for educators' use in creating culturally responsive leadership in schools: an awareness of political context in education, knowledge of culturally responsive teaching as a pedagogical approach, reflection of teacher's professional journey, and honoring these aspects as a part of professional duty. To shift teacher practice, educators must first openly acknowledge the racist roots of school structure and practices (Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011). Supported by school leaders, teachers working with marginalized populations should develop a cross-cultural approach to instruction to ensure that the pedagogical needs of diverse learners are met. While Horsford, Grosland, and Gunn (2011) espouse specific leadership competencies needed to lead in a culturally responsive manner, no guidance is offered on how to implement these competencies in professional practice or how to address the barriers to implementing such leadership.

Santamaria (2014) investigates the principals' work in educational leadership for social justice and equity as a key response to inclusive and equitable education. Santamaria (2014) cites the need to understand how historically marginalized leaders of color translate theory into practice and address educational inequities as the gap addressed by this research. Through a yearlong, culturally responsive case study grounded in critical race theory, Santamaria (2014) explored the ways in which a principal's identity enhances the ability to see, understand, and consider alternate perspectives in leadership practice by first giving participants an identity survey then observing and interviewing them. Santamaria (2014) identified nine characteristics of what she coined as "applied critical leadership," which presents the intersection of personal identity and culturally responsive leadership (p. 356). These characteristics are

a willingness to engage in critical conversations, choosing to assume a critical race theory lens, utilizing consensus building as a decision-making strategy, remaining conscious of stereotype threat associated with their ethnic groups, making research-based contributions to academic discourse about underserved populations, honoring all members of their constituencies, leading by example in addressing educational needs, proving themselves worthy of the leadership position they hold, and leading as servant leaders guided by a calling to lead. While this study explicitly identifies practices culturally responsive leaders of color employ in connection to their personal identities, it fails to explore the depth of implementation of these practices, barriers to implementation, and how principals overcome these barriers.

School leaders influence the amount of academic success experienced by students in their schools. As school leaders make decisions and establish expectations for students, they levy influence on student success – whether that influence is determined to be significant or insignificant (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Principals must be intentional in their style of leadership, especially when seeking to shape school culture and classroom instruction within the confines of CSR. In a meta-analysis of 27 international studies, Robinson, Lloyd, and Rowe (2008) examine school leadership style through the lens of instructional and transformational leadership and how they intersect. Robinson et al. (2008) found that leaders in higher performing schools focus more on teaching and learning, prove to be a strong instructional resource to teachers, actively participate in and lead teacher learning and development, communicate clear goals and expectations, ensure an environment conducive to teaching and learning, and allocate resources to support school goals. These conclusions reinforce the belief

that principals must work more to shape teaching, learning, and school culture in order for schools to achieve increased levels of success. Such work requires the implementation of multiple leadership skills (Robinson et al., 2008): a cross section that is critical in order for teachers' practices to be entrenched in cultural responsiveness and lead to increased student success.

Witziers, Bosker, and Kruger (2003) examine the link between educational leadership and student achievement by exploring the extent to which principals or educational leader's affect student achievement. In framing their quantitative meta-analysis, Witziers et al. (2003) provide essential background information to support their research by citing an earlier review of school leadership studies by Leithwood and Montgomery (1982), which posited that the effective principal comes to the forefront as an instructional or educational leader who affects school climate and student achievement. The concluding result of the meta-analysis was a small yet positive effect of leadership on student achievement among multinational research reports (Witziers et al., 2003).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 expanded the federal role in education in states and school districts through an increased emphasis on high-stakes accountability and consequences for poor performance on accountability measures. The underlying tenant of NCLB was to increase student achievement by holding states more accountable for the education of all students – especially traditionally marginalized students. Through the collaboration of major education partners such as the United States Department of Education, the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), members of Congress, and the president of the United States, NCLB

was crafted with the requirement that all students score at the “proficient” level by school year 2013-2014 (Sadovnik et al., 2013). Included in this accountability model was the mandate that schools meet “adequate yearly progress” targets set by each state.

Corrective action measures could be levied against schools failing to meet these standards, including school governance changes, private tutoring for students, and school choice (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). With increased legislative pressure to drastically improve lower performing schools, school-level leadership emerged as the significant starting point for improving underperforming schools through CSR.

When working within the context of CSR, principals must determine what external mandates they will allow to impact their schools and which they will buffer the school against. In order to make these decisions, principals execute a skill called sensemaking. Louis and Robinson (2012) define sensemaking as a mental mechanism principals use to understand external mandates and to inform their roles as instructional leaders in schools. Using a random sampling of existing teacher and principal surveys conducted in nine states, Louis and Robinson (2012) examined the theoretical concepts of sensemaking, crafting coherence, and instructional leadership. Louis and Robinson (2012) posit that external accountability policies have a positive impact when principals find connection and congruency between policies, district-level supports, and their personal beliefs. In some instances, school leaders shaped policies to fit the particular needs of their schools. When one or more of the above-mentioned factors was missing, principals demonstrated negative attitudes toward both the policies and instructional leadership in general. Louis and Robinson (2012) posit that school leaders’ responses to federal accountability mandates likely reflect a complex interaction between their

perceptions of state policies and support, their specific district contexts, and their personal leadership beliefs and practices (Louis & Robinson, 2012). Principals' responses to external accountability structures and CSR are important as they lead diverse schools faced with high-stakes accountability pressures – even more critical for leaders in Priority Schools who are charged with fostering significant change in a short amount of time through CSR.

While Louis and Robinson (2012) examine principals' ability and willingness to perform tasks in relation to their sensemaking skills, Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, and Wishard-Guerra (2011) examine the ways threat rigidity and efficacy influence principals' leadership. Daly et al. (2011) define threat-rigidity as occurring when external factors threaten an organization's livelihood and the organization produces a rigid and resistant response to the threat. Potential effects of organizational threats are the increase in restrictive thinking, reliance on past experiences and prior knowledge, centralized authority, and standardization of processes (Daly et al., 2011). Daly et al.'s (2011) findings suggest that principals in lower performing schools have higher instances of a threat-rigid response and a decreased sense of self-efficacy. Principals must possess a high sense of self-efficacy in order to enact change in schools and foster greater success for all students through culturally responsive teaching and leadership, even in the face of challenging external accountability and CSR policies. The existing literature is scant in guidance on how principals should proceed if the external mandates contradict the needs of their diverse student populations, shaping the other side of national policy's impact on leadership.

The turnaround model of CSR is intended to quickly and dramatically improve a school within a short period of time. Even within this time constraint, school leadership continues to surface as the crux of CSR. Several researchers have established the importance of school leadership in affecting school climate and culture and have also provided theoretical insight into what successful turnaround school leadership looks like (Duke, 2014; Finnigan, 2011; Leithwood et al., 2008; Norton, 2002; Orr et al., 2008; Taylor & Tashakkori, 1994). Since schools most commonly labeled as Priority Schools often serve marginalized student populations, the need for effective and culturally responsive leadership is paramount. As Glasman and Glasman (1997) concluded, “Every choice [educational leaders] make lowers the degree of uncertainty but reflects a solution that might not be the best one” (p. 13). Culturally responsive leaders undertake transformative work which may contradict prevailing beliefs in the school communities they serve (Cooper, 2009). These leaders must build and enact a resistance to outside pressures that threaten culturally responsive leadership (Theoharis, 2004, 2007). For this reason, the success of CSR rests on the effectiveness of school leadership to implement change in a culturally responsive manner.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

In recent years, a new line of research centered upon the phenomenon of culturally responsive leadership has emerged (Jones & Nichols, 2013; Mitchell, 2015; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009; Theoharis, 2004, 2007). This new line of research has focused on what culturally responsive leadership is and what characteristics principals might exude when executing this type of leadership. This new, but limited, research has established a clear connection between a school leader’s implementation of culturally

responsive leadership and teachers' ability to teach in a culturally responsive manner (Jones & Nichols, 2013; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

Culturally responsive leadership, also referred to as culturally proficient leadership, is distinguished from other leadership approaches because it is anchored in the belief that a leader must clearly understand his or her own assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from himself or herself in order to lead effectively in multicultural settings (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Johnson (2006) asserts that culturally responsive leadership occurs when administrators merge curriculum innovation with social activism. Gooden (2010) deepens this understanding stating that culturally responsive leadership pursues educational equity while supporting teaching practices that utilize culture as a way to empower and teach children. Similar to teachers who must remain cognizant of personal beliefs and biases because of the manner in which they significantly impact their approaches to curriculum and pedagogy, school leaders must be conscious of the same when working with marginalized student populations (Buehler et al., 2009).

Lindsey, Roberts, and Campbell Jones (2005) identify several critical competencies that culturally responsive leaders exhibit. Culturally responsive leaders redefine education to be inclusive. They focus on inequity and equity, regardless of who benefits from the current status of the organization. Culturally responsive leaders focus on confronting and changing their own behavior to learn from and about new groups in the community (Lindsey et al., 2005). Culturally responsive leadership has some roots in social justice leadership. Bates (2006) establishes that social justice in education demands “distributive justice” (to address underserved inequalities) and “recognitional

justice” (to treat cultural differences with understanding and respect) (p. 154). He calls for a model of educational leadership that focuses on the problem of the justice and fairness of social and educational arrangements. This model is culturally responsive leadership. Since the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and the fostering of culturally responsive cultures rests on the principal, principals must lead in a culturally responsive manner in order to raise marginalized student populations to higher academic achievement levels.

In considering Priority Schools engaged in CSR, the need for culturally relevant leadership has never been greater. Empirical research has established leadership as the second most significant variable in student achievement, next to classroom instruction (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood et al., 2004; Waters et al., 2004). Bass (1997) implores organizational leaders to implement transformational leadership by acting in different ways within differing cultural contexts. Culturally responsive leadership seeks to develop and support school staff by intentionally fostering a climate and culture inclusive of marginalized students (Khalifa et al., 2015). When examining the challenges of improving student success in Priority schools, the issue of effective and culturally responsive leadership is greatly important because Priority Schools often serve the most marginalized student populations.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), in their single case study, cite the need to provide school leaders guidance on how to help teachers work effectively with marginalized groups of students. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) were guided by the desire to understand how one school leader, an assistant principal, enacted her culturally responsive leadership role with teachers, students, and parents. Madhlangobe and

Gordon (2012) present their findings in six themes: caring for others, building relationships, persistence and persuasiveness, being present and communicating, modeling cultural responsiveness, and fostering cultural responsiveness among others. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) posit that the key to the success of this school leader was the fact that “culturally responsive relationships help to reduce power struggles that manifest themselves in skeptical attitudes and resistance” (p. 198). This leader leveraged her personal relationships to encourage educators’ efforts to reach all students in the school. While this finding is strong and noteworthy, the principle limitation of this study is the sample size. Studying more leaders engaged in their work with similar intentionality and reaching similar study conclusions would strengthen this claim.

Theoharis (2007) narrows the focus from the actions of social justice leaders (one of the origins of culturally responsive leadership) to the resistance these leaders face and the strategies these leaders develop to sustain their leading with equity in mind. Theoharis (2007) engaged in a critical, positioned-subject approach combined with autoethnography to analyze the work of himself and six other leaders who espoused social justice school leadership through the examination of three research questions. While these leaders provided clear responses to the study’s first two research questions focused on how they enact social justice leadership and identify the resistance they face as social justice leaders, the principals struggled to clearly identify ways they develop the resistance needed to sustain social justice leadership. Theoharis (2007) asserts that future study is needed into the traits social justice leaders develop to address the resistance they face to their leadership. What is critical is not just how social justice and culturally

responsive leaders personally cope with resistance but how they continue to forward this important work for the sake of the marginalized students they serve.

In Priority Schools engaged in CSR work, where the expectation is a drastic increase in test scores in a short time period, students must be highly and authentically engaged. With the diversity of student populations in Priority Schools, teachers' implementation of culturally responsive teaching is critical and must be supported by school leadership. Three key models exist to guide school leaders in the implementation of culturally responsive leadership. Terrell and Lindsey (2009) posit a Cultural Proficiency Continuum, which acts as a guide for school leaders' engagement with stakeholders and movement toward culturally competent practices. Jones and Nichols (2013) posit a different continuum called the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum focused on leaders' progression to a more culturally responsive attitude and approach to leadership. Vassallo (2015) developed a five-step model for culturally responsive educational leadership designed to guide school leaders through reflection to challenge personal biases and hindrances to culturally responsive leadership. All three models present a framework for gauging a school leader's level of culturally responsive leadership.

The first three stages of the Cultural Proficiency Continuum (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009) present how leaders view diverse stakeholders when they see them as problematic. Diversity appears as a problem to be solved and demonstrates a lack of cultural competence. The last three stages focus on leadership practice and how leaders can better understand diverse stakeholders' cultures and experiences and adjust policies as a result (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009).

With the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum, the first two categories of leaders are described as “diversity leaders” who make symbolic gestures through initiatives that lack the ability to have a substantive impact on practice and culture (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 115). These leaders typically view students as one in the same. In contrast, the last two categories of leaders are described as “culturally competent leaders” who develop, implement, and sustain observable outcomes that reflect a significant level of cultural competence in their schools (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 118).

Vassallo (2015) developed a model for culturally responsive educational leadership, which includes five steps: reflective process, teacher-student interactions, deconstructing and reconstructing, new knowledge, and the emergence of culturally responsive pedagogy. First, leaders are called to engage in reflection, which sets prejudices aside to allow for the construction of new knowledge. This reflection leads to positive, meaningful interactions between teachers and students – both within the classroom and in the broader community. With meaningful interactions comes the ability to deconstruct biases and reconstruct more culturally responsive beliefs and practices. The deconstruction-reconstruction process gives way to new knowledge “driving emergent norms, values and pedagogical processes to unprecedented ethical heights” (Vassallo, 2015, p.115). These steps culminate in a culturally responsive pedagogy that fosters a more equitable environment for all students.

To lead a diverse school effectively, school leaders must exhibit the determination and flexibility necessary to “adapt our schools to the cultural backgrounds and values of the communities they serve” (Deschenes, Cuban, & Tyack, 2001, p. 542). While CSR

policy impacts the decision making process, prioritization of resources and leadership activities, school culture, and student achievement in the lowest performing schools, principals must ensure schools are steeped with cultural responsiveness that ensures all students achieve at high levels (Bustamante et al., 2009; Klotz, 2006). School leaders' philosophies, biases, and beliefs impact administrative decisions regarding school culture, structure, and instruction. In our current, discriminatory society, principals serve as the gatekeepers to an anti-racist education for diverse learners. Lopez (2003) states, "we need to develop antiracist educators who recognize the reproductive functions of schooling and have the courage to envision different possibilities for schooling" (p. 71). Ladson-Billings (2002) posits that culturally responsive school leaders help school stakeholders through social, emotional, and intellectual development by "using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 382). This work requires leaders to have the courage to assess their knowledge base and examine how race and culture fit into the broader scope of education. This level of cultural responsiveness serves as a tool that can counter barriers and help construct new cultural values in schools based upon formal, informal, and non-formal education (Vassallo, 2015).

The implementation of any model for culturally responsive leadership is important because it grants permission for stakeholders to learn from each other while meeting the needs of a diverse student population. Consistent with the tenets of transformational leadership, these models encourage continuous inquiry of how schools function and shift organizational frames to meet the needs of a diverse population (Burns, 1979; Nahavandi, 2006). These models provide effective frameworks for the

implementation of culturally responsive leadership but do not clearly elucidate how principals execute this work or address barriers to this work – the focus of this study.

Summary of Literature Review

Much attention has been centered upon culturally responsive teaching and its impact on student achievement. Still, much is to be learned about the preparation of school leaders to foster culturally responsive teaching through the implementation of culturally responsive leadership. School leadership impacts student achievement and teacher effectiveness. And, school leadership impacts school culture, either encouraging or thwarting cultural responsiveness. Through the examination of both theoretical and empirical research, the need for school leaders to lead in a culturally responsive manner is clearly presented.

School leaders can actively identify, challenge, and reframe deficit conversations and thinking in their schools to foster culturally responsive practice. Research has established that school culture impacts teacher practice. Race, student beliefs, and school leadership have an effect on the improvement of student achievement when presented against the backdrop of school culture. More than anything, however, teacher practice must be shifted through the work of effective school leaders. The current literature establishes the need for educators to understand how to best teach a diverse and often marginalized group of learners in an effort to ensure that students' diversity is explicitly addressed when fostering an increase in student achievement.

While the literature on culturally responsive teaching often does not directly explore the role of school leadership, it is inferred that school leaders can promote the implementation of culturally responsive teaching by incorporating its tenants into their

leadership practice (Riehl, 2000). Mitchell (2015) calls for further study of the characteristics of culturally responsive leaders, in both urban and non-urban settings, in order to give more insight into the challenges they face. Theoharis (2004) echoes this need saying future studies that focus on the daily practices of social justice/culturally responsive leaders is needed to better understand the key aspects of this leadership. Empirical studies of culturally responsive leadership are limited mostly to qualitative dissertations focused on basic implementation of various styles of leadership. While some characteristics of leadership style and implementation are discussed, the literature is scant regarding *how* principals implement and also mitigate barriers to the implementation of culturally responsive leadership. To this end, this study sought to examine how principals implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students.

STUDY TWO: METHODS

Any researcher who wishes to become proficient at doing qualitative analysis must learn to code well and easily. The excellence of the research rests in large part on the excellence of the coding. – Strauss (1987, p. 27)

This multi-site qualitative comparative case study explored how elementary, middle, and high school principals in urban Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership. Two research questions focused this study: (a) How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership? and (b) How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students? This study sought to unearth how principals challenged with enacting comprehensive school reform (CSR) in urban schools lead in a culturally responsive manner. When considering the prevalent factors on student success, leadership is found to be second only to effective classroom instruction (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). In the current high-stakes accountability culture, principals' leadership greatly influences student success, school culture, and the impact of CSR efforts.

The first research question sought to examine how urban Priority School principals implement culturally responsive leadership in their schools.

This question guided the examination of principals' daily practices, words, and written discourse for evidence of the elements of culturally responsive leadership. The second research question has two aims: first, to uncover the barriers that exist to implementing culturally responsive leadership and, second, to explain how these principals mitigate those identified barriers. The individuality of each school context illuminated unique barriers and the principals' approaches to counteract them.

Addressed in this section of the capstone are the selection and justification of the study's research design, including a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the selected research design. This is followed by a discussion of the study's context, data sources, data collection, and data analysis. Also discussed are the processes for ensuring data verification: specifically, the assessment of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Trochin, 2006). The means of reporting findings varies from case to case as guided by the conceptual framework. As such, this section foreshadows how findings are reported in the *Analysis* section. Also discussed are the ethical considerations of this study and steps by which the rights and wishes of the informants have been protected. A feature of qualitative research is that the researcher is an actual instrument of data collection. As such, this necessitates a discussion of how the researcher's positionality has been explored, thus ensuring the mitigation of researcher biases. Finally, this section closes with a summary.

Research Design

Case study methodology was selected to examine the perceptions and resulting approaches of several urban school principals with regard to the implementation of culturally responsive leadership. The CSR context of each Priority School colors the

work of each principal and influences their leadership approaches. Yin (2003) defines a case study as empirical inquiry investigating a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context for exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory purposes. Using case studies depends on three things: “(a) the type of research question posed, (b) the extent of control an investigator has over actual behavior events, and (c) the degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to historical events” (Yin, 2003, p. 5). The research questions which guided this study sought to explore how urban school principals implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to it; both questions were appropriate for a case study approach.

The CSR context of the schools in which the study participants serve creates a unique lens for study. Creswell (2014) described case study research as involving “the study of a case within a real-life, contemporary context or setting” (p. 7). Case study can also be helpful in explaining the causal links that exist in real-life situations that cannot be fully explained by experimental and survey studies (Yin, 2009). This comparative case study was bounded by the lived experiences of the participants with implementing culturally responsive leadership and overcoming barriers to this implementation within the CSR context of their urban schools. According to Yin (2009), all case studies seek to develop a deeper understanding of a single or small number of ‘cases’ set in their real-world contexts. More pointedly, case study research assumes that “examining the context and other complex conditions related to the case(s) being studied are integral to understanding the case(s)” (Yin, 2009, p. 4). In exploring how these principals implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to it, a deeper

understanding of the nature of implementation of culturally responsive leadership within a CSR context will be developed.

This comparative case study utilized a multi-site design which afforded a more comprehensive approach to answering the aforementioned research questions. Because of the broad focus on urban elementary, middle, and high school principals engaged in CSR, the researcher could better examine the similarities and uniqueness of each school and participant. Gay, Mills, and Airasian (2009) noted, “Multi-site case studies allow the researcher to make claims that the events described at one site are not necessarily idiosyncratic to that site, and thus contribute to the researcher’s understanding about contextual variations, or lack thereof, across sites” (p. 430). Case studies are commonly used in the study of educational cultural competence (Stake, 1995). In this vein, the multi-site design of this study revealed complexities of the implementation of culturally responsive leadership that a focus on a single site would not reveal. A qualitative case study affords a researcher the opportunity to explore phenomenon in a broader scope, granting the researcher the ability to examine culturally responsive leadership in different settings using multiple sources of data (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2009).

This study focused on the implementation of culturally responsive leadership by four principals engaged in CSR in four urban Priority Schools in the southeastern United States. The researcher possesses a personal connection to both education and to Priority Schools, served in various educational administration roles in six different schools over eleven years. Four of those schools were Priority Schools. The researcher sought to limit personal bias by bracketing through memoing.

A delimitation of the study is the Priority School status of each school and the district in which these schools exist. Of the 141 schools in this urban, southeastern school district, only 18 Priority Schools exist. Selecting a representative sample of Priority Schools across school levels, when most Priority Schools in this district are middle and high schools, is challenging. This is, in part, because the state Department of Education has elected to not identify any new Priority Schools because of an upcoming change in the state accountability structure, even though two elementary schools in this district would have been identified as Priority Schools based upon recent accountability scores.

Context of the Study and Study Data

Currently, the state in which the study was conducted has 27 Priority Schools. 18 of those schools are located in the district of focus ($n = 18$). The purposeful sampling method was chosen because of specific interest in the lived experiences and stories of a small group of urban school principals currently engaged in CSR with diverse student populations. For the purpose of this study, schools were considered sufficiently diverse when their student demographic data yielded a non-White student population of 30% or more. Of specific interest was the manner in which these principals implement culturally responsive leadership while engaged in CSR in these Priority Schools. A purposeful sample of Priority School principals in this large, urban, public school district in the southeastern United States was drawn.

The study participants possessed a range of years of service as school principals, varied in both gender and race, varied in school levels, and varied in geographic locations in the district. All study participants possessed lived experiences which coalesce with

their levels of education, training, and experiences in education. Some participants may have overcome personal barriers to implement culturally responsive leadership and may have overcome school barriers to its implementation as well.

Data Sources and Collection

This study utilized purposeful sampling to secure participants for the study. In order to gain an in-depth understanding about the case to be studied, the researcher selected study participants who have direct knowledge of and experiences with the case study topic (Patton, 2002). Prior to the collection of data, a completed IRB was submitted to the university and school district of focus to gain approval for the study. Once approval was gained, the collection of data began through interviews and the analysis of documents such as school report cards, mission and vision statements, Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIP), 30-60-90 Day Improvement Plans, and reflective feedback. Each principal was contacted via email or phone to schedule a 90-minute interview, which was conducted in person at a location of the principals' choosing. If an interview appeared as though it would run beyond 90 minutes, the participant would have been asked for additional time or a second interview to complete his or her responses. No interview ran longer than 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in January and February, 2017 using a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix 2A); document analysis occurred during this same time frame. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. A transcript of the interview was returned to the participants for review and an opportunity to provide reflective feedback was given. This approach to member checking served as both an opportunity to validate the participants' perceptions of implementing culturally responsive leadership and mitigating

barriers to it as well as provide the researcher an opportunity to engage participants in a meaningful, reflective dialogue (Seidman, 2006).

Interviews were conducted in a conversational manner to encourage the openness of study participants in their responses. Probing questions were used to more deeply explore responses given by study participants during the interview. Individuals may experience a shared phenomenon in different ways. For this reason, case study inquiry is constructivist in nature – as realized truth is examined in relation to the lived experiences of the individual (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009). Open-ended questions allowed these principals to express their truth regarding their schools' Priority School status and how they engage in culturally responsive leadership to move their schools forward academically. Patton (2002) asserts the purpose of interviewing as allowing someone to enter another person's perspective. The interview process in this study was used to build rapport with the study participants and create an atmosphere in which they feel comfortable communicating responses which are insightful, reflect their truth, and permit entry into their perception. Open-ended questions also supported comparative analysis because all study participants will be asked the same questions.

Implementing culturally responsive leadership requires reflection upon personal values and beliefs and situating them in the broader context of a diverse school community (Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Milner, 2012; Mitchell, 2015; Theoharis, 2004). The use of an open-ended interview question structure was intended to help study participants do just that and was guided by the conceptual framework for this study, The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013), which focuses on the following essential elements:

- School leader fosters student-focused, highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures.
- School leader holds educators accountable to high expectations.
- School leader is knowledgeable about and understands institutional history relative to issues of race and ethnicity.
- School leader is knowledgeable about self and society with regard to personal racial and ethnic bias.
- School leader creates and sustains interdependent and relationship-based system.
- School leader understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege.

The aim was to see how the principals in this study embodied these aforementioned essential elements. This embodiment came through in what the participants shared in the interviews, what they espoused in mission and vision statements, the school goals they communicated in Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIPs), and the 30-60-90 Day Improvement Plans. These documents communicate a school leader's priorities. Therefore, they can be used to ascertain the level of a leader's embodiment of the six essential elements. Figure 6 illustrates the levels of the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013). Specifically, the figure shows the two categories of leaders each with two sub-categories: diversity leaders (the Superficial Supervisor and the Minimalist Manager) and culturally competent leaders (the Ardent Advocate and the Eco-systemic Leader). The lower three sub-categories somewhat overlap in how the six essential elements are embodied by school leaders. This overlap is

communicated in the figure with bold border lines connecting the three sub-categories.

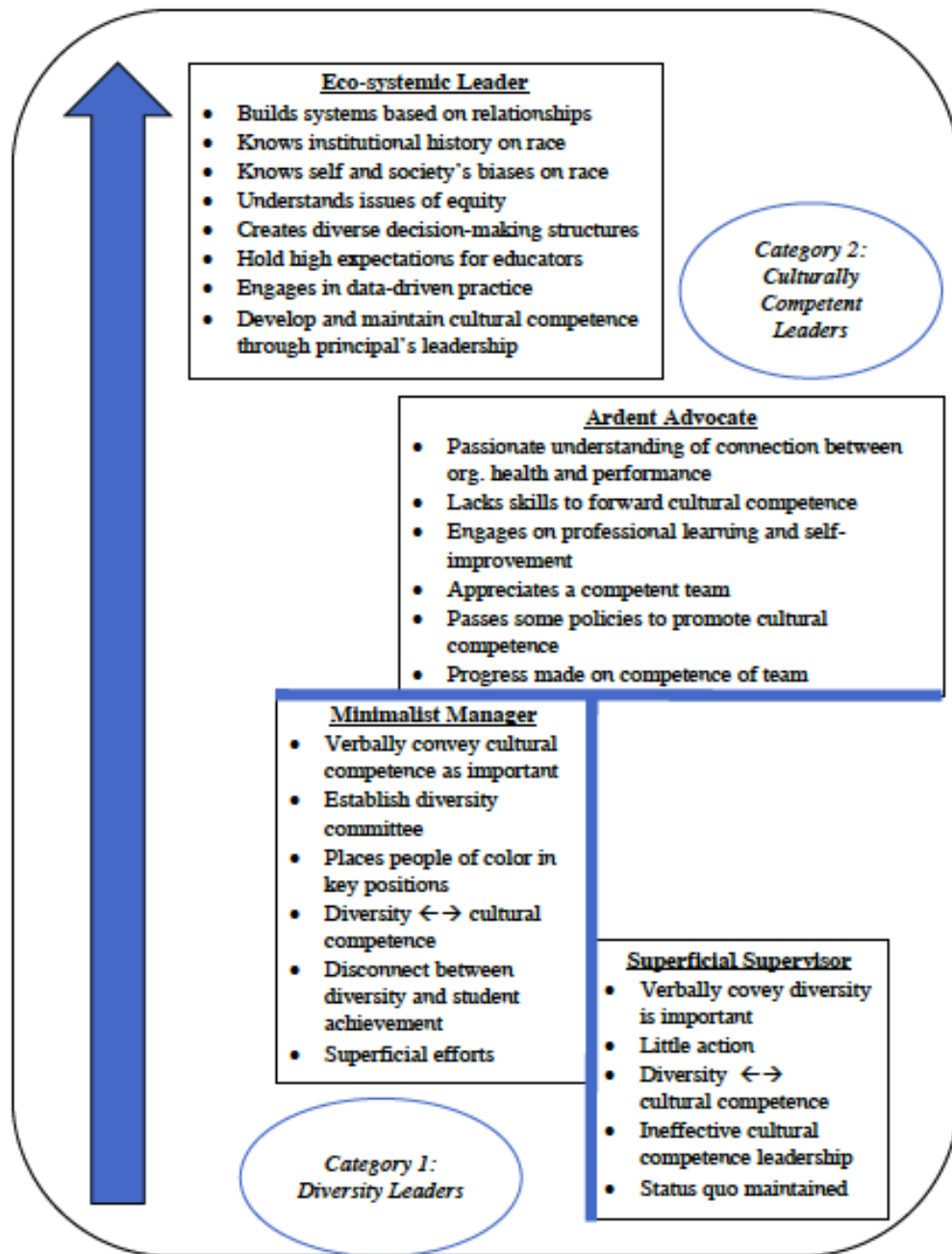


Figure 6. Embodiment of Continuum's Essential Elements – adapted from Jones & Nichols, 2013

The highest sub-category, the Eco-systemic Leader, is set away from the rest of the sub-categories because the embodiment of the six essential elements look different. Within

each area of Figure 6, descriptions for how the six essential elements are embodied at each sub-category are included.

The research questions for this study are connected to the guiding principles espoused by the conceptual framework. Table 6 illustrates the interconnectedness of the research questions, the guiding principles of the conceptual framework, the essential elements of the continuum, and the data sources connected to each (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 116-117). In addition to interviews, several documents from each school were analyzed. The school report card showed the academic impact of CSR efforts at each school through the reporting of high-stakes accountability assessment scores over time. This document also revealed cultural aspects of the school with regard to access to technology, community involvement, and perceptions about school safety and discipline. The vision and mission statements, the CSIPs, and the 30-60-90 Day Improvement Plans were also analyzed. These documents provided insight into the systemic cultural beliefs at each school as well as the level of inclusion of culturally responsive practices in the midst of CSR, the professional development offered to staff, the interventions provided to students, student discipline, and both short-term and long-term goals for the school.

Table 6

Overview of Research Questions, Conceptual Framework Principles, and Data Sources

Research Questions	Conceptual Framework Principles	Essential Elements	Data Sources
How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students?	The comprehensive and strategic adoption of holistic approaches to problem solving and creation of opportunities for students to learn in highly innovative environments	Fosters student-focused, highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures	Interviews, CSIP review, 30-60-90 Day Plan review, Document Analysis

Table 6 Cont.

Research Questions	Conceptual Framework Principles	Essential Elements	Data Sources
How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership?	Teachers, counselors, school leaders, and students act as a collective in knowledge co-construction	Holds educators accountable to high expectations	Interviews, CSIP review (for professional development work), School Report Card, Document Analysis
How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership?	Culturally competent educators are willing to share aspects of their own cultures with students to build relationships	Knowledgeable about and understands institutional history relative to issues of race and ethnicity	Interviews, Field Notes
How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership?	Culturally competent educators, in holistic settings, seek to know their students	Knowledgeable about self and society with regard to personal racial and ethnic bias	Interviews, Document Analysis
How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students?	Culturally competent educators break down silos between themselves, educators, and community constituents who may be helpful in understanding students' origins	Creates and sustains interdependent and relationship-based system	Interviews, CSIP review, 30-60-90 Day Plan review, Document Analysis
How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership?	Culturally competent educators act in a collective way to ensure school practices are socially just and equitable	Understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege	Interviews, School Report Card, Document Analysis

(Jones & Nichols, 2013)

Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis is iterative because it occurs simultaneously with data collection (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). As data was collected from interviews and document analysis, the researcher will engage in reflection and memoing to aid in making connections across sources of data (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). After the interviews, the researcher recorded a voice memo describing initial impressions from the interview; these memos were transcribed and stored with other interview data. Memoing enabled continual reflection on the data collected, what was seen, and what was learned

during the study. Yin (2009) posits the use of theoretical propositions as a quality approach to data analysis and does so for the following reasons:

1. the study propositions allow the researcher to conduct a comprehensive and focused analysis of the data;
2. the purpose, design, data collection, and methodology are based on the theoretical or conceptual framework; and,
3. alternate explanations can be defined and explored.

Interview responses and documents were analyzed both deductively and inductively by identifying significant statements. Data from the interviews was coded and analyzed, using Dedoose qualitative coding software, to identify and assign initial codes to significant statements and arrive at major themes to help understand the complexity of each case. Saldaña (2012) asserts that coding is not just labeling or identifying pertinent data; instead, it is a process of linking data to the overarching idea of the study and to other data in an iterative manner. The first cycle coding typologies that were utilized in this study were descriptive and in vivo coding. Descriptive coding was utilized to summarize the primary topic of key excerpts of data and to prompt additional questioning of the data. In vivo coding was used in conjunction with descriptive coding to communicate the exact words of study participants which might be central to answering the research questions. The second cycle coding typology utilized in this study was pattern coding. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) define pattern codes as “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p. 86). To this end, pattern coding was used to condense large amounts of data into smaller units to lay the foundation for cross-case analysis by identifying

common themes. Qualitative data often emphasize people's lived experiences and help to locate the meaning people ascribe to events. These data aid in connecting the events and structures of people's lives to the broader world around them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These themes were compared across the cases to arrive at the final meaning of the case with regard to implementing culturally responsive leadership and mitigating barriers to it.

Because the design of this study was guided by a conceptual framework, deductive coding was completed for the analysis of themes consistent with The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013), the conceptual framework for this study. Based upon the analysis of data, each principal was categorized in one of the four categories espoused by the continuum. Inductive coding was completed based upon analysis of interview transcripts and documents to give rise to data outside of the continuum which may be relevant to understanding the experiences and leadership work of the study participants. The identified significant statements were winnowed and thematized to create a summary of emerging themes. Dedoose qualitative coding software was used to code and decipher the collected data in several iterations. The repetition of words and phrases illuminated meanings and patterns across schools and principals. Themes were cross-checked against the conceptual framework for deductive accuracy (Patton, 2002; Yin, 2009).

Data Verification

Credibility, the accuracy of the description by the researcher, is a concern of any research study. Credibility involves establishing the results of the research as being credible and believable from the perspective of the participants, who are truly the only

ones who can judge the results as credible (Trochin, 2006). Therefore, this study utilized member checking to establish the credibility of the results. In seeking “the intellectual and emotional connections between the participants’ work and life” (Seidman, 2006, p. 18), a copy of the interview transcript was returned to each participant within two weeks of the interview. This approach to member-checking served as both an opportunity to validate the accuracy of the transcript and as an opportunity to engage principals in a meaningful, reflective dialogue for the purpose of eliciting details of how they implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to it in their schools. Trustworthiness was established through peer briefing with the other researchers who were involved in this capstone project.

An overarching aim of any research study is transferability, “the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings” (Trochin, 2006). The context of this study is clear: a large, urban school district in the southeast United States housing 18 of the state’s 27 Priority Schools. This Priority School status requires schools to implement a CSR model to quickly foster academic improvement. These 18 schools contain diverse student populations in terms of race and socioeconomic status. For this reason, purposeful sampling was utilized to secure a study sample reflective of this context. These schools’ contexts necessitate CSR being implemented in a culturally responsive manner. The results of this study are transferable to districts and schools possessing similar demographics and faced with a similar mandate to implement CSR to quickly improve student achievement.

Through personal memoing and reflective feedback from participants, the researcher addressed dependability. Because school contexts can change, memoing was

utilized to capture any changes and to discuss how these changes impact the approach of the study. This audit trail provided details about observed changes to those who review the study. Walking in tandem with dependability is the need for confirmability. Since researchers bring different perspectives to research studies, the results of this study needed to be confirmed by others (Trochin, 2006). Collected data was reviewed in an iterative manner utilizing first cycle and second cycle coding as well as deductive and inductive coding. Deductive coding was completed for the analysis of themes consistent with the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013), the conceptual framework for this study. Construct validity, defined as using multiple sources of data to establish a chain of evidence, will increase the trustworthiness of this study (Yin, 2009). All data sources were used to triangulate data since the use of multiple sources of data and evidence strengthened this study as well as aided in understanding how the researcher reached the conclusions of the study (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Reporting Results

The *Analysis* section of this study in the capstone focuses on reporting the results of the study. Data from the interviews were coded and analyzed, using Dedoose qualitative coding software, to identify and assign initial codes to significant statements. These identified significant statements were winnowed and thematized to create a summary of emerging themes to help understand the complexity of each case. Each case is reported separately with regard to the following: codes, significant statements/themes, and overall continuum placement. Analysis continues through second cycle coding, allowing these themes and continuum placements to be compared across cases to analyze

for similarities and differences. This drives the conclusion of the final meaning of the overall case with regard to the implementation of culturally responsive leadership in Priority Schools and mitigating barriers presented to this style of leadership.

Ethical Considerations

The protection of study participants was a priority during this study. When participants agreed to participate, they were provided with and be required to sign an informed consent document (Appendix 2B) which outlined the scope and purpose of the study. Anonymity was offered as study participants and schools are identified by pseudonyms to ensure the confidentiality of the participants and their schools. Confidentiality of data was ensured as the researcher was the only individual with access to the data. Hard copy documents were stored in a locked file at the researcher's residence. Digital audio recordings, electronic notes, and electronic files were secured on the researcher's personal computer and password protected with a password only known by the researcher.

Researcher Positionality

It should be noted that the author of this study has worked directly in Priority Schools within the same school district from which the sample is drawn. The researcher has served in various educational administration roles in six different schools over twelve years. Four of those schools were Priority Schools in the district of focus. Peshkin (1988) plainly states, "one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed. It is insistently reset in both the research and nonresearch aspects of our life" (p. 17). Due to the direct experiences with work in Priority Schools, it was necessary for the researcher to bracket personal assumptions by making them explicit through the maintenance of a

reflexive journal and discussions with colleagues throughout the course of the study. Clearly, the researcher holds specific beliefs about what work should be undertaken in urban, Priority Schools and about the need for culturally responsive leadership in these schools. The researcher minimized personal bias by bracketing positionality through memoing after each interview and journaling throughout the study as a method to limit bias and increase objectivity.

Summary

This multi-site qualitative comparative case study explores how elementary, middle, and high school principals in urban Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership. This study seeks to understand how principals challenged with enacting CSR in diverse, urban schools lead in a culturally responsive manner and mitigate barriers to this leadership approach. To answer the study's two research questions, data was collected from multiple sources including interviews, school report cards, mission and vision statements, Comprehensive School Improvement Plans (CSIPs), 30-60-90 Day Improvement Plans, and reflective feedback. The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) was used as a conceptual framework to guide deductive data analysis. Participant interviews and documents were coded and analyzed, using Dedoose qualitative coding software, to identify and assign initial codes to significant statements and arrive at major themes to help understand the complexity of each case. Themes were compared across cases to arrive at the final meaning of the case and identify where each principal stands on the continuum with regard to implementing culturally responsive leadership and mitigating barriers to this leadership approach.

STUDY TWO: ANALYSIS

Only by wrestling with the conditions of the problem at hand, "seeking and finding his own way out, does he think... If he cannot devise his own solution... and find his own way out he will not learn." – Dewey (1961, p. 160)

In this section of the capstone, I report the results of the study in relation to principals' level of implementation of culturally responsive leadership. Data for each case is presented individually through the lens of the essential elements of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013):

- School leader fosters student-focused, highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures.
- School leader holds educators accountable to high expectations.
- School leader is knowledgeable about and understands institutional history relative to issues of race and ethnicity.
- School leader is knowledgeable about self and society with regard to personal racial and ethnic bias.
- School leader creates and sustains interdependent and relationship-based system.
- School leader understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege.

This study focused on the intersection of school leadership and the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in several public schools labeled as

Priority Schools (formerly known as Persistently Low Achieving Schools) that are engaged in comprehensive school reform (CSR). In essence, this leadership work is culturally responsive leadership in practice. Jones and Nichols (2013), authors of the conceptual framework for this study, posit a very clear definition of cultural competence, “acceptance of the sociopolitical, economic and historical experiences of different racial, ethnic and gender subgroups as legitimate experiences that have a profound influence on how people learn and achieve inside and outside of formal and informal education settings” (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 8-9). This comprehensive definition provides the foundation for The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum developed by Jones and Nichols (2013). This continuum categorizes leaders with regard to their level of implementation of culturally responsive leadership. The model categorizes leaders in two broad categories: *diversity leaders* and *culturally competent leaders*. “Diversity leaders” (broken down as *The Superficial Supervisor* and *The Minimalist Manager*) are defined as those who make symbolic gestures through initiatives that lack the ability to have a substantive impact on practice and culture. These leaders typically view students all the same, with no regard for cultural differences. “Culturally competent leaders” (broken down as *The Ardent Advocate* and *The Eco-systemic Leader*) are described as those who develop, implement, and sustain observable outcomes that reflect a significant level of cultural responsiveness in their schools (Jones & Nichols, 2013).

The goal of a culturally responsive school leader should be to reach the highest level of the continuum, *The Eco-systemic Leader*, since research shows that culturally responsive practices are more likely to occur in schools where principals engage in culturally responsive leadership and work to overcome the barriers that arise against it

(Bustamante et al., 2009). A clear need exists for school leaders to possess different skills, to champion an equity agenda, and to manage conflicting belief systems in such a way that consensus is reached for the benefit of the students their schools serve (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2015). While much has been researched and discussed about school leadership, “very little has been written on what effective leadership should look like in highly diverse racial and ethnic education settings” (Jones & Nichols, 2013, p. 111). This study sought to fill that gap by providing some data on what culturally responsive leadership looks like in practice.

Four principals were selected for focus in this study. All four lead diverse Priority Schools (at least 40% minority student population) with a significant number of students eligible for free and reduced price lunch (at least 40% of students). All four schools are making academic progress defined as meeting annual measurable objective (AMO) in at least one school year since being identified as a Priority School. All four principals espouse a belief that all students can and should be academically successful regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic status. Such is increasingly possible as each school has recently met AMO. Table 7 provides some descriptive data of the four principals and the schools they lead. Other descriptive data is presented in conjunction with the discussion of results.

The researcher would be shortsighted to believe that this research study did not carry ethical considerations. In fact, any research endeavor carries ethical considerations. Goodson and Sikes (2001) state, “research per se is an inherently political activity in that it has a bearing on how human beings make sense of their world” (p. 89). In light of this understanding, several measures were taken to address ethical considerations during this

study. The principals in this study shared elements of their personal stories and professional practice with the researcher. Because of the nature of this study, “confidentiality and anonymity are crucial because their breach could result in harm to the participants” (Gates, Church, & Crowe, 2001, p. 157). A lengthy narrative describing each principal participating in the study and the schools they lead has not been provided. In an effort to preserve confidentiality and protect these principals from harm, each principal and school has been given a pseudonym. At times, either is referred to directly by these pseudonyms. By way of descriptive narrative, the following, all-inclusive description is offered. All four principals are leaders within a large, urban, public school district in the Southeastern United States. As noted in Table 7, two participants serve at the high school level, one at the middle school level, and one at the elementary school level. All four principals have been in education for more than 15 years and have served as head principals for less than 5 years at their present schools. These principals and schools are referred to by the following pseudonyms: Principal Anderson of Lakeridge High School, Principal Brackens of Forest Grove High School, Principal Clark of Southridge Middle School, and Principal Drake of Johnstone Elementary School.

Table 7

Descriptive Data for Principals and Schools

Prin.	Gender	Race	Level	Priority Label	AMO Achieved	Enrollment	% Minority	% ECE	% FRL
Anderson	M	W	High	2010	2016	783	76	22	84
Brackens	M	W	High	2011	2016	1080	66	25	82
Clark	F	W	Middle	2011	2016	414	42	16	88
Drake	F	AA	Elem.	2013	2016	345	87	10	100

Interview responses and documents were analyzed both deductively and inductively by identifying significant statements. Data from the interviews were coded and analyzed, using Dedoose qualitative coding software, to identify and assign initial codes to significant statements and arrive at major themes to help understand the complexity of each case. Saldaña (2012) asserts that coding is not just labeling or identifying pertinent data; instead, it is a process of linking data to the overarching idea of the study and to other data in an iterative manner. The first cycle coding typologies utilized in this study were descriptive and In vivo coding. Descriptive coding was utilized to summarize the primary topic of key excerpts of data and to prompt additional questioning of the data. Saldaña (2012) describes descriptive coding as summarizing a thought or excerpt in a word or short phrase to establish the basic topic. In vivo coding was used in conjunction with descriptive coding to communicate the exact words of study participants which might be central to answering the research questions. In coding interview transcripts and documents, these first cycle coding methods were applied. The second cycle coding typology utilized in this study was pattern coding. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) define pattern codes as “explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation” (p. 86). To this end, pattern coding was used to condense large amounts of data into smaller units to lay the foundation for cross-case analysis by identifying common themes among the cases. These resulting themes are discussed in the cross-case analysis because these themes were consistent among participants (as demonstrated by a code co-occurrence analysis) and were correlated to the essential elements of the conceptual framework in order to arrive at the final meaning of the case with regard to implementing culturally responsive

leadership and mitigating barriers to it. Qualitative data often emphasize people's lived experiences and help to locate the meaning people ascribe to events. These data aid in connecting the events and structures of people's lives to the broader world around them (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Because the design of this study is guided by a conceptual framework, deductive analysis of themes was completed consistent with The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013), the conceptual framework for this study. Based upon the analysis of data, each principal was categorized in one of the four categories proffered by the continuum. Dedoose qualitative coding software was used to code and decipher the collected data in several iterations. The repetition of words and phrases illuminated meanings and patterns across principals, schools, and relevant documents. The use of several data analysis tools, including the code cloud and code co-occurrence analysis, were extremely beneficial for analysis. Themes were then cross-checked against the conceptual framework for deductive accuracy (Patton, 2002; Yin 2009).

What follows is a report of findings. Findings for each principal are presented based upon their responses to interview questions (see Appendix 2A) and how these responses correlate to the essential elements of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013). The discussion of each case finishes with a placement on the continuum assigned to each principal based upon the data collected during the study. At the conclusion of the discussion of the cases, a cross-case analysis is offered to explore how elementary, middle, and high school principals in urban Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership comparatively. This study sought to

discover how principals challenged with enacting comprehensive school reform (CSR) in urban schools lead in a culturally responsive manner through two research questions: (a) How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership? and (b) How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students?

Individual Case Results

Principal Anderson

Principal Anderson of Lakeridge High School describes *cultural responsiveness* in terms of understanding the backgrounds of individuals from different cultures. In specific relation to the students his school serves, he states that cultural responsiveness is about “understanding the heritage of the culture, understanding the current success of the culture, struggles of the culture, strife of a culture in order to help create a realistic advancement opportunity.” He views his primary role as a culturally responsive leader as helping students set goals for the future that are realistic within the context of their culture. Principal Anderson discusses *cultural competence* as educators possessing the skillset necessary to be culturally responsive and help students breakdown barriers to their success. Our interview was conducted at an off-campus location.

Fosters Student-Focused, Highly Diverse and Inclusive Decision-Making Structures

Principal Anderson defines his leadership approach as pragmatic, where he seeks to capitalize on people’s strengths and provide resources needed to ensure success. In his words, “communication is key” to ensure everyone is on the same page and working toward a common goal. To ensure synergy in problem solving, he regularly guides his team through an analysis of barriers to success. This began during his first year as

principal when the leadership team examined state accountability data and identified Barriers To School Improvement (BTSI). This brainstorm was the genesis of the school improvement plan which identified specific, comprehensive practices and strategies to address the identified barriers. The result was a 120-page improvement plan designed to help the school successfully navigate its identified barriers to success. To provide students with opportunities to learn in highly innovative environments, Principal Anderson encourages his staff to build personal relationships with students, getting to know them and their individual stories on a deeper level. Principal Anderson actively pursues parent involvement, although it has been allusive at times. He has sought help from his school district in establishing and maintaining an active Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) that will help provide a parent voice in school decisions. He also seeks to hire staff that are reflective of his student population. In a school where the student population is majority minority, this is a significant challenge; only 12% of the school staff is of a minority background while 76% of the student population is from a minority background of some sort. Still, he seeks to do this in hopes that students will connect more to the academic curriculum and enjoy unique academic experiences. At Lakeridge High School, Principal Anderson has led the implementation of a behavioral support structure called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). The goal of PBIS is to reduce the amount of time students are removed from classroom instructional because of poor behavior and to increase students' connection to the academic curriculum. He emphasizes that even with the implementation of PBIS, if students do not feel a connection to staff and see a connection between academic content and their future goals, students will not be successful.

Holds Educators Accountable to High Expectations

Lakeridge High School has changed some since it was first identified as a Priority School. The student population has fluctuated between 700 and 900 students. Still, the demographics have not changed: 70% African-American, 24% White, 3% Hispanic, 3% other, 84% Free/Reduced Lunch, 22% ECE (special needs). Additionally, 20% of the student population is transient, meaning they move out of the school's attendance area at some point during the school year. With this significant level of diversity, Principal Anderson still holds high expectations for students. He expects all students to "leave Lakeridge college-ready, career-experienced, goal-driven, and reality certain." The school mission is to graduate all students prepared for a transition to college and allowing each student to reach his/her educational and career goals. These are high expectations for an ethnically and economically diverse population. Principal Anderson cites the greatest challenge in this regard as simply educating students: allowing students to choose the path ahead and to push through their lack of motivation by helping them set goals. He says simply, "You see a lot of students who are willing to just... just be." But when students are motivated and forge ahead to achieve their goals, Principal Anderson says he then enjoys the great reward of seeing "the light go on" for students.

Knowledgeable About/Understands Institutional History with Issues of Race/Ethnicity

Principal Anderson works to balance the ambitious school mission with a desire to work with students individually. He unequivocally states, "Every child must be approached a little bit differently based on their individual needs, which could include their background and culture." To meet individual students' needs and address the academic challenges students of ethnic backgrounds sometimes face, Principal Anderson

engages the broader community. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Advisory Board is actively engaged in providing guidance to career pathway programs in the school. A talent development academy, part of the school district's implementation of the Ford Next Generation Learners initiative, was implemented in school year 2017-2018 and provides a best-practices framework for the implementation of smaller learning communities and career pathways. A mentoring program for African-American students has been established also. While it is not highly structured, it takes a Big Brothers/Big Sisters-like approach in connecting successful African-American alumni with current African-American students to prove that academic success is possible. Employing these community resources is designed to help students see that they can achieve the mission of the school. Principal Anderson communicates this plainly when he says, "When belief combined with a goal is set in place, they're more likely to achieve." He expresses the need for district support in identifying professional learning opportunities and professional resources to help forward this work. While he is working to connect the broader community to the school, targeted help in identifying and providing professional development to help overcome historical issues with race would be both practical and beneficial.

Knowledgeable about Self and Society with Regard to Personal Racial/Ethnic Bias

Principal Anderson readily admits that an area of growth in his leadership is effectively engaging parents in the school community. This includes parent involvement in decision making as well as their presence at parent nights designed to communicate academic information. Parent involvement has been low at Lakeridge High School, but this lack of involvement is not for lack of trying. In fact, this lack of parental

involvement in the school is personally deflating for Principal Anderson, “It feels like every ounce of energy I have put into it [parent involvement] has failed.” At one point, the school had a functional PTSA, but it was school-run because of poor parent involvement. Parents offered critical feedback saying, “You don’t understand our culture.” Principal Anderson’s response was to offer an invitation to parents to participate at a higher degree, to lead collaboratively. As a result, he was able to establish a parent board of four members, but eventually parent involvement waned again – presumably because he does not understand their culture.

Because he knows that he does not fully understand the cultures of diverse students, Principal Anderson focuses effort on getting to know the students at Lakeridge High School. He has come to learn, “You’ve got to individualize; you’ve got to know every kid because the one thing that matters most, at least in my eyes, in a diverse population is relationship.” He pushes his staff to do the same: get to know the students they serve as well as their individual stories. Principal Anderson interviews potential staff members with the lack of staff diversity in the back of his mind. He knows it is important to have a staff that reflects the diversity of his student population but struggles to attract diverse candidates to a Priority School. While he understands some things about himself very well, he still has room for growth with regard to understanding the racial and ethnic bias facing his school community.

Creates and Sustains Interdependent and Relationship-Based System

Principal Anderson actively works to breakdown silos that exist between the school and its stakeholders. The challenge of parental support and involvement weighs heavily on Principal Anderson as he senses he could have more traction with achieving

the school's mission if he had more parental support, "The elephant in the room is parental support and understanding vision or even what success looks like for their child." In response, Principal Anderson often demonstrates his personal cultural competence in individual interactions with students, which serve as a model for other staff members. He works to raise the cultural competence level of his staff as well as their awareness of the need for culturally responsive practices through this modeling and by encouraging teachers to understand the stories of each student. A home-school coordinator has been hired to help address truancy issues. Staff have been trained in PBIS to help them better address student behavior issues and keep students in class to bolster academic success. Staff have received professional development on poverty and its impact on student learning. Staff have received professional development on project-based learning and creating real-world experiences to engage students in deeper learning. No professional learning has been dedicated to building cultural competence and/or responsiveness in the staff at Lakeridge; Principal Anderson fears that it would not be impactful unless a staff member acknowledged that they have difficulty understanding diverse cultures and need training to be more culturally responsive. While some silos have been targeted, those built to thwart achieving cultural responsiveness have not.

School Leader Understands Issues of Equity, Social Justice, and Social Privilege

Since being identified as a Priority School, some discipline policies have been changed. Disciplinary consequences are applied on a progressive discipline structure. The school suspends students, primarily, for two infractions: fighting and profanity to staff. For other infractions, in-school consequences are applied including providing additional supports for students (i.e., mental health counseling, anger management, etc.).

Attendance and behavior are the biggest barriers to student achievement.

Disproportionality exists in the areas of truancy (with White students) and discipline (with African-American students). In active pursuit of equitable practice at Lakeridge High School, an equity policy was drafted and enacted; it is modeled after the school district's equity policy. This policy has not been widely publicized to school stakeholders, however, and is not shaping current practice. Therefore, practices that may be inequitable and promote the disparities of social privilege are still in effect.

Continuum Placement

Principal Anderson's practice reaches the level of *The Ardent Advocate* under the category of "culturally competent leaders" (Jones & Nichols, 2013). This placement is one level shy of the goal of *The Eco-systemic Leader*. Principal Anderson exhibits an understanding of cultural competence and its importance to the health of the school. However, he lacks the leadership skills necessary to shift the organization to fully embrace culturally competent work. He is eager about self-improvement but has yet to commit to such improvement for his staff as well as commit to building a stronger awareness of racial/ethnic bias (both personally and in the school). He has led the passage of a diversity policy. However, the policy has not taken root and is not impacting current practice because it has not been publicized. Lakeridge High School has the ability to move forward and become a culturally responsive school, but this hinges on the willingness of Principal Anderson to intentionally shift the school's practice in this direction.

Principal Brackens

Principal Brackens of Forest Grove High School defines *cultural competence* as having an intimate knowledge and understanding of the students the school serves. He extends that understanding to whatever cultures exist in the school as well, be it nationality, religion, or race, and how they impact student success. Principal Brackens discusses *cultural responsiveness* as not only understanding the various cultures in a school and how students from those cultures learn but also responding to and ensuring that staff implement strategies that are necessary for students from diverse cultures to be successful. He states, “I believe oftentimes it [the term cultural responsiveness] is used, especially with teachers and leaders, as what you’re not doing as opposed to how do we give teachers the tools that they need in order to implement those things.” Our interview was conducted at an off-campus location.

Fosters Student-Focused, Highly Diverse and Inclusive Decision-Making Structures

Principal Brackens defines his leadership style as distributed. He seeks to attract, retain, and hold accountable high quality staff members. He sees his role as the leader as “getting them all pointed in the right direction.” Principal Brackens works to strike a balance between giving people opportunities to complete work and micromanaging them as they complete assigned tasks. To prevent from taking over delegated tasks, Principal Brackens encourages and motivates staff to do well with the work assigned to them and works to ensure he has given staff the correct responsibilities in relation to their skill sets. He recognizes that his success and the success of the school are inextricably bound to the success of individuals, “If I was gonna be successful as a leader, I had to enable other people, really distribute the leadership.” Principal Brackens works to allocate financial

resources to support classroom instruction and Extended School Services (ESS) to ensure students have extra academic support as needed. He also works to allocate instructional resources, specifically resource teachers, to provide interventions to struggling students and support students' learning throughout the school.

Holds Educators Accountable to High Expectations

Forest Grove High School's student population has remained steady around 1100 students. The school has had roughly the same demographics since first being identified as a Priority School: 49% African-American, 34% White, 11% Hispanic, 6% other, 82% Free/Reduced Lunch, 25% ECE (special needs). Additionally, the school boasts a large number of diverse ESL students with cultures and backgrounds from all over the world. The Free/Reduced Lunch figure has increased by 6-7% since the school was identified as a Priority School. Principal Brackens communicates high expectations for students through the school mission: "To inspire, create, and foster authentic learning opportunities that maximize student engagement." He expects students to come to school to learn and to be engaged in learning while they are present. He believes that all students can learn when necessary supports are in place. Support has been given to staff, by way of professional development, to ensure students can meet this high expectation. Staff have received training in project-based learning and in the implementation of standards-based grading, designed to allow students to demonstrate what they know and their applied knowledge in an authentic manner. Students who do not demonstrate standards mastery are provided interventions to help them learn and master unacquired content. Principal Brackens cites the greatest challenge in this regard as the high need of his students. He says, "When one out of every four of your students has some type of

special learning plan, whether it be ESL or ECE [it's challenging]. I also believe that not every single free and reduced [lunch] student is created equally, even though as an education system, we pile them in together.” Despite this challenge, Principal Brackens notes that he has seen fewer issues with racism, sexism, sexual identity, and xenophobia at Forest Grove High School than other schools he has led. With these challenges not present, staff members are able to hold students to a high standard with fewer distractions. Principal Brackens, in turn, is able to hold staff to a high expectation as well.

Knowledgeable About/Understands Institutional History with Issues of Race/Ethnicity

Upon being appointed as principal of Forest Grove High School after his predecessor's removal by the state, Principal Brackens immediately removed one academic track from the school. The removal of the honors track now leaves two academic tracks: general and Advance Placement. This was done to strategically elevate the academic expectations of and for minority students. Recognizing the challenge students from diverse cultures have in connecting to the academic curriculum, Principal Brackens shifted the school to an academy model wherein every student is enrolled in an academy based upon their Career and Technical Education (CTE) program. Core content instruction is provided around these CTE programs. Because some methods of assessment have not been fair to students from minority groups, Principal Brackens shifted the school to a standards-based grading approach to assessment. The academic expectation is that teachers teach using a project-based approach and assess students on what they know and are able to do in relation to specific course standards (standards-based grading).

With this academy structure comes the work of helping students build social capital as they are connected to community partners through their selected CTE programs. Each CTE program maintains an advisory council of outside partners who seek to advise the school on the direction of the program. These advisors also support students by advising them as they complete course projects. These advisors provide job shadowing and employment opportunities for students as well. This engagement between community partners and diverse students provides them the best possible training for the workforce and extends social capital to them by connecting them to gatekeepers in their fields of interest. Because minority students often lack social capital, this CTE connection can be critical to the future success of these students.

Knowledgeable about Self and Society with Regard to Personal Racial/Ethnic Bias

Principal Brackens cites parent involvement as a significant area of growth for Forest Grove High School. He explains it this way, “It feels like spinning your wheels in the mud... like the more effort and attention you give to it, you will get minimal results – not no results – minimal results.” In his second year as principal, Principal Brackens says that he tackled the issue of low parent involvement head-on. He sent a weekly newsletter to parents. He hosted several parent nights for parents to gain information about the academic curriculum. He had teachers speak directly to students and parents about the new standards-based grading approach. With all of that effort, he saw very little impact. As he continues to search for the answers to the conundrum of parent involvement in his school, he questions his cultural understanding of what parents want and need. He has deduced that perhaps he needs to take parent nights to the neighborhoods where his students’ families live instead of asking them to come to the school.

Recognizing that he does not fully understand the desires of parents of students from diverse cultures or of the cultures themselves, Principal Brackens focuses his effort on building a school culture conducive to teaching and learning. He works to help teachers and students build mutual respect for the academic environment, “Number one: be in class. Number two: teaching an understanding of what a positive academic climate is... you’re gonna be respectful of the teachers and the teachers are gonna be respectful of you.” Ultimately, it is about building pride in the work that is accomplished collectively as a school. He states, “That is the type of community feel I want, that honor and pride in what we do in the school.”

Creates and Sustains Interdependent and Relationship-Based System

Principal Brackens works to remove the barriers that exist between the school and its stakeholders. The challenge of a lack of parental involvement looms heavily in the school. In response, Principal Brackens focuses on making Forest Grove High School the best school it can be. He characterizes it as every student there having “the exact same opportunity to be successful as another student in the school.” In essence, he is driven by seeking to level the playing field to ensure all students can be successful. He achieves this by allocating financial and instructional resources to support classroom instruction, Extended School Services (ESS), and the use of resource teachers to provide additional support to students struggling to master course standards. He works to raise the cultural responsiveness of his staff by hiring more staff members who are reflective of the diverse student population. And while this is an earnest desire, Principal Brackens readily admits that Forest Grove High School is a difficult-to-staff school,

[Hire a more diverse staff?] I would love to. In complete honesty, it's hard enough just to staff Forest Grove High School, period. We've had vacancies all

year long. Unfortunately, two were a little bit at the hands of our HR Department, but we're not getting candidates for many positions, period, much less minority candidates. But I've expressed the need to central office trying to get some support with that, and it's definitely something we've identified as something we would like to improve and get better with. We've hired two teachers already this year [school year 2016-2017], one being a minority candidate, so we're trying, but it's one of those we feel there's unfortunately not a lot of control we have over it.

Staff have been trained, by the district, in some Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) practices to help them better address student behavior issues and keep students in class. Staff have received extensive professional development on project-based learning in order to more deeply engage students. The structure for this training was to use the support of an outside entity, The Buck Institute, to train twelve staff members who would then train the rest of the school's teachers. This training also facilitated a relationship with The Buck Institute for ongoing support with regard to effective implementation of project-based learning. No professional learning has been dedicated to building cultural competence and/or responsiveness in the staff at Forest Grove. Principal Brackens hopes the district will provide cultural responsiveness training in the same vein as what was provided for project-based learning instead of the current approach of mini-workshops that identify problems but do not help to generate solutions.

School Leader Understands Issues of Equity, Social Justice, and Social Privilege

The discipline policies at Forest Grove High School run in line with the academic expectations of being in class and mutual respect existing between teachers and students. Suspensions occur when warranted; but, Forest Grove is one of the few schools where the number of suspensions of White students is higher than the actual percentage of White students in the school. In the end, the focus is on student learning. Principal Brackens believes that if students are in class and are well engaged, discipline problems will

dissipate. He believes that giving students every opportunity to learn is the most equitable practice a school can undertake, “We’re not gonna have deadlines on assessments. We’re gonna reassess as many times as the student needs to be successful. All grades are gonna be based upon their proficiency on standards. We will provide as many interventions and as many opportunities as it takes to do that.” While there is no official school policy to guide cultural responsiveness, Principal Brackens is strongly guided by the desire to ensure that every student at Forest Grove High School has an equal opportunity for success as any other student in the school.

Continuum Placement

Principal Brackens’ practice reaches the level of *The Minimalist Manager* under the category of “diversity leaders” (Jones & Nichols, 2013). This placement is two levels shy of the goal of *The Eco-systemic Leader*. He communicates the importance of cultural diversity in schools but confuses diversity with cultural competence. Efforts with regard to diversity are not strongly connected to school performance in relation to student achievement or staff efficacy. The diversity efforts in the school are more superficial than substantive and leave Forest Grove High School unchanged with regard to cultural responsiveness.

Principal Clark

Principal Clark of Southridge Middle School discusses *cultural competence* and *cultural responsiveness* in an intertwined manner. She discusses them as an acute awareness of the experiences that all students bring into school with them – specifically, home situations or culturally unique situations which differ from her culture. This awareness is necessary to heighten awareness to her own biases toward different cultures

so that she can circumvent them in her practice. She stresses the need to evaluate students' cultures without judgement saying, "We're not going to make a judgement call on whether we think that's good... we're going to acknowledge that's what it is and that we have a level of uncomfortableness with that because that's not the way I was raised." This absence of judgement is necessary so that students, and their unique cultures, can truly be embraced by the school community. Our interview was conducted at an off-campus location.

Fosters Student-Focused, Highly Diverse and Inclusive Decision-Making Structures

Principal Clark defines her leadership approach as servant leadership, wherein she works to meet the needs of the school based upon the individual person and situation:

I believe that my job is to serve others. That's going to look different at different points; but at the root of everything I do, it comes back to some of my core values and my own core beliefs. I truly believe that as the leader of the building, it's my job to do whatever I need to do in order for our teachers to be successful because if our teachers aren't successful, then our students don't have a shot at being successful.

Leading with service in mind is what fosters a cooperative staff who can work with students from diverse backgrounds. Principal Clark works to model appropriate relationships for her staff, especially interactions with students. This modeling also includes building an awareness of one's own personal biases, "Don't be afraid to look at your biases. It doesn't mean you're a bad person... I know I had biases. I've got to face them and recognize that they exist so my bias doesn't get in the way of helping." In order to foster an inclusive school environment, Principal Clark led the staff in identifying their core values as a school. These core beliefs express the desire to see students become lifelong learners; to teach to the whole child, through relevant and engaging instruction; to be student-centered and culturally responsive; to set high expectations for all students;

to provide a safe physical and learning environment for every student; to provide a voice for stakeholders in decision-making; and to foster respect for one's self and the school community. The staff at Southridge Middle School regularly review these core beliefs and check to see if they are meeting them.

Additionally, Principal Clark sets the focus of each day on student learning through her morning announcements. In this specific announcement, repeated each day, Principal Clark details what living up to those core values means for students:

opportunity creates personal responsibility; walk with a purpose in the hallways, keep hands and bodies to one's self; speak to each other with kind words and friendly tones; and, remember that great decisions are intentional and have a positive impact on others.

This announcement is a reinforcement of the positive welcome and atmosphere students experience as they disembark the school bus, exit vehicles, and enter the front doors and cafeteria each morning. From the minute they enter the building, a clear centrality is placed on students. This focus continues with academic work as students receive targeted support in content they have not mastered. The WIN program was created to reward students who are performing well academically by allowing them to participate in different activities during the school day (i.e., archery, video production, etc.).

Conversely, students who are struggling academically receive targeted interventions.

Once the areas of struggle are sufficiently improved, these students become eligible to participate in the unique activities of the WIN program.

Recognizing the challenge this Priority School faced with student behavior when she assumed leadership, Principal Clark led the implementation of a behavioral support structure called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). While this is a

district supported approach, Principal Clark pushed the school to deepen this work through the implementation of “PROWL Lessons” to clearly teach students the behavior expectations of the school. The goal of PBIS is to reduce the amount of time students are removed from classroom instruction because of behavior and to increase students’ connection to the academic curriculum. Principal Clark also sees the purpose of PBIS as helping students build the self-regulation skills necessary to avoid disciplinary issues. When students make poor disciplinary choices, restorative practices are used to address misbehavior; Southridge Middle School is a restorative practices model middle school in its district. This approach to student discipline forces students to acknowledge their victim, hear how their choices made the victim feel, and reach a better understanding about both their choices and their victim. All of these actions and systems demonstrate a clear effort to ensure the school is student-focused and inclusive in decision-making.

Holds Educators Accountable to High Expectations

Southridge Middle School has maintained the same demographics since first being identified as a Priority School: 25% African-American, 12% Hispanic, 5% Other, 60% White, 88% Free/Reduced Lunch, 16.5% ECE (special needs), 92% of students are classified in a GAP area. Additionally, 20% of the student population is transient, meaning they move to another school at some point during the school year. Southridge Middle School offers no magnet programs aside from the Advance Program which all schools offer; it is a complete resides school with territory extending to the neighboring southern county. Even with 42% of the student population coming from diverse backgrounds, Principal Clark holds high expectations for students. She views the purpose of education as producing students who are both lifelong learners and productive

members of society. In order to achieve this core belief, students must be actively engaged in classroom instruction. The first step here is appropriate behavior and meeting school expectations. In this sense, the “PROWL Lessons,” which are used to clearly teach students the behavior expectations of the school, are critically important.

While students have commented, in a school-district produced video, that they appreciate the diversity in their school, amalgamating a broad cross section of students has not been without incident. Principal Clark recounted a situation which occurred during the recent presidential election. Immediately following the election of President Trump, two Muslim girls were verbally bullied by several White male students saying, "Trump's going to make sure you're kicked out of this country! You're getting ready to get kicked out of this country!" The verbal bullying escalated to one young man pulling one of the young lady's hijabs off of her head. A restorative practices approach was used to address the situation and to foster an understanding in these young men of the significance of the religion and the hijab as well as how their actions made the young lady feel. When the restorative circle was complete, both White male students conveyed shame for what they had done and apologized to the young lady. For Principal Clark, “That was a win because neither one of them have done it again.” Through this conversation, it became clear that these young men are reared in homes where misogyny and xenophobia are tolerated. Still the expectation for school was clear: as students, you will demonstrate respect for self, the school, and the community.

Knowledgeable About/Understands Institutional History with Issues of Race/Ethnicity

Principal Clark works to make the school's core beliefs come to life by showcasing for students what success is. She works to bring in guest speakers from all

ethnic backgrounds to speak to what can be accomplished with hard work. Because, historically, students of color have not performed well academically at Southridge Middle School, Principal Clark works to help students see productive adults as a model of success – not necessarily those making a great deal of money but those experiencing fulfillment in life. In bringing in these individuals, she is careful to show “the diversity in ethnicity and now, this year, being really intentional to make sure I bring in women as well, not just successful men, so to make sure that I'm hitting everybody.” A new ethnic concern has emerged with the election of the new president as Hispanic students have voiced concerns about the direction of the county in light of the xenophobic rhetoric of the presidential campaign. Hispanic students ask staff members if they are Trump supporters in order to gauge teachers’ level of acceptance of their culture. This reinforces the need for Principal Clark to bring individuals from all ethnic backgrounds in to talk with students about being productive members of society.

Understanding parents’ perspectives on the school is an important piece of understanding the institutional history with regard to issues of race and ethnicity. Principal Clark believes that community and parent involvement are vital keys to success for a school, but she has struggled to mobilize both at Southridge Middle School. She says, “I believe the outside community needs to be involved... the achievement trajectory could be higher than [it] is had I let that be a focus when we started and really tried to engage with parents in an authentic manner.” Because of the academic and behavioral needs of the school, community and parent involvement were not an immediate focus during Principal Clark’s first year. She decided to focus in-house first with behavior management through PBIS implementation and academic supports through the WIN

program. This work is designed to level the field so all students have an opportunity at academic success.

Knowledgeable about Self and Society with Regard to Personal Racial/Ethnic Bias

Principal Clark freely admits that self-examination of personal biases is important for any educator. In an effort to model such introspection for her staff, Principal Clark reflects on her biases and actively works to set them aside in order to operate in the best interest of the students she serves. She works to understand the backgrounds from which her students come: a diverse school population with 88% of students living in poverty. She understands the instructional implications that come with such status and actively seeks to mitigate the emerging challenges.

Even with this effort, Principal Clark readily admits that effectively engaging parents and the broader community in the life of Southridge Middle School is an area of growth in her leadership. She freely admits, “The biggest thing that we have struggled with has been to get our parents plugged in. That has been a conundrum; I mean it's been a barrier we have not been able to figure out yet.” This parent involvement includes both being active in decision making as well as being present at parent nights. Parent involvement has been low, historically. In response, Principal Clark has hired a home/school coordinator – an African-American woman – whose sole job is to build relationships with parents and link them to the school. In building these relationships, Principal Clark hopes to ascertain what will draw parents into the school and determine what the parents need from the school. Because her personal efforts have not been successful, Principal Clark has secured a gatekeeper to help connect parents to the

broader school community. This would not have occurred without a significant level of self-awareness and reflection.

Creates and Sustains Interdependent and Relationship-Based System

Principal Clark is committed to building a relationship-based system which fosters the interdependence of school stakeholders. The challenge of low parental involvement is present as Principal Clark makes decisions about the direction of Southridge Middle School. She continues to look for ways to better connect parents into the life of the school. With parental involvement waning, Principal Clark focuses on strongly connecting students to the academic curriculum. Southridge Middle School utilizes the Bobcats Learning After School Time (BLAST) to provide extra academic support to students. The WIN program is designed to provide in-time interventions to students struggling to master the academic curriculum. PBIS is used to help students build the self-regulation skills necessary to avoid disciplinary trouble. And restorative circles are used to address behavior issues and build a greater sense of understanding and acceptance among students. Principal Clark has worked to build an interdependent system that will support students and help them realize success.

Principal Clark also works to coach teachers to be more culturally responsive. She models culturally responsive interactions for teachers and encourages them to reflect upon their personal biases so they may bracket them in their professional practice. She also seeks to hire a more diverse staff, recognizing that students need to see people who look like them delivering classroom instruction. Currently, 14% of the teachers at Southridge Middle School are minority – with only African-Americans represented – in a school where 42% of the student population comes from any number of diverse ethnic

minority backgrounds. Principal Clark is actively involved in district-level teacher recruitment efforts to attract more diverse teachers to the district and school.

School Leader Understands Issues of Equity, Social Justice, and Social Privilege

Since being identified as a Priority School, major changes have occurred in student discipline. When Southridge Middle School was first identified as a Priority School, the student population was 400 students, and they comprised 800 days of suspension in one school year. Today, enrollment sits at around 415 students, and they comprise 160 days of suspension – an 80% decrease in suspensions. Aside from that, disproportionality in suspensions was large between students of color and White students. Today, the disproportionality is almost zero. To what is this significant change attributed? In part, PBIS has helped to keep students in class and teach them self-regulation to avoid disciplinary situations. Principal Clark communicates clear expectations for student conduct on a daily basis; students now self-correct when failure to meet an expectation is brought to their attention. A restorative practices approach has been implemented to foster more understanding among students when a wrong is committed. Of key significance, however, is the training given to teachers. Teachers have been directed to work with a behavior coach and create classroom management plans. This has forced teachers to think through every possible behavior issue and formulate a neutral and culturally responsive response for that behavior. Teachers are building a greater awareness of their personal biases, recognizing that not all behavior is directed at them, and responding to behavior issues in a much more nuanced manner. While Southridge Middle School does not have a diversity or equity policy, it does

engage in the aforementioned practices to foster a more equitable school environment for all students.

Continuum Placement

Principal Clark's overall practice reaches the level of *The Ardent Advocate* with some aspects of *The Eco-systemic Leader* present. Both levels are housed under the category of "culturally competent leaders" (Jones & Nichols, 2013). This placement is one level shy of the goal of *The Eco-systemic Leader*. Principal Clark works to create and sustain an interdependent and relationship-based school structure. She possesses some knowledge about the institutional history relative to issues of race. She is knowledgeable and aware of herself and personal biases but not as aware about the community's biases which connect to the history of discrimination in society and education. She possesses a strong understanding of issues of equity and social justice in the educational system and works to hold educators accountable to high expectations. Under Principal Clark's leadership, Southridge Middle School possesses the ability to move forward and become a culturally responsive school, but this relies heavily on her ability to create a culturally competent workforce steeped in high levels of teacher efficacy and student achievement. This work is directly related to her leadership skillset and effectiveness as a school leader.

Principal Drake

Principal Drake discusses *cultural competence* and *cultural responsiveness* in relation to her experiences at Johnstone Elementary School. She defines cultural competence as "being in tune with who's present in front of you." She understands that while teachers may not live the lives of their students, they need to understand their lives.

She quickly advances into defining cultural responsiveness saying, “Then we adjust, and we teach to what's in front of us every single day... Your job is to be responsive to who they are and what they come from. That's me recognizing their cultures, how they're growing up.” She also speaks of the importance of not dismissing families and parents as what may be perceived as abnormal. It is incumbent upon educators to recognize where students come from and “show them a different way.”

Our interview was conducted in her office, which is a large space complete with a desk, conference table, private restroom, and a couch. The office is decorated in a nurturing manner: inspirational quotes are placed throughout the room. Her conference table is filled with elementary level reading books; she referred to these books later as she discussed sending a set home with a student to support parents in teaching him how to read. At another point in our interview, she intentionally pointed to the couch and nearby mini-refrigerator as she discussed how she often times offers her couch to a student who did not sleep the night before or goes into her mini-refrigerator to offer food to a student who is hungry. Principal Drake demonstrates through the items in and the structure of her office how she maintains a working knowledge of the socioeconomic and systemic challenges her students face. Additionally, throughout the office, she has posted pictures of prominent people of color important to the city in which her school district is situated. Through this action and her interview answers, she communicates a knowledge about self, society, and institutional history that are important to guide her decision-making.

Fosters Student-Focused, Highly Diverse and Inclusive Decision-Making Structures

Principal Drake defines her leadership approach as distributed leadership infused with coaching to help staff members improve their craft. She seeks to identify people's

strengths and assign responsibilities that correspond to those strengths. She functions with a high degree of straightforwardness describing her upfront nature as saying, “This is the lowdown. This is what's the real, and I need you to understand the real and then understand this is why we are doing this, this, this, and this.” She seeks to be honest with teachers about their place at Johnstone Elementary School because the school has had such a history of poor performance. In fact, when she applied for the principalship of this school, she admits that she knew the school was in a bad place. She says, “The data was bad because there had been a nine-year decline. But once you got in here, it was worse than bad if that is even to say. The culture... would've been a shock for anybody, just the culture.”

Because she is committed to seeing systemic change occur at Johnstone Elementary School, she works to set clear expectations for students through the acronym PAWS: positive attitude, acting responsibly, making wise choices, and keeping safety first. She repeats this expectation on both the morning and afternoon announcements and questions students throughout the day about their choices in meeting this expectation. Principal Drake’s most significant student-focused work comes as she advocates for services for her students. She is acutely aware of the trauma her students have experienced because of the violence they regularly witness in the community in which they live. As a result, she has secured adjunct support services from two different community agencies as well as the support of two mental health counselors (added to her staff) to work with students. Principal Drake sees the academic challenges her students face as more than an academic issue, “To me, that's me being culturally responsive because I can't teach them academics until I get a hold of their social emotional.” She has

even petitioned her school district to allow her to become a “transition school” of sorts, for students leaving facilities and needing a transition place before reentering a comprehensive elementary school. Because she sees so many struggles in this vein as it is, it makes sense to her to offer comprehensive, wrap-around supports to students. Her willingness to shoulder that burden, for the sake of kids, demonstrates a true commitment to students.

As she works to provide effective support services to her students, she is also coaching her teachers on how to best teach students who carry a myriad of issues into school with them. She regularly reverts to the practices of her past position as an instructional coach and works with teachers on lesson design and implementation – even co-teaching with them as needed. Instructional leadership is centric to her focus on students, “If I can't tell [teachers] what to do or show them what to do or how to do, then who am I as a principal? If I can't do it myself, I'm not going to ask you to do anything that I wouldn't do myself.”

Holds Educators Accountable to High Expectations

Johnstone Elementary School has maintained consistent demographics since first being identified as a Priority School: 80% African-American, 13% White, 7% Other, 100% Free/Reduced Lunch, and 10% ECE (special needs). Additionally, transience within the student population is a significant challenge as the student population has fluctuated over time: 447 students (school year 2014-15), 420 students (school year 2015-16), and 315 students (2016-17). Principal Drake remarks that many times the students you start the school year with are not the students you finish the school year with. Building academic and social consistency is, therefore, a significant challenge. Principal

Drake has lobbied school district officials for help in stabilizing enrollment and to stymie the ongoing placement of new ECE students in the school well into the school year. As she so eloquently communicates it: Johnstone Elementary School is in the bottom 5% of schools in the state and located in the roughest neighborhood in the city. Continual placement of ECE students there as well as student transience makes a difference when working to meet annual measurable objective (AMO).

Despite the challenging demographics, Principal Drake makes building positive relationships with families a top priority. She hopes to retain students in the building from kindergarten through fifth grade and knows that cultivating positive relationships with families can pay significant dividends over six years of schooling. Principal Drake expects teachers to expose students to experiences and people they may not otherwise see. Because of their geographic location, these students see a lot of crime committed. Teachers have to work to expose students to different experiences and help them build a more complete worldview. Principal Drake would like to hire a more diverse teaching staff, but Johnstone Elementary School continues to be a hard to staff school – because of location and its status as a Priority School. The school currently has no teachers of color. Of the 40 candidates interviewed last summer, only one was a minority. In response, Principal Drake has asked to be “allowed to do something different and to be set up different to meet the needs of the kids and the families in our community.” What that “different” is remains unknown at this point.

Knowledgeable About/Understands Institutional History with Issues of Race/Ethnicity

Principal Drake is knowledgeable about the institutional history of her school with regard to issues of race and ethnicity. In fact, changing this trajectory has become

the focus of her work as a school leader. Not only does she set clear expectations for students and work to coach teachers, but she also works to connect students' homes to the academic curriculum. The school hosts parent nights to provide information about literacy, math instruction, and educational events occurring throughout the city. She works to build school-to-home relationships founded on academic content to break the tradition of a lack of involvement in academics for minority households. Because the student population has historically contained a majority of students from minority backgrounds, Principal Drake has appealed to the district's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Poverty programs to conduct a cultural competence audit. This would provide clear data points from which she could guide a shift in the school's work. The district has agreed to conduct the audit in September of next school year.

Principal Drake understands that she cannot affect significant change, with regard to issues of race and ethnicity, on her own. She has partnered with various entities to bring additional support and resources to bear for her students. She maintains a partnership with several local churches and a private university to tutor students and provide them with savings bonds for college as their academic performance improves. She has partnered with the local YMCA to ensure adequate healthcare resources are available to her students – and the community at large – as they prepare to build a new branch several blocks from her campus. Most significant for the transformation of the broader community is her partnership with the local branch of the Urban League and their pursuit of a neighborhood transformation grant from the federal government. For the first time, a school has been written into such a grant because of the dire need of students and the historic inequities suffered at that school. While ensuring that her students have

additional support, Principal Drake asked for an adult education program to be included in the grant and housed at her school. She recognizes that if parents cannot support student learning at home, students will struggle with content acquisition and skill building. Principal Drake hopes these partnerships will accentuate the academic work of the school by increasing the level of cultural competence in the school, “Building upon what they [teachers] bring to the table and tapping into the culture, being culturally responsive.”

Knowledgeable about Self and Society with Regard to Personal Racial/Ethnic Bias

Principal Drake reflects upon the issues of racial and ethnic biases by recounting some of the strengths and successes of her school. The staff works arduously to build positive relationships with students and families. Staff truly demonstrate they care through both word and deed. Principal Drake encourages staff to listen beyond their personal biases to what students and families tell them,

For me it is guiding my staff, because I have a young staff, to think outside of their comfort zone and truly listen and be present to what's being said by families, by students, because they tell you a whole lot. You just have to be willing to listen and read between the lines. That's what I'm trying to teach them. They do truly come to ... They being students and parents ... Truly come to us with all they have and all they know. What I've quickly learned here through surveys and things is that most of my families didn't have good school experiences. So how do we change that? That's the transition that we're in right now. How are we going to change? What is going to be different about Johnstone to make parents want to come here?

The challenge that looms is one of effectively engaging parents at Johnstone Elementary School. While the broader community is working to more deeply engage parents in the school, the question of how to bring parents into the school, without offering something in exchange for their presence, haunts Principal Drake. She utilizes the One Call now

system to communicate with parents. She hosts parent nights. She has hosted “Parent Power Hour” where parents came in with their children and were provided life readiness training. Parents eagerly joined this program but stopped attending when asked to volunteer in their children’s classrooms as a trade-off. The local YMCA offers a free Early Learning Readiness program for children ages 0-5, but only three families take advantage of the program. This lack of parental involvement is very different from Principal Drake’s upbringing in a small, close-knit town where everyone’s parents co-parented all of the children in the town. This stark contrast to her personal experience creates a personal bias for her that must be overcome in order to reach the parents her school serves.

Creates and Sustains Interdependent and Relationship-Based System

Principal Drake desires to see all school stakeholders work together to ensure success for the students at Johnstone Elementary School. The challenge of low parental involvement is ever-present, but Principal Drake continues to work to forge positive relationships with parents and families. She purchases much needed reading materials and instructional resources (i.e., books, flashcards, etc.) out of her own pocket and sends them home with students. Families have her cell phone number and call her to ask for assistance with homework or to alert her about significant happenings within the family unit. She invites families into the school to learn about students’ work, to discuss literacy and numeracy, and to receive life-readiness training. She continues to seek new ways to engage parents for the benefit of students,

We've got a parent institute we're trying to develop right now... We've partnered with the Urban League and a group of African-American people, retired educators, community activists that are doing Kindergarten readiness... doing a parent leadership engagement workshop, and we are using our Title funds, parent

involvement funds to help get them going, their kick-off. It's about what they are going to need to do and what their kids need to do to be ready for Kindergarten.

Principal Drake has made clear inroads with community partners and capitalizes upon the support of the local YMCA and local chapter of the Urban League to provide services she cannot manage on her own. She clearly expresses student expectations through PAWS. Additionally, Principal Drake works to provide supports to students dealing with trauma through the P-A-T-H-S program which seeks to address social emotional issues through literacy. Principal Drake also coaches teachers to be more culturally responsive in their practice. She models positive, culturally responsive relationships with students so teachers understand the desired dynamic in the school culture. Additionally, she actively seeks to hire a more diverse staff, recognizing that students need to see people who look like them delivering classroom instruction.

School Leader Understands Issues of Equity, Social Justice, and Social Privilege

Student discipline is a barrier to learning at Johnstone Elementary School. In an effort to curtail common area behavior infractions, the administrative team enlarged a map of the school and identified hot spots for behavior. Then, they allocated extra staff to those areas. This plan works well as long as all staff are present; when a staff member is out and an administrative team member must cover for them, it creates a breach in coverage. Principal Drake states an understanding of the need for consistent enforcement of the code of conduct. However, within the context of current student assignment challenges (i.e., ECE student placement and general transiency), she feels that students with disciplinary issues should be handled individually – within the context of their current situations,

I know it has to be consistent, but you've got to know where this kid is coming from. So, suspending the kid because the parent didn't give him his meds... he's pulling the fire alarm, running through the building; they're refusing to answer the phone call. They come back doing the same thing. I do have the highest suspension rate, but most all of my suspensions are about them physically hitting and hurting staff and students, and that I won't tolerate.

Principal Drake struggles with the balancing of consistency with responsiveness.

In considering general equity at Johnstone Elementary School, the fact that no teachers of color work at the school and the general demographics of the student population both pose a significant challenge. In a large, urban district that bolsters a commitment to equity, Principal Drake says, "Based on the district policy and the diversity index, I am one of the 18 schools out of compliance." So, while the district has drafted a diversity policy and seeks to have diverse and equitable schools, Principal Drake struggles to keep classrooms diverse because she has three Kindergarten classrooms and only five White Kindergarten students. It is impossible to create a diverse and equitable school with student ethnicity ratios like this.

Continuum Placement

Principal Drake's overall practice reaches the level of *The Eco-systemic Leader*, housed under the category of "culturally competent leaders" (Jones & Nichols, 2013). This placement meets the goal for school leaders. She works to create and sustain an interdependent and relationship-based school structure. She possesses strong knowledge about the institutional history relative to issues of race, especially with regard to the geographical location of her school. She is knowledgeable and aware about herself and personal biases as well as the broader community's biases which connect to the history of discrimination in society and education. She possesses a strong understanding of issues

of equity and social justice in educational systems and works to hold educators accountable to high expectations. She engages in data-guided practice, both academic and behavior data, to guide the next steps of the school. Under Principal Drake's leadership, Johnstone Elementary School has the ability to move forward and continue as a culturally responsive school. This work is dependent upon Principal Drake's ability to create a culturally competent workforce steeped in high levels of teacher efficacy and student achievement. This work is directly related to Principal Drake's skillset to be an effective school leader.

Summary of Data

In summary, the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) is designed to help school leaders understand their level of implementation of culturally responsive leadership. As such, the continuum is established upon the following six essential elements for effective culturally responsive leadership:

- School leader fosters student-focused, highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures.
- School leader holds educators accountable to high expectations.
- School leader is knowledgeable about and understands institutional history relative to issues of race and ethnicity.
- School leader is knowledgeable about self and society with regard to personal racial and ethnic bias.
- School leader creates and sustains interdependent and relationship-based system.

- School leader understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege.

Table 8 provides summary data for each principal in the study. The table provides information regarding which elements of *The Eco-systemic Leader* (Jones & Nichols, 2013), the highest level of the continuum, each principal lacks in each principal's current practice. For those that the participant lacks partially, a "(P)" is denoted behind it in the table. Principal Anderson completely lacks three of the essential elements and partially lacks one of the essential elements. Principal Brackens completely lacks four of the essential elements and partially lacks one of the essential elements. Principal Clark completely only partially lacks two of the essential elements. Principal Drake embodies all of the essential elements of the Eco-systemic Leader. The data reveals that principals of younger students, specifically elementary and middle schools, lead in a more culturally responsive manner. As students progress through school and move closer to personal independence in a world devoid of compulsory education, school leaders in this study lead in a less culturally responsive manner. For reasons presented in the *Discussion* section of this capstone, this leaves all school stakeholders at a distinct disadvantage when working to help diverse students actualize the dreams they envision for their lives.

The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) can be a useful tool for practitioners seeking to evaluate and improve the level of cultural responsiveness with which they lead. The continuum, however, lacks specificity school leaders need to effectively evaluate their practice. Phrases like "highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures" or "interdependent and relationship-based system" and verbs such as "knowledgeable about" and "understands", for example, present a significant challenge for practitioners. Because school contexts vary so widely with

regard to diverse school populations, principals need more concrete definitions to guide the self-reflection which leads to shifts in practice. Principals in this study have defined some of the vague phrases in the continuum through their responses without ever interacting with the Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013). Through explanations of their leadership philosophies and discussions about how they craft school policies and lead their schools, Principal Clark and Principal Drake illustrate the specificity culturally responsive leadership requires. Previously in this section of the capstone, Principal Clark demonstrates this on p. 188 (leadership), p. 188 and p. 192 (modeling for staff), p. 189 (behavior support), and p. 191 (diverse guest speakers). Principal Drake demonstrates this specificity on p. 196 (definition of cultural competence and responsiveness), p. 198 (acknowledgement of trend data), p. 198 (student supports), p. 199 (staff supports), p. 201 (community partnerships), and p. 204 (behavior supports). Conversely, the analysis of school leadership for the sake of improvement requires the same level of specificity. This continuum, and its use, would be greatly enhanced by providing definitions and/or tangible examples of its terminology such as those provided by the principals most highly classified on the continuum in this study.

Table 8

Continuum Summary Data for Principals

Principal	School Level	Elements Lacking	Supporting Quotations
Anderson	High school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making structures are not highly diverse and inclusive (P) • Holds educators accountable to high expectations with regard to equity • Creates and sustains interdependent and relationship-based system • Understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “We’ve adopted PBIS. We’ve taken time to train teachers to be a little bit more patient. We’ve taken time to celebrate the wins. We have a response team in place that is unparalleled anywhere else to be able to minimize disruption.

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “At Lakeridge High School, we expect all students to perform at high levels.” • “The ACT... we set that as the goal.” • “We’re moving to providing better PD. We’ve done it on poverty. We’ve done it on positive behavior. But when your energy is taxed and your exhausted from the day-to-day, what do you do?” • “I have to go on record and say the elephant in the room is parental support and understanding of vision or even what success looks like for their child.” • “The hardest thing is to educate.. to allow choice. Then, there’s the behavior with lack of drive, lack of motivation with lack of goal setting. You see a lot of students who are willing to just be.”
Brackens	High school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making structures are not highly diverse and inclusive (P) • Holds educators accountable to high expectations with regard to equity • Knowledgeable about and understands institutional history relative to issues of race and ethnicity • Creates and sustains interdependent and relationship-based system • Understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Disproportionality, ECE, achievement... all we seem to get [told] are the problems. The patient has a cough. Okay? But we never get to, ‘So here’s how to fix it. Here’s the major problem.’” • “In complete frankness, I think we do a whole lot of identifying data that says there must be a lack of cultural competence without a whole lot of training into what it means and what teachers should be doing on a daily basis.” • “We’ve got to meet AMO and [have] so many kids proficient and moving out of novice... that’s such a hard thing to do.” • “The policy that guides me the most is that every student... it’s not an official policy, but every student who walks into Forest Grove High School has the same opportunity to be successful as another student.” • “No, we’ve not offered PD outside of instructional. I think our mission on authentic engagement and providing authentic instruction in the classroom and making sure kids are engaged... gets to the heart of the problem. I tell people all the time, especially kids from poverty, that when you’re telling

			them, ‘This is gonna help you for college’ you might as well be telling them it’s gonna help your retirement account because they aren’t going.”
Clark	Middle school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledgeable about society with regard to personal racial and ethnic bias (P) • Knowledgeable about and understands institutional history relative to issues of race and ethnicity (P) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Cultural competence or responsiveness: what comes to mind is being acutely aware of all of the experiences that all of our kids bring to the table with them. Home situations, situations that happen that are unique maybe in their culture that are not unique to my culture. Being aware of what those are so I can be aware of my own biases might be toward them.” • “I believe the outside community needs to be involved... In all frankness, it’s not been something that I have focused on. Probably the trajectory of the school, the achievement trajectory could be higher than what our achievement trajectory is had I let that be a focus when we started and really tried to engage with parents in an authentic manner.” • “The district has done a nice job of having the speaker series and having things available to schools that I will say that while they had it available, I believe there’s been too much ‘If you want to participate, participate’. Someone then could choose to opt in or opt out. Because of that, I think you have a lot of variance in [the district’s] schools on the amount of cultural equity. It’s reflected in a lot of data.”
Drake	Elementary school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None 	

Please refer to the discussion of the individual cases for support of the essential elements embodied by the study participants.

Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case comparison explores how elementary, middle, and high school principals in urban Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership while

enacting comprehensive school reform (CSR). The goal of a culturally responsive school leader should be to reach the highest level of the continuum, *The Eco-systemic Leader* (Jones & Nichols, 2013), since research shows that culturally responsive practices occur more in schools where principals engage in culturally responsive leadership (Bustamante et al., 2009). As Jean-Marie, Normore & Brooks, (2015) posit, a clear need exists for school leaders to possess different skills, to champion an equity agenda, and to manage conflicting belief systems in such a way that consensus is reached for the benefit of the students their schools serve. The following themes are common and significant among the four individual cases previously mentioned: tackling student behavior, the missing minority teachers, the parent involvement conundrum, and clear student success with varying leadership styles. All of these themes were noted in prior literature, in some fashion, except for the parent involvement conundrum. While the existing literature did not present this theme, it consistently arose in the data collected from each study participant. Because of this consistent reoccurrence, the theme “the parent involvement conundrum” is noted in the results of this study.

Tackling Student Behavior

The first significant theme focuses upon student behavior management. Principal Anderson recognizes the disproportionality that exists within the student population at Lakeridge High School: White students for truancy and African-American students for suspensions. The school has crafted a diversity policy, a fill-in-the-blank duplicate of the district diversity policy, but has yet to disseminate it to stakeholders or use it to guide decision making. Therefore, it has no impact on decision making in the school. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is utilized as the primary tool teachers use to

address student misbehavior. The administration is still working to help students understand the purpose of the approach. The school holds zero tolerance for profanity to staff and for fighting, for which students are immediately suspended.

Principal Brackens faces an interesting challenge for a school with a large, minority student population: the number of suspensions for White students is higher than the number of White students and, therefore, is disproportionate. To help decrease the number of suspensions school wide, Principal Brackens has eliminated disciplinary policies for “things that don’t matter,” such as dress code and the use of cell phones in the hallways. According to Principal Brackens, students’ refusal to comply with rules in these two arenas often escalated into suspensions that could be avoided with a change in disciplinary focus. Forest Grove High School has no diversity or equity policy. Instead, Principal Brackens seeks to ensure that every student has the same opportunity at success as any other student in the school.

Principal Clark faced a significant disproportionality problem in suspensions when she first arrived at Southridge Middle School. Because of strategic and intentional implementation of PBIS and restorative practices work, the suspension rate has been cut by 80% over two years. The school lacks a diversity or equity policy. However, Principal Clark possesses a sound understanding of her own biases as well as issues of equity and social justice in educational systems and works to hold educators accountable to high expectations. She actively brackets her personal biases in order to make decisions in the best interests of her students.

Principal Drake still faces major discipline challenges at Johnstone Elementary School. The school has the highest suspension rate among the elementary schools in this

large, urban school district; suspensions are only assigned when students hit and/or hurt staff or other students. This reality provides some insight into the complex needs of the students at Johnstone Elementary School. The school lacks a diversity or equity policy to guide its work. Principal Drake works to apply the code of conduct consistently but also seeks to be responsive to students' individual needs and situations regardless of their behavior infractions.

This student behavior theme applies directly to *Essential Element 6* of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013): *understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege*. Three summary notes emerge in this theme. First, none of the four schools have an active, impactful equity or diversity policy even though the school district does. While principals espouse a commitment to equity and diversity, no policy guides and ensures the application of that commitment. Secondly, two principals actively utilize a student behavior support system: PBIS. The district has strongly encouraged all schools to utilize PBIS to decrease student disciplinary infractions, but this has been voluntary. The results among the two schools in the study who actively implement PBIS are mixed as one continues to face the challenge of disproportionality in African-American student suspensions and one has reduced suspensions by 80% (perhaps because PBIS is coupled with restorative practices). This data is assumed true in the case that all discipline data is accurately reported at the school level. Finally, all four principals seek to apply the student code of conduct consistently. The variation here is that one principal discusses her need to be responsive to the individual contexts and situations of students while the other uses restorative practices to supplement her efforts.

Principal Drake, an Eco-Systemic Leader, saw the need for systems immediately upon her arrival to Johnstone Elementary School. She stated, “[There were] behaviors issues and a lack of leadership. There were no systems. There were no processes. It was just a free for all.” Later in the interview, she discussed the fact that she seeks to be responsive to individual students because of the challenging situations students in her school often come from. She stated,

If a kid’s brother gets murdered, and the parents send him to school anyway, tell him that they were murdered, and they have an off day... he gets in an argument, we know where that is coming from. That is not suspension worthy. The code of conduct is not one size fits all.

In Principal Drake’s mind, cultural and individual responsiveness hinges on a sound understanding of issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege and their impact on students’ lives. For Principal Drake, this leadership orientation is necessary to lead her school effectively. The other principals in this study did not communicate such responsiveness in their interview responses or documents submitted for analysis.

The Missing Minority Teachers

The second cross-case theme centers upon the desire to have a teaching staff reflective of the diverse populations these schools serve. Building such a diverse teaching staff is a significant challenge in all four schools. At Lakeridge High School, Principal Anderson cited data indicating that 12% of his 52 staff members are members of ethnic minority groups, in comparison to a school population which is 76% minority. He actively seeks minority candidates but struggles to receive qualified minority candidates to interview. Principal Brackens at Forest Grove High School stated that 15% of his 65 staff members are minorities, compared to 66% of the student population. He

also wants to have a diverse teaching staff but struggles to receive enough candidates to fill all of his positions, let alone minority candidates (During school year 2016-2017, Forest Grove High School operated with two vacancies unfilled.). At Southridge Middle School, Principal Clark supports a staff where 14% of 28 teachers are minorities, compared to a 42% minority student population. She is also interested in developing a diverse teaching staff and participates in district screening interviews to find appropriate minority candidates. Principal Drake at Johnstone Elementary School faces the greatest disparity where no teachers are minorities while the student population is 90% minority. Johnstone Elementary School is a hard to staff school where minority candidates do not typically apply. This runs counterintuitive to Principal Drake's desire to build a diverse teaching staff. She states, "I'm essentially in the heart of the city... I interviewed 40 candidates last summer... one was African American and one was biracial." She currently has no teachers of color in her building. She desires to have diversity in her staff, but she cannot secure minority applicants for her vacancies.

This desired diverse staff theme applies directly to *Essential Element 6* of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013): *creates and sustains interdependent and relationship based system*. Two summary notes are important in this theme. First, minority teachers are in short supply in these high minority student population schools. This is concerning in a large, urban district where minority teachers are active in other schools and at the district level in various capacities. If minority staff members are employed at other schools and at the central office, it is logical to believe that such minorities can be employed in these schools as well. Secondly, all four principals continue to actively seek minority teaching candidates and

fall short of reaching their goals. Each principal understands the importance for minority students to see individuals who look like them leading classroom instruction. If they are ever to achieve their goal of building and maintaining a diverse teaching staff, these principals must have the support of the district in recruitment and retention of minority teachers.

The Parent Involvement Conundrum

The third cross-case theme pinpoints the issue of a lack of parent involvement in the life of the school. All four principals see value in parental involvement in the academic lives of students and the culture of their schools. They implement various strategies to increase parent involvement but without much success.

Principal Anderson hosts several events (i.e., academic parent nights, PTSA events, etc.) but with poor parent attendance. A small group of parents even remarked that he did not understand their culture or needs. In an effort to show sensitivity to this concern, he invited those parents to help him lead the work to motivate other parents to become involved. This involvement continued for a short time before ending. Principal Anderson has reached out to the school district's PTSA liaison for help in establishing a true, parent-led PTSA organization because he desires a quality relationship with parents and wants them involved in the life of the school.

Principal Brackens also hosts parent nights but has sought to be more communicative with parents by way of a weekly newsletter. He also seeks to provide an impetus for attendance at parent nights (i.e., food). Even with these efforts, parent involvement at Forest Grove High School is low. Principal Brackens is vocal about

wanting parent involvement in his school, but he is unsure of the next step to take to foster it because parent responses to previous efforts have been so poor.

At Southridge Middle School, Principal Clark began her tenure with academic parent nights. After poor attendance became the norm for these events, she surveyed parents about their needs and how the school might better support them. This led to the hiring of a school/community liaison charged with building a solid connection between the school and parents. Principal Clark wants parents involved in the school; she is just trying to determine what will draw parents into the school and what they need from the school.

Principal Drake at Johnstone Elementary School designs parent nights to address a specific theme: literacy, math, community activities (i.e., zoo passes), etc. She uses food to draw parents to events and provides giveaways so parents have educational items to use at home with their children. Principal Drake partners with external community partners to provide programs to draw parents into the school (i.e., college savings bonds given by local churches, YMCA Early Readiness Program, and life training opportunities while students are in school). The participation rate has improved during her time as principal; the highest parent attendance at a single event has been 300 parents. Still, parents stop coming to the school as soon as they are asked to actively participate in the life of the school and not just receive things from the school. Principal Drake states that she needs district support determining how to move parent involvement to this next and important level.

This parent involvement theme applies directly to *Essential Elements 5 and 6* of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013): *creates*

and sustains interdependent and relationship based system; understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege. Three summary notes support the analysis of this theme. First, all four principals desire increased parent involvement in their schools. These principals recognize the value of connecting parents to student learning and are seeking to build this connection. Secondly, the best levels of parent involvement are seen when other staff members and external community partners are involved. As seen with two schools, sometimes a surrogate can foster more parent involvement than the principal. The partnerships Principal Drake (Eco-systemic Leader) has secured are critical to the success of her students: the local chapter of Urban League, the YMCA, local churches, and retired educators of color. These partnerships are highly indicative of essential elements 5 and 6 and the ideas of creating and sustaining interdependent and relationship based system; understanding issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege. Even with this support, she admits, “We’ve come a long way, but still have a ways to go.” Finally, outside support is needed to increase parent involvement in these schools. Like the challenge of building a diverse teaching staff, the goal will only be met when the district provides targeted support to these schools.

Clear Student Success and Principal Leadership

The final cross-case theme connects to the inherent purpose of any school: student success. Both a verbal and written commitment to student success has been espoused by all four principals. Efforts to align their practice to this commitment is also evident in the leadership style undertaken by each principal.

The mission of Lakeridge High School articulates a goal of graduating “all students prepared for transition to college by providing students a supportive and

structured pathway, allowing each student to reach his/her future educational and career goals.” Another stated goal at Lakeridge is for “all students to leave Lakeridge college-ready, career-experienced, goal-driven, and reality certain.” Principal Anderson utilizes a pragmatic leadership approach to capitalize on people’s strengths, provide resources for task completion, and to model vital and culturally responsive relationships with students. He seeks to learn individual student stories and guide them to success based upon what they need.

Forest Grove High School’s mission is “to inspire, create, and foster authentic learning opportunities that maximize student engagement.” The key here is to connect each student to a career pathway. Within these career pathways, core content instruction is enhanced through the academy structure built around several similar career pathways. Principal Brackens accomplishes this work through distributed leadership. He actively seeks to attract, retain, and hold accountable quality staff members. In addition, he seeks to ensure they are all headed in the right direction by supporting them with resources and ensuring they have been assigned the right responsibilities to do well with a task and help achieve the mission of the school.

Southridge Middle School’s mission is summarized by several core beliefs: to see students become lifelong learners; to teach to the whole child, through relevant and engaging instruction; to be student-centered and culturally responsive; to set high expectations for all students; to provide a safe physical and learning environment for every student; to provide a voice for stakeholders in decision-making; and to foster respect for one’s self and the school community. To ensure these core beliefs are the guide posts for the school, Principal Clark employs servant leadership. In this leadership

style, Principal Clark does whatever needs to be done to ensure student and teacher success. This includes coaching teachers and students, modeling for teachers, and empowering staff throughout the school to live out these core beliefs.

Johnstone Elementary School's mission is "to create a caring and positive community that develops high-performing, independent problem solvers." To achieve this mission, Principal Drake encourages teachers to create and teach lessons that support implementation of technology and the Common Core Standards. Through students' daily pledge and PBIS implementation, students at Johnstone Elementary School build relationships, develop social skills, and enjoy a proactive approach to discipline. To achieve this work, Principal Drake leads in both distributed and servant leadership styles. She is a straightforward administrator who corrects students and staff when they have drifted from the core mission of the school. She also coaches teachers, which includes mentoring, co-planning, and co-teaching to help teachers build instructional efficacy. Additionally, Principal Drake seeks to match the work of the staff with individual strengths to ensure maximum success with students. These are clear marks of an Eco-systemic Leader.

This student success and leadership theme applies directly to *Essential Element 1* of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013): *fosters student-focused, highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures*. First, it is important to note that all four principals lead in such a way that the mission of the school drives the work of the school. Where the mission is more equity-minded and culturally responsive so, too, is the work of the school and the principal. *This* mission drives students' success beyond students' current levels. The elementary schools understand the

need for success in middle school. The middle school understands the need for student success in high school. And, the high school understands the need for student success in life. The mission and work of these schools is not only about success in the current school but about the next phase in life for students. Secondly, as principals advance up the continuum approaching the goal of *The Eco-systemic Leader*, the more their leadership style changes and becomes more nuanced. In *The Eco-systemic Leader*, the leadership style of the principal becomes both distributed and servant. At this level, principals realize that culturally responsive work does not happen simply by matching staff to work that parallels their strengths. Culturally responsive leadership occurs when principals do this *and* do whatever is needed to mentor, coach, and model cultural responsiveness for staff. Culturally responsive leaders understand that their success is inextricably bound to the success of their students. Student success hinges on teacher effectiveness, which is strengthened by the practice of culturally responsive leaders.

STUDY TWO: DISCUSSION

Popularity doesn't mean 'best'. It merely means popular. – Godin (2017, June 3)

This section presents a discussion of the findings that emerged from the data analyzed in the *Analysis* section of this capstone. It includes a summary of the study, major findings, and an overview of the conceptual framework application and findings. The *Discussion* section also presents contextual data points that might represent key characteristics which influence the leadership behavior of urban school principals seeking to lead in a culturally responsive manner. Implications for urban school principals' practice and recommendations for further research are included as well.

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to discover how principals challenged with enacting comprehensive school reform (CSR) in urban schools lead in a culturally responsive manner. For this study, four head principals in a large, urban, public school district in the Southeastern United States were invited to participate. Each principal clearly understood the expectations, challenges, and complexities of school leadership in an urban context.

They had each served as head principals for no more than five years in these highly diverse, urban schools. Each held advanced degrees in educational administration which qualified them for their roles.

Data, trends, and results were analyzed to uncover common themes and meanings among the four cases during this study. The results of this study hold significant implications for individual principal's practice and professional development, for the school district in which the study was situated, and for principal preparation programs. This study was designed to answer two research questions: (a) How do principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership? and (b) How do principals in Priority Schools mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students?

Major Findings

Through this qualitative, comparative case study, the analysis of results revealed four themes which are common and significant among the four cases in this study: tackling student behavior, the missing minority teachers, the parent involvement conundrum, and clear student success with varying leadership styles.

Tackling Student Behavior

All four principals recognized behavior as a serious impediment to student success. One principal even went as far as crafting a diversity policy to ensure equal opportunities for all students in his school, although the policy existed in name only because it had not yet been implemented. Two of the four principals implemented the district-supported Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to teach common expectations and curb student misbehavior. In addition, one principal also instituted the

use of a restorative practices model to foster a greater sense of community, belonging, empathy, and understanding among the students in her school. The other two principals sought to suspend for only things which warranted a suspension. One of these principals crafted new policies to address student misbehavior that did not pose a danger to the school community but often resulted in a suspension. The other sought to only suspend when a student was violent toward a staff member or another student. The results have been mixed as one school continues to face the challenge of disproportionality in African-American student suspensions, and another has reduced suspensions by 80% (perhaps because PBIS is used in conjunction with restorative practices). The end result is that all four principals are seeking creative ways to foster school community, communicate behavior expectations to students, and build an understanding among all school stakeholders while addressing discipline in an equitable manner (the antithesis of previous practice in their schools).

The Missing Minority Teachers

This theme centers upon the clear desire of all four principals to have a teaching staff reflective of the diverse populations their schools serve. Building such a diverse teaching staff is a significant challenge in all four schools. Among these four schools, the average percentage of minority staff members is 10%. In one school where 87% of the student population is of a minority group, no teachers of color are employed. Minority teachers are in short supply in these high minority student population schools. This is concerning in a large, urban district where minority teachers are active in other schools and at the district level in various capacities. Each of these principals understands the importance for minority students to see minority teachers leading classroom instruction

because when students of color feel a connection to the curriculum and the school in which they learn, they are more likely to achieve at higher rates (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Race, student beliefs, and school leadership all have a bearing on student achievement; students from minority populations sometimes possess negative attitudes toward their ability to succeed academically. Minority student populations will be best nurtured to high academic achievement when teachers effectively implement culturally responsive teaching and engage in social-emotional learning (SEL) that leads to a sense of inclusiveness for all students (Johnson, 2014). Part of this positive SEL environment is ensuring teachers from minority groups are present in schools with diverse student populations. All four principals continue to actively seek minority teaching candidates but continually fall short of reaching their goals.

The Parent Involvement Conundrum

The third significant theme pinpoints the issue of a lack of parent involvement in the life of these schools. All four principals see value in high levels of parental involvement in the academic lives of students and the culture of the schools. They implement various strategies to increase parent involvement but without much success. All four principals host parent nights focused on various topics such as, literacy, math competency, and community skills. All four principals offer a “carrot” with food or other giveaways. Still, parent attendance and participation are low. To combat this, one principal has hired a school/community liaison charged with building a solid connection between the school and parents. Another principal has had some success with parent involvement because of the help of community partners. Still, she wonders how to more

deeply engage parents in the life of the school. All four seek additional support from the school district in this regard.

Clear Student Success and Principal Leadership

The final significant theme is student success, which resonates with the inherent purpose of schools. All four principals espouse both a verbal and written (in school mission and vision statements, 30-60-90 Day Plans, and Comprehensive School Improvement Plans) commitment to student success. They all work to align their practice to this commitment, which is evident by the variation in leadership styles undertaken by each principal. The missions, visions, and core beliefs of the schools clearly articulate this commitment: “[to graduate] all students prepared for transition to college by providing students a supportive and structured pathway, allowing each student to reach his/her future educational and career goals” (Lakeridge High School); “to inspire, create, and foster authentic learning opportunities that maximize student engagement” (Forest Grove High School); core beliefs: “to see students become lifelong learners; to teach to the whole child, through relevant and engaging instruction; to be student-centered and culturally responsive; to set high expectations for all students; to provide a safe physical and learning environment for every student; to provide a voice for stakeholders in decision-making; and to foster respect for one’s self and the school community” (Southridge Middle School), and “to create a caring and positive community that develops high-performing, independent problem solvers” (Johnstone Elementary School).

Additionally, the four principals lead in different ways specific to their schools’ context, culture, and climate. One leads in what he calls a pragmatic leadership approach, seeking to capitalize on people’s strengths, provide resources for task

completion, and to model vital and culturally responsive relationships with students. Another principal ascribes to distributed leadership where he seeks to provide direction for his staff members, assign them responsibilities that align with their strengths, and provide support for their work. A third principal employs servant leadership where she strives to do whatever needs to be done to ensure student and teacher success. The fourth principal leads in both a distributed and servant leadership style. She actively coaches teachers, which includes mentoring, co-planning, and co-teaching to help teachers build instructional efficacy while matching the work of the staff with individual strengths to ensure maximum success with students. The goal of all four principals is increased student achievement, and each go about it in a different way.

Conceptual Framework Application

The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) was selected as the conceptual framework to guide this study. In order for a principal's practice to reach the highest level of the continuum, identified as *The Eco-systemic Leader*, the six essential elements of the continuum must be sufficiently addressed. Each significant theme correlates to one or more essential element of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013). The theme *Tackling Student Behavior* correlates directly to *Essential Element 6* of the framework: *understands issues of equity, social justice, and social privilege*. The theme *The Missing Minority Teachers* applies directly to *Essential Element 6* of the framework: *creates and sustains interdependent and relationship based system*. The theme *The Parent Involvement Conundrum* connects directly to *Essential Elements 5 and 6* of the framework: *creates and sustains interdependent and relationship based system; understands issues of equity,*

social justice, and social privilege. The theme *Clear Student Success and Principal Leadership* correlates to *Essential Element 1* of the framework: *fosters student-focused, highly diverse and inclusive decision-making structures.*

Additionally, each principal was placed on the continuum based upon their question responses and supporting school documentation. This placement is important because the existing research on culturally responsive leadership heavily discusses the role of the teacher. Placement of school leaders on The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) based upon actions and expressed beliefs provides a distinction between the role of the school leader and the role of the teacher in culturally responsive schools. One principal communicated the importance of cultural diversity in schools but confused diversity with cultural competence. In that school, diversity efforts are not strongly connected to school performance, student achievement, or staff efficacy. Based on the evidence, this principal was categorized as being *The Minimalist Manager*

Two principals provided evidence of being *The Ardent Advocate* because they exhibit an understanding of cultural competence and its importance to the overall health of their schools. They work to create and sustain an interdependent and relationship-based school structure and possess some knowledge about the institutional history relative to issues of race. However, they lack the leadership skills necessary to shift the organization to culturally competent work. Work to become a culturally responsive school will rely heavily on their ability to create a culturally competent workforce steeped in high levels of teacher efficacy and student achievement. This work is directly related to their leadership skillsets and effectiveness as school leaders.

One principal provided evidence of being *The Eco-systemic Leader*, the highest level of the continuum, meeting the goal for leaders of schools with diverse student populations. She possesses strong knowledge about the institutional history relative to issues of race, especially with regard to the geographical location of her school. She is knowledgeable and aware about herself and personal biases as well as the broader community's biases, which connect to the history of discrimination in society and education. She possesses a strong understanding of issues of equity and social justice in educational systems and works to hold educators in her school accountable to high expectations. She engages in data-guided practice, using both academic and behavior data, to guide the next steps of the school. This principal is a transformational leader who clearly sees the welfare of the larger community she serves (Wright & Pandey, 2010). This work is directly related to her skillset as an effective school leader.

The use of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) as the conceptual framework for this study helped identify a leadership type for each participating principal with regard to their implementation of culturally responsive leadership in their school. The use of the continuum also helped to illuminate several qualities of principals' practice which are necessary to lead in a culturally responsive manner as well as illuminate barriers to this practice which must be mitigated.

Implications

It is important to discuss the implications of this study in relation to the work these participating principals undertake. It is not sufficient for leaders in schools with diverse student populations to *only* speak to the need for culturally responsive leadership. Lip service alone does not foster change. Leaders in schools with diverse student

populations must *live out* their beliefs through their leadership practice. Jones and Nichols (2013) posit, “Individual educators who strive to become culturally competent must do so while working to create culturally competent institutions from an organizational standpoint” (p. 107). The essential elements of The Cultural Competence and Leadership Continuum (Jones & Nichols, 2013) embody the strategies needed to effectively work with diverse student populations. Furthermore, equitable opportunities must be provided to students of color. Cooper and Jackson (2011) echo the sentiment that minority students too often “sit in classrooms waiting for opportunities that will elicit and nurture their attention, creativity, and intellectual potential” (p.22). Because of its focus on the interdependence of members of a diverse group and on fostering equitable practices to increase student achievement, *The Eco-systemic Leader* level is the best hope in demonstrating the leadership competencies necessary to truly lead a diverse school in a culturally responsive manner. The findings of this study have several implications for the schools these principals lead, for the school district in which these schools are situated, and for principal preparation programs.

The Focus Schools in the Study

This study revealed that academic progress is possible even without a principal’s complete commitment to the six essential elements of culturally responsive leadership. This academic progress is seen in the form of schools meeting annual measurable objective (AMO) during at least one year once the school had been identified as a Priority School. Each of the principals focused upon in this study lead schools which have achieved this. However, in schools where the principal did not fully commit to the essential elements of culturally responsive leadership, significant challenges persisted in

the areas of managing student behavior, supporting the implementation of culturally responsive teaching, and increasing the levels of parent involvement. In fact, in this study, student suspensions remained disproportionate – a proxy for inequitable discipline policies. If achievement, both academically and behaviorally, is to be realized and sustained, principals must be fully vested and engaged in actions consistent with the essential elements of culturally responsive leadership.

According to Jones and Nichols (2013), culturally competent leaders do not support “silos, which compartmentalize people in a given educative community thus preventing engagement in the education enterprise” (p. 115). In order for three of the four schools to progress toward a more culturally competent existence, their principals must abandon policies and practices which support the siloing of diverse students. These principals must also continue to pursue the time and interest of parents. They already actively do so, but only one principal in the study does so with the broader community in mind. Progress will not be achieved in increasing parent involvement until the entire school community is engaged in supporting the school, its mission, and its work. Clear opportunities exist for these principals to increase the level of culturally responsive leadership in their schools.

As a person of color and a current school principal, I understand the need for culturally responsive leadership in schools from personal experience. While I hold a personal frame of reference, many other principals in schools with diverse populations do not hold a similar frame of reference. This does not negate the need for culturally responsive leadership. More White allies must emerge to challenge existing power structures and shift the attitudes that drive actions away from cultural responsiveness.

White allies in schools, those with a culturally responsive orientation who teach and lead in schools, must be vocal and take action against inequities in schools. Challenging such status quo issues cannot be the work of only educators of color. Principals of diverse schools, especially White principals, can do this by allocating resources equitably, by structuring school policies with cultural differences in mind, and by intentionally and effectively implementing the tenets culturally responsive leadership.

The School District

The study reveals the challenge the school district faces in keeping a pulse on changing demographics within individual schools and on the resulting change in school contexts for school leaders. In an urban school district managing over 150 schools, support is crucial to effective work. In order for principals of schools with diverse student populations to experience success, the school district must work to both provide support and remove barriers. Two principals discussed unethical student assignment practices which either removed an inordinate number of students from the school or assigned a disproportionate number of ECE (special needs) students with severe emotional and behavior disorders to the school. One principal discussed the fact that her school offers no magnet programs to attract students who choose other schools over hers. If this district is truly committed to its vision of graduating students prepared to reach their full potential, it must discontinue policies and practices that stymie that potential at the schoolhouse door.

Brooks, Normore, and Wilkinson (2017) comment, “Understanding the equity history of the school and community will enable a leader to make more informed decisions, and hopefully not repeat the mistakes of the past” (p.9). The district in which

these schools are situated has a history of issues with student assignment policies and their lack of equity. Three of these principals demonstrate a “courageous and steadfast commitment to the long-term mission, goals and aims” of culturally responsive leadership (Brooks, Normore, & Wilkinson, 2017, p. 9). They want their schools to make such a meaningful impact on the lives of its students that it changes the trajectory of their lives (Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). This district is in a prime position to help its leaders better connect with parents and the surrounding community to engender better support for the work of these schools. In a country where xenophobic political attitudes and policies toward immigrants and individuals from ethnic minorities are shaping educational ideologies, this determination to lead in a culturally responsive manner is critical (Spring, 2016). Race continues to dictate educational experiences and outcomes for students, which has a negative consequence on students of color across the country (Skiba, Horner, Chung, Karega, Rausch, May, & Tobin, 2011). The district in which the schools in this study are situated recently approved the creation of a males of color academy; the only students who will be enrolled in this school are male students from non-White ethnicities from across the district. In a school whose intentional design is to only serve diverse students, the implementation of culturally responsive leadership will be critical to student success. The leader in this school must lead with a culturally responsive orientation. The teachers in this school must teach with a culturally responsive orientation. District leaders must support this school with a culturally responsive orientation. While the creation of this new males of color academy is a strong, district step in the direction of cultural responsiveness, it is not enough. Until the district is willing to enact policies and procedures that provide equity for the most

ethnically and economically diverse students in all of its schools (i.e., student assignment policies, allocation of magnet programs, allocation of school resources, and discipline management policies), the culturally responsive leadership work of principals will have little effect, and students will remain disenfranchised individuals within the system entrusted to educate them.

Principal Preparation Programs

Finally, this study reveals implications for principal preparation programs. In order for schools to be led by culturally responsive leaders, culturally responsive leaders must be cultivated through higher education. Principal preparation programs must help potential school leaders build and sharpen a skillset that will ensure school leaders can connect with the students and communities they serve, no matter how diverse they may be. This skillset will be developed as these programs teach specific approaches for developing and maintaining positive relationships with stakeholders in schools with diverse populations. These programs should provide emerging school leaders with immersive experiences with successful leaders in diverse schools to support this leadership development. Principal preparation programs should help potential school leaders identify their biases, develop strategies to mitigate them, and build a culturally responsive leadership paradigm. These students should be exposed to theories about culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive leadership through meaningful coursework prompting them to probe, explore, and adjust personal leadership orientations. Post-secondary institutions with principal preparation programs should provide and require courses that explore theories about culturally responsive pedagogy and culturally responsive leadership and their place in the current educational

environment. Aspiring principals should learn *why* this perspective on leadership is critical in increasingly diverse schools and learn *how* to lead in this manner. Taylor (2017) makes it clear that educators “must recognize the complex and pervasive racialization process that permeates and structures US schools and society at large” (p. 69). Emerging school leaders must develop the expertise needed to spot racism and inequity, identify the needs of diverse student populations, and structure appropriate responses to meet these needs. Taylor (2017) states, “racism is complex, subtle, and systematic, and our efforts to dismantle it should be equally so” (p. 71). How true it is that racism is pervasive in this modern age. It shows itself in various ways in education. While there is no single way to lead, school leaders should be taught how to deconstruct instances of inequity, create equitable processes, and lead schools in a way that builds systemic equity in schools. Therefore, education needs leaders who are culturally responsive and willing to counter the status quo for the sake of diverse students.

Recommendations for Future Study

This study sought to add to the existing research literature and also address the gap in the research regarding how school leaders implement culturally responsive leadership in Priority Schools. Future research can extend this focus. In this study, four principals were extensively interviewed about their leadership practices with regard to culturally responsive leadership. In addition, relevant documents were analyzed (30-60-90 Day Plan, Comprehensive School Improvement Plans, and schools’ mission and vision statements) for consistency with interview responses. Through their interview responses, these principals offer insight into how they attempt to lead their diverse schools in a culturally responsive manner.

A study that focuses on more participants might yield additional insight into how principals implement culturally responsive leadership. By expanding the participant pool (sample size), a researcher might uncover additional nuances to this style of leadership. Additionally, a more diverse participant pool could be analyzed. This might shift analysis to focus heavily on elementary schools, however, because most minority principals in the district in which this study was situated are in elementary schools. Another study of merit would consist of scaling up this study to district level staff to explore how their culturally responsive orientations support the work of culturally responsive leaders in the district. This would provide implications for the local board of education and their work to support effective leadership of diverse schools across the school district. This understanding might also create opportunities for culturally responsive leadership to be more intentionally infused into the leadership structure of the school district. Finally, a correlational study could be conducted to focus on the level of demonstration of the continuum's essential elements with student achievement over time. This could help researchers isolate which elements of the continuum are most impactful on student achievement.

Conclusion

Much attention has been centered upon culturally responsive teaching and its impact on student achievement (Buehler et al., 2009; Delpit, 1988; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b, 2009). However, some research studies have discussed the importance of school leadership in the context of CSR efforts and with marginalized student populations (Johnson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Milner, 2012, 2013). Culturally responsive leadership is distinguished from

other leadership approaches because it is anchored in the belief that a leader must clearly understand his or her own assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from himself or herself in order to lead effectively in multicultural settings (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Johnson (2006) asserts that culturally responsive leadership occurs when administrators merge curriculum innovation with social activism.

Effective leadership is critical to the success of any school – especially Priority Schools engaged in CSR. While the impact of school leadership has been examined with some depth, of key importance is the role of leadership in schools enacting CSR (Duke, 2014; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). To ensure coordinated, long-standing implementation of cultural responsiveness, principals must directly engage in and support this work (Duke, 2014; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2015). Culturally responsive leadership is paramount in schools working with diverse student populations in order to address the inherent barriers to these students' academic progress. Since the implementation of culturally responsive teaching and the fostering of culturally responsive cultures rests on the principal, school principals must lead in a culturally responsive manner in order to lift diverse student populations to higher academic achievement levels.

This study sought to understand how principals implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students. The aim of this study was to elucidate methods and strategies principals employ to address cultural and instructional barriers to increase student achievement. The principals in this study brought to bear both successes and challenges with a wide

range of stakeholders as they attempted to create the best possible educational environments for students from diverse backgrounds. Although the level of successful implementation varied as the principals' commitment to the essential elements of culturally responsive leadership varied, all four principals saw academic progress occur in their schools. This is good for all students.

Cultural responsiveness is about more than just race. Cultural responsiveness is about understanding how varying experiences impact students, learning how to embrace diversity, and fostering connections between school staff and the diverse populations they serve (Ladson-Billings, 1995b). Culturally responsive practices are more likely to occur in schools where principals engage in culturally responsive leadership and work to overcome the barriers that arise against it (Bustamante et al., 2009). The principals in this study are proof that when leadership is focused on making a difference in the lives of students from diverse backgrounds, culturally responsive practices can have a positive impact. When principals are focused on ensuring equity is present for all students, culturally responsive practices can happen. When principals have appropriate support from their districts and communities, culturally responsive practices can happen. The life trajectory of students from diverse backgrounds is positively changed when they encounter a culturally responsive leader. Though this approach to leadership may not always be popular, it is a better way to lead. May all students from diverse backgrounds have such an experience and realize much success in the future as a result of their encounter with a culturally responsive leader.

JOINT IMPLICATIONS

Limitations

A case study design was utilized in this capstone to detail the nuances of school personnel striving to be culturally responsive. A limitation of this capstone is possible researcher bias. Characteristic of case studies, the sample sizes are small; therefore transferability is limited beyond the scope of school districts similar to the one wherein this research was situated. Therefore, the findings of this capstone are limited to the context of a diverse school district but also low performing schools and student populations where the majority is of low socioeconomic status. This research is meant to inform the practice of educators working within a large and diverse student population. While quantitative data in this area is plentiful, there is a lack of rich qualitative data gathered from different perspectives to foster culturally responsive practices in schools. The small sample sizes in this capstone allowed for in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis for the purpose of bringing the experiences of educators serving in a diverse student population to light.

Also, both researchers are educators of color who have had professional experiences within the school district studied.

The researchers had previous professional encounters with the schools and participants of the capstone. Therefore, the study participants could have considered possible political issues that may arise as a result of sharing data in interviews and observations. Additionally, the racial positionality and personal culture of the researchers matter in studying and reporting on studies meant to increase the implementation of culturally responsive practices in education (Milner, 2007). Both researchers have experienced racism and injustice, so interpretations of the data are explained from a point-of-view that is meant to support educational practice which decreases instances of discrimination. Reflection, in the form of a researcher positionality section in the methodology of each study, was included to address possible tensions between the researcher and participants. Study participants were given the opportunity to review transcripts for accuracy, and the final capstone will be shared with all participants to ensure they are engaged in the process of accurately representing their experiences.

Implications

It is important to discuss the implications of this study in relation to the leadership work of study participants and the effective implementation of SEL in schools. It is not sufficient for leaders in schools with diverse student populations to *only* speak to the need for culturally responsive leadership but should also take steps toward effective implementation. Jones and Nichols (2013) posit, “individual educators who strive to become culturally competent must do so while working to create culturally competent institutions from an organizational standpoint” (p. 107). Of critical importance for schools is ensuring that equitable opportunities are provided to students of color. Cooper and Jackson (2011) echo the sentiment that minority students too often “sit in classrooms

waiting for opportunities that will elicit and nurture their attention, creativity, and intellectual potential” (p. 22). Issues concerning the establishment of a safe and caring school culture, building a culturally inclusive school climate, and providing professional development are responsibilities of school leaders. Each of these components is paramount for the successful implementation of SEL in schools. As administrators consider implementing school wide initiatives, it is important to address the needs of the growing diversity within the American student body because social emotional learning creates an environment conducive to the various contextual differences in today’s schools. Considering these needs, the findings of this capstone have several implications for the schools and for the school district in which these studies are situated.

The Local School Level

The first study revealed that when implementers of social emotional learning include central defining features of effectiveness and essential factors to increase implementation quality but exclude other factors, possible positive outcomes for students could be limited. An inclusive school climate infused with effective social emotional learning practices, quality implementation, and associated administrative support has the potential to bolsters all students’ performance both academically and socially. This can be achieved by identifying practical strategies for effective implementation of all SEL factors to maximize program effectiveness. Comprehensive social emotional learning in schools -- when supported by school, district, and community leaders -- systematically engages all stakeholders in providing a responsive climate for the positive development youth from diverse populations.

Similarly the second study revealed that some academic progress is possible without a complete commitment to the essential elements of culturally responsive leadership. However, in schools where the principal does not fully commit to the essential elements of culturally responsive leadership, significant challenges will persist. Principals must be fully committed to and engage in culturally responsive leadership to foster both academic and behavioral achievement. According to Jones and Nichols (2013), culturally competent leaders do not support “silos, which compartmentalize people in a given educative community thus preventing engagement in the education enterprise” (p. 115). Progress toward a more culturally competent existence requires principals to abandon policies and practices which support the siloing of diverse students. Progress will not be achieved until the entire school community is engaged in supporting the school, its mission, and its work.

The School District Level

Social emotional learning programs have become integral to addressing Americans’ concerns regarding low achieving students who also engage in problematic behaviors. Hoffman (2009) states that there is a “promise of SEL to foster academic achievement and equity in our education [but it] may not be realized unless more work is done to connect ideals with practices and to address the political and cultural assumptions that are being built into contemporary approaches” (p. 533). Furthermore, research supports the inclusion of social emotional competencies as a focus in staff professional development and the evaluation of SEL programs in schools. This is a call to action for school districts with diverse student populations. Districts must move away from the assumption that just the presence of SEL in schools improves associated advantages such

as improved academic grades and test scores, fewer behavioral issues, and prosocial relationships. SEL must be implemented with fidelity based upon evidence-based practices to achieve these results. Research to interpret, integrate, and critique SEL models and to highlight differences that may occur among schools and classrooms must be conducted to improve SEL implementation. The school district's policies influence both professional practice in schools and pedagogy in classrooms. Therefore, to provide a more equitable school climate to diverse populations, policies to evaluate and provide professional development for educators implementing SEL are critical.

The second study revealed the challenge the school district faces in clearly understanding the changing demographics and school context for school leaders. In an urban school district managing over 150 schools, clear and sustained district support for schools is crucial to the effective and productive work of schools. In order for principals of schools with diverse student populations to experience success, the school district must work to both provide support and remove barriers. Brooks, Normore, and Wilkinson (2017) comment, "understanding the equity history of the school and community will enable a leader to make more informed decisions, and hopefully not repeat the mistakes of the past" (p. 9). In a country where xenophobic political attitudes and policies toward immigrants and individuals from ethnic minorities are shaping educational ideologies, a determination to understand equity history and lead in a culturally responsive manner is critical (Spring, 2016). Sadly, race continues to dictate educational experiences and outcomes for students, leading to negative consequences for students of color (Skiba et al., 2011). Policies must be enacted in this district to counteract this.

Future Study

This capstone seeks to add to existing literature about SEL and culturally responsive leadership and address the gap of actionable steps schools and school leaders can take to create more culturally responsive schools. Future study can enhance and extend the data gathered through this capstone.

A longitudinal study could be conducted to assess how implementing SEL and culturally responsive leadership impacts student achievement. Such a study could examine the steps taken by schools to create more inclusive and responsive school environments and track how students perform academically over time. A study of this nature would provide quantitative data regarding how meeting diverse students' needs impacts their academic success.

Another future study could seek data from both parents' and students' perspectives regarding the implementation of SEL and culturally responsive leadership. Current research focuses on qualitative methods used to describe educators perspectives of practices to influence cultural responsiveness in order to benefit students and families. However, research on these benefits are often limited to the perspectives of those implementing and leading rather than from participants who can best validate positive results. The perspectives from these populations have the potential to enrich findings and pinpoint further areas of improvement for efforts meant to support cultural responsiveness in schools.

Finally, a future study could seek a broader sample size and/or different participants. Because both studies in this capstone were situated in the same school district, the sample pool became limited. A future study with a broader sample pool

could uncover more nuanced action steps with implementing SEL and leading in a culturally responsive manner. A study of this nature would also render more data and help to bolster the strength of study conclusions.

Conclusion

SEL and effective leadership are critical to the success of any school – especially Priority Schools engaged in CSR. The purpose of first study was to inform school and district leaders of the essential features of effective SEL and implementation to grow socially competent students and foster a culturally responsive school climate. In order for school leaders to reap benefits associated with SEL it requires courage to advocate for a holistic approach to student learning and must include interventions for the academic and social emotional development for all students. Integrating effective social emotional learning programs with integrity has the potential to transform schools with students in crisis by addressing diversity, increasing equity, and fostering cultural responsiveness.

While the impact of school leadership has been examined with some depth, the role of leadership in schools enacting CSR is of key importance (Duke, 2014; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson, 2010). Culturally responsive leadership is distinguished from other leadership approaches because it is anchored in a leader’s clear understanding of his or her own assumptions, beliefs, and values about people and cultures different from himself or herself in order to lead effectively in multicultural settings (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). For schools working with marginalized groups, culturally responsive leadership is paramount to help students realize success. School principals must lead in a culturally responsive manner in order to raise marginalized student populations to higher academic

achievement levels. The aim of the first study was to elucidate methods and strategies principals employ to address cultural and instructional barriers to increase student achievement. Although the level of successful implementation varied as the principal's commitment to culturally responsive leadership varied, all four principals saw academic progress occur in their schools -- which is good for all students, especially students from diverse and marginalized populations. School leadership must be willing to realign structures and relationships to achieve change for students in diverse populations.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1A

Semi-structured Interviews

Participant Name: _____ Gender Male / Female School Name: _____ Date : _____ _____	
Introduction I am _____ from _____ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ General purpose of the study ✓ Aims of the interview and expected duration ✓ Who is involved in the process (other participants) ✓ Why the participant's cooperation is important ✓ What will happen with the collected information and how the participant/target group will benefit ✓ Any questions? ✓ Consent 	
Warm up [demographic & work history] Can I ask some details about you and your job? Job Title _____ Highest Educational Grade attained ____ Years worked at this school __ __ yrs __ __ mths Are you originally from this area/district? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Now I am going to ask you some questions about your experiences as an educator implementing social emotional learning at this school.	
Domain	Topic and Probes
SEL Knowledge?	1. What is social emotional learning? Probes: Can you describe the five behavioral competencies? 2. What are the student outcomes associated with social emotional learning?

Domain	Topic and Probes
SEL Characteristics	<p>Probes: Do you think it is necessary to have SEL in schools? Why?</p> <p>3. What approach does your school use to teach SEL?</p> <p>Probes: direct instruction (infused in teaching practices), embedded instruction (infused instruction with academics), organizational strategies (activities to promote SEL) or SEL lessons (free standing direct teaching of SEL skill)</p> <p>4. What curriculum and/or program is used to teach SEL?</p> <p>Probes: Is it researched based? How was program and/or strategies selected?</p> <p>5. What opportunities are available for students to practice SEL skills for application in their daily life?</p> <p>Prompt: Are there activities to help demonstrate learning to everyday situations?</p> <p>6. What teaching methods are used to promote student engagement and to build relationships in the classroom?</p> <p>Prompt: What roles do different people play, is there an established system for sharing what students have learned and making in personal to their experiences at school?</p> <p>7. How are developmental and cultural differences addressed in SEL instruction?</p> <p>Prompt: Are learning objectives appropriate for learning differences? What methods are used to promote cultural responsiveness and sensitivity?</p>
SEL Implementation Quality	<p>8. How long has SEL been implemented in your school? Was it school-wide?</p> <p>9. How are teachers and other staff engaged in the process to implement SEL?</p> <p>Probes: Is there steering committee? If so, who are the members?</p> <p>10. Is there a shared vision? If so, please share.</p> <p>11. How was it determined that SEL would be implemented at your school?</p> <p>Probes: Was there a needs and/or resource assessment completed?</p> <p>12. Please explain the plan followed to implement SEL.</p> <p>Probes: What were the initial goals and objectives?</p> <p>13. What training and /or staff development took place before SEL was implemented?</p> <p>14. Are any SEL program components or strategies integrated into the school wide environment (across classrooms and grade levels)?</p> <p>15. What methods are used for program evaluation and improvement?</p>

Domain	Topic and Probes
Implementation support	<p>Probes: Are surveys or questionnaires used? How often? How do staff give feedback about SEL implementation? What are your beliefs about the importance of SEL in schools?</p> <p>16. What role do you play in modeling behavior for students and staff in regards on social and emotional skills?</p> <p>17. How has integration of SEL improved the climate in your school?</p> <p>18. How was the vision for SEL implementation established in your school?</p> <p>Prompt: How was the vision developed? Agreed upon? Shared?</p> <p>19. How were efforts initiated and integrated school wide?</p> <p>20. To your knowledge is SEL being implemented with integrity at your school?</p> <p>Prompt: What perceptions do you gather from teachers and staff? What evidence supports your thoughts?</p> <p>21. What are the training supports offered?</p> <p>Prompt: Are there materials and resources available to support teachers and staff?</p> <p>22. To your knowledge is SEL improving positive student outcomes at your school? Please provide examples to demonstrate this.</p>
Closing	<p>Is there anything else you think is important in diagnosing malaria that we have not talked about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Summarize ✓ Thank participant ✓ Provide extra information and contacts to participants

Appendix 1B
Follow-up Interview

Participant Name:

Participant gender (*circle*): male/female

Participant title (*circle*): implementer/ supervisor

School name:

Audio file #: |_|_|_|_|_| **Date:** |_|_|/|_|_|/|_|_|

Today's date: |_|_|/|_|_|/|_|_|

1. How would you describe the atmosphere and context of the interview?

2. What were the main points made during the interview?

3. What new information did you gain through this interview in regards to social emotional learning implementation?

4. Was there anything surprising to you personally? Or that made you think differently?

5. What messages did you take from this interview for SEL evaluation and improvement?

6. Were there any problems with the topic guide (e.g., wording, order of topics, missing topics) you experienced in this interview?

Appendix 1C
Observation Protocol

Participant Name:

Participant Gender (*circle*): male/female

Participant Title (*circle*): implementer/ supervisor

School Name:

Setting:

Individual Observed:

Observation #: (first observation, second, etc.)

Observer involvement:

Date/Time:

Place:

Duration of Observation (indicate start/end times):

Guiding questions:

1. What SEL approach is being used?

direct instruction embedded instruction organizational strategies SEL lesson

2. Curriculum used?

Yes No

Name:

3. Life application activities?

Yes No

4. Student engagement:

Yes No

5. Developmental/Cultural responsive teaching methods used:

Yes No

Descriptive Notes (Detailed, chronological notes about what thoughts the observer sees, hears; what occurred; the physical setting)	Reflective Notes (Concurrent notes about the observer's personal reactions, experiences)

Appendix 2A
Interview Protocol

Demographics, Knowledge, and Competency

1. Name: _____ School: _____
2. Race: _____ Sex: Male Female
3. Highest Level of Education: Masters Specialist Doctorate
4. Years in education: _____
5. Years as a principal in a Priority School: _____
6. What inspired you to go to into education and to become a principal?
7. Describe your leadership philosophy.
8. How do you define cultural responsiveness (or competence)?

What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “culturally responsive leadership”?

School Culture and Climate

9. What are the current demographics of your student population? Have these demographics changed since being identified as a Priority School? If so, in what ways?
10. What do you see as the benefits and challenges of the diversity of your student population? What steps have been taken to connect these diverse student groups to the broader school community and academic curriculum?
11. What barriers exist to implementing the steps you just mentioned?

Culturally Responsive Leadership Practices

12. What strategies are being implemented to overcome the aforementioned barriers?
13. Is your teaching staff reflective of the diversity of your student population? If not, what steps are you taking to create a more diverse staff?
14. How have programs/professional development in your school assisted staff in better working with diverse students?
15. What do you do, as the school leader, to build a sense of community in your school?
16. Should the “outside community” be involved in helping all students be successful? How do you engage the community in supporting this school?
17. How do you foster consistent parent participation in your school? Has it been difficult engaging any specific groups of parents? What strategies are being implemented to address this challenge?
18. How do the discipline policies of your school promote equity for all students?
19. What experience do you have initiating and implementing culturally responsive practices in your school?
20. What school or district policies guide your practice of promoting diversity and cultural responsiveness?
21. Is there anything you would like to mention that we have not discussed?

Appendix 2B

Informed Consent

LEVERAGING INFLUENCE:
EXPLORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE
LEADERSHIP

Investigator(s) Name and Address:
Advisor and Principal Investigator:
Meera Alagaraja, PhD
College of Education and Human Development
University of Louisville
1905 South 1st Street
Louisville, KY 40292

Joseph Ellison, III
University of Louisville
4532 Pulaski Ct.
Louisville, KY 40245; joseph.ellison@louisville.edu

Site(s) where study is to be conducted: University of Louisville, Jefferson County Public Schools.

Phone number for subjects to call for questions: Joseph Ellison, III at (270) 314-8393

Introduction and Background Information

You are invited to participate in a research study. The study is being conducted by Meera Alagaraja, PhD and Joseph Ellison, III (doctoral student). The study is sponsored by the University of Louisville, Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational Development (ELEOD). The study will take place at the University of Louisville and Jefferson County Public Schools. Approximately four subjects will be invited to participate.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine how principals in Priority Schools implement culturally responsive leadership and mitigate barriers to cultural competence to increase achievement for all students.

Procedures

In this study, you will be asked to provide demographic information and information about your past experiences in education. You will also be asked to provide responses to several questions about your experiences as a school leader as it relates to the implementation of culturally responsive leadership. Your participation will include an interview to collect demographic and some contextual information and to explore your experiences with leading in a culturally responsive manner (90 minutes). A transcript of the interview will be returned within two weeks of the completion of the interview. At that time, you will have the opportunity to provide feedback on the information gleaned from the interview. The interview will be audio recorded. I am highly flexible and are willing to meet with at your convenience. The interview phase of this research project will conclude by February 28, 2017. You may decline to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

Potential Risks

There are no foreseeable risks other than possible discomfort in answering personal questions.

Benefits

The possible benefits of this study include the opportunity for current principals to reflect on their own contribution to comprehensive school reform work. The possible benefits to society include the contribution to a greater understanding of the lived experiences of principals who are charged with school turnaround and are leading in a culturally responsive manner. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for your time, inconvenience, or expenses while you are in this study.

Security

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. Your privacy will be protected to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public; pseudonyms will be used, and schools will be identified by number. While unlikely, the following may look at the study records:

The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, and the Human Subjects Protection Program Office.

People who are responsible for research and HIPAA oversight at the institutions where the study is conducted.

Government agencies, such as: Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP)

Conflict of Interest

This study involves no foreseeable conflict of interest.

Security

All data will be stored on a password-protected computer. Hard copy documents will be stored in a locked file at the investigator's home. Everything will be destroyed within six months of the study's completion.

Voluntary Participation

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify. You will be told about any changes that may affect your decision to continue in the study.

Contact Persons, Research Subject's Rights, Questions, Concerns, and Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints about the study or the study staff, you have three options.

You may contact the principal investigator at (502) 852-0617 or m0alag01@louisville.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a study subject, questions, concerns or complaints, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO) (502) 852-5188. You may discuss any questions about your rights as a subject, in secret, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the HSPPO staff. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as lay members of the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this study.

If you want to speak to a person outside the University, you may call 1-877-852-1167. You will be given the chance to talk about any questions, concerns or complaints in secret. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Acknowledgment and Signatures

This informed consent document is not a contract. This document tells you what will happen during the study if you choose to take part. Your signature indicates that this study has been explained to you, that your questions have been answered, and that you agree to take part in the study. You are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled by signing this informed consent document. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Subject Name (Please Print)	Signature of Subject	Date Signed
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Printed Name of Legal Representative (if applicable)	Signature of Legal Representative	Date Signed
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Relationship of Legal Representative to Subject

Printed Name of Person Explaining Consent Form	Signature of Person Explaining Consent Form (if other than the Investigator)	Date Signed
--	--	-------------

Printed Name of Investigator	Signature of Investigator	Date Signed
------------------------------	---------------------------	-------------

List of Investigators:
Meera Alagaraja
Joseph Ellison, III

Phone Numbers:
(502) 852-0617
(270) 314-8393

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jessika Berry Benson

ADDRESS: Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational
Development
1905 S. 1st Street
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40208

DOB: September 24, 1979

EDUCATION & TRAINING:

B.A., Psychology
Indiana University Southeast
2003

M.Ed., Counseling Psychology
University of Louisville
2008

M.S., Education – School Counseling
Indiana University Southeast
2011

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES:

Jefferson County Counselor Association
2013-Present

Kentucky Counselor Association
2013, 2015

Kentucky Association for College Admission Counseling
2016-Present

American School Counselor Association
2015-Present

NATIONAL MEETING PRESENTATIONS:

Council for Opportunity in Education Annual Conference
2007, 2011

INVITED

PRESENTATIONS:

Jefferson County Counselors Association
2009, 2016, 2017

Kentucky Association for College Admission Counseling
2016

Kentucky Counselor Association
2009, 2012, 2017

Kentucky School Counselor Association
2008, 2016

Joseph Ellison, III

ADDRESS: Department of Educational Leadership, Evaluation and Organizational
Development
1905 S. 1st Street
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40208

DOB: February 8, 1979

EDUCATION
& TRAINING:

B.S., Secondary English Education
Cumberland College, Williamsburg, KY
2001

M.Ed., Educational Leadership and Administration
Western Kentucky Univeristy, Bowling Green, KY
2004

Rank 1., Supervisor of Instruction
Western Kentucky Univeristy, Bowling Green, KY
2012

AWARDS: 21st Century Leadership Award, University of the Cumberlands
2009

Who's Who Among America's Teachers
2004

Alumni Board of Directors Service Award, Cumberland College
2001

PROFESSIONAL
SOCIETIES:

ASCD (*formerly Association for Supervision and Curriculum
Development*) (2008-present)

SACS/AdvancED (2008-present)

Phi Kappa Phi National Honor Society (2004-present)

NATIONAL MEETING

PRESENTATIONS: UCEA Convention
2015

- Co-presented research paper entitled *Understanding Principal's Experiences with the Biennial Leadership Audit: A Phenomenology*
- Focus of paper: investigating the lived experiences of principals in Persistently Low Achieving Schools related to a leadership audit to elucidate the turnaround process initiated by NCLB and how it impacts principals