

## **Culturally Responsive School Leadership: A Synthesis of the Literature**

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*Culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) has become important to research on culturally responsive education, reform, and social justice education. This comprehensive review provides a framework for the expanding body of literature that seeks to make not only teaching, but rather the entire school environment, responsive to the schooling needs of minoritized students. Based on the literature, we frame the discussion around clarifying strands—critical self-awareness, CRSL and teacher preparation, CRSL and school environments, and CRSL and community advocacy. We then outline specific CRSL behaviors that center inclusion, equity, advocacy, and social justice in school. Pulling from literature on leadership, social justice, culturally relevant schooling, and students/communities of color, we describe five specific expressions of CRSL found in unique communities. Finally, we reflect on the continued promise and implications of CRSL.*

**KEYWORDS:** antiracist, antioppressive, community-based leadership, culturally responsive education, Indigenous leadership, school leadership, social justice

Nearly two decades ago, culturally relevant (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 1994) entered and, arguably, would come to dominate discourses on education and reform. Following the effective schools research of earlier years, this corpus of work sought to unearth and explicitly describe ways in which classroom teachers could address the unique learning needs of minoritized students. Specific strategies were produced as a result of this

work, and it set education research on pedagogy in new, untapped directions. For example, teachers are encouraged to use cultural referents in both pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and classroom management (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). And culturally responsive classrooms have been expanded to include multiple epistemologies as diverse as Indigenous (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008) and even hip-hop approaches (Khalifa, 2013).

Gay (2010) made the point that culturally responsive teaching is important, but that it alone cannot solve the major challenges facing minoritized students. She amplified the importance of reforming and transforming all aspects of the educational enterprise, such as funding, policymaking, and administration, so they too are culturally responsive. Indeed, such incisive transformations are yet to happen soundly and consistently in the field of educational leadership. Surely, if teachers should adjust their craft in ways that respond effectively to children's cultural learning and social needs in the classroom, as Gay suggested, then school administrators must have a similar mandate regarding the entire school culture and climate. Although we agree with Gay that major changes are needed to reform society and address social, political, and economic inequities, our focus in this article is on reforming school leadership.

Educational reformers have long claimed school leadership is a crucial component to any reform of education, secondary only to the very act of teaching (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). This same research suggests good teachers will eventually leave schools where there are ineffective school leaders, especially in urban educational environments. Therefore, developing effective leaders becomes a vital part of the process in recruiting and retaining the best teachers for children who have been marginalized. Effective leaders must be capable of promoting and sustaining an environment stable enough to attract, maintain, and support the further development of good teachers. Additionally, the right leader will hold an understanding of the need to recruit and sustain culturally responsive teachers who are better prepared to work with poor children of color. This goal is especially important given the high likelihood poor children of color will get mostly inexperienced teachers who are often teaching out of their content areas (Clotfelter, Ladd, Vigdor, & Wheeler, 2006; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002; Office for Civil Rights, 2014).

Thus, given this necessary and essential place of educational leadership in school reform, fundamental questions must be raised, such as what are the unique characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader? How can leaders respond to minoritized or culturally unique school contexts in similar ways as teachers respond to diverse students? What behaviors does such leadership entail? How must the effectiveness of a culturally responsive school leader be characterized and measured? In this article, we examine an emerging body of literature on culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) as it relates to the work of principals. Much like the early work on culturally responsive teaching, we examine a phenomenon that has appeared in practice-centered settings and outline the contours of its existence in the principalship. However, unique to our scholarly endeavor is our engagement in a process that seeks to extract aspects from current research that exemplify notions of CRSL.

Although the focus of this article is building-level leaders, or principals and assistant principals, we understand culturally responsive school leaders serve at

multiple levels and in various contexts, from district-level (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008), to community leaders (Khalifa, 2012), to teacher-leaders (Villegas & Lucas, 2002), and all in between. For example, there has been an increasing body of knowledge on the impact of teacher-leaders (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Similarly, community-influenced—or even community-led—school leadership has also gained quite a bit of traction in recent years (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013). Also, Leithwood (1995) and many others (Hannay, Jaafar, & Earl, 2013; Khalifa, Jennings, Briscoe, Oleszweski, & Abdi, 2014; Sergiovanni, 1992) have demonstrated the deep impact superintendents and other district-level administrators can have on education and school reform (Mattingly, 2003).

We recognize the importance of these myriad forms of culturally responsive leadership; however, we focus on the school-level administrator (principalship) for a number of reasons. Prior research suggests school principals can have a profoundly deep impact on instruction and student learning (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013). Of all leadership expressions, the principal is most knowledgeable about resources, and he/she is best positioned to promote and support school-level reforms (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). The principalship is also the most recognizable leadership position in a school, and the position most empowered by district, and even state, policy. It is also the one held most accountable for progress or lack thereof. 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; and conversely, district-level mandates are only effective to the extent they are locally enforced.

Finally, we agree with Gay (2010) that cultural responsiveness cannot be decontextualized or ahistorical; thus, the focus of our work is on urban schools, and the scope of this article is the urban school leader. In the following sections, we briefly discuss what we mean by CRSL but then discuss concerns raised about this term. We then explain the methodology we employed in our analysis of the literature. We describe how four clarifying strands of CRSL emerged in our study of the principalship. And finally, we identify three distinct roles for culturally responsive leaders.

### **Definitions, Methodology, Terminology, and Guiding Leadership Framework**

In this article, we choose to describe CRSL *behaviors*. In other words, we highlight practices and actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses that influence school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes. This literature review suggests culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. For example, culturally responsive school leaders are responsible for promoting a school climate inclusive of minoritized students, particularly those marginalized within most school contexts. Such leaders also maintain a presence in, and relationships with, community members they serve. They lead professional developments to ensure their teachers and staff, and the curriculum, are *continuously* responsive to minoritized students. In other words, as population demographics continuously shift, so too must the leadership practices and school contexts that respond to the needs that accompany these shifts. It is the job of instructional

leaders to develop and improve teachers' craft in ways that result in improved student outcomes, but this must be done with cultural responsiveness.

Moreover, culturally responsive leaders develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students. Finally, we recognize that culturally responsive leadership is needed in all settings including those not dominated by minoritized students, and that not all students of color are minoritized. In this article, we address culturally responsive leadership of minoritized students. Here, we consider minoritized students individuals from racially oppressed communities that have been marginalized—both legally and discursively—because of their non-dominant race, ethnicity, religion, language, or citizenship. Indeed, all minoritized students also have rich histories of agency, appropriation, and resistance to oppression; yet, this term recognizes the histories of oppression minoritized students have faced and the need for schools to resist the continuing contexts of oppression. We further acknowledge that gender, sexuality, income, and other factors lead to even further marginalization. Because minoritized students have been disadvantaged by historically oppressive structures, and because educators and schools have been—intentionally or unintentionally—complicit in reproducing this oppression, culturally responsive school leaders have a principled, moral responsibility to counter this oppression.

## **Method**

### *Approach to Reviewing the Literature*

Like all other literature reviews, we employed a search methodology aimed at finding and including all of the articles on CRSL in Google, Google Scholar, and academic scholarly search engines (JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE, ERIC). In the years spanning from 1989 to 2014, we found 37 journal articles and 8 books, and summarized each source, noted which were empirical, and noted best practices and strategies that authors reported, paying attention to the emerging common themes. This approach alone, we soon learned, was problematic because a great number of sources that did not include titles with either of the terms “culturally responsive” or “leadership” did contain a great deal of relevance to our topic. For example, Gardiner and Enomoto's (2006) article “Urban School Principals and their Role as Multicultural Leaders” was highly informative in the ways they developed culture-specific programs to serve immigrant/refugee students. Similarly, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) described school-based practices and programs that are responsive to Indigenous youth needs, but had a title that, again, did not signal CRSL. Indeed, the implementation of school-based programs is often a function of school leadership.

Likewise, a number of most data-rich studies (Alston, 2005; Benham, 1997; Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1989; López, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Morris, 1991; Tillman, 2006; Walker, 2009) were conducted on nuanced, school leadership approaches responsive to local cultures, but these scholars did not explicitly name their studies with terms including “culturally responsive.” Thus, we came to realize the need for a broader search. In addition to “culturally responsive leadership,” we used other search terms to gain a fuller understanding

of this body of knowledge. For example, our search of particular groups and “leadership” (i.e., leadership and “African Americans,” “Indigenous,” “Latino,” “Africa,” “Asia,” and “urban”) was useful.

We also looked at school leadership with the key words of “race,” “moral,” and “ethnicity,” and although these results were less helpful, another 13 sources were identified and incorporated into this review. Despite the depth of research containing expressions of culturally responsive leadership in communities of color, we confined this particular article to research explicitly about aspects of schooling and education. Essentially, we were interested in the body of research that reflects the need for education—teaching and learning contexts, leadership, and communities—to be more responsive and relevant to students.

Although many scholars use culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching as a way to frame their discussions on culturally responsive leadership, we draw a distinction between teaching and leadership. The recognition of culture is important to multiple disciplines in education (e.g., teacher education and curriculum and instruction), yet the differences between what happens in classrooms and schools are so vast that we felt it far more useful to focus on school culture and leadership practices. We also noted that the educational administration literature tends to conflate the use of the terms “culture” and “school culture.” Therefore, by including other terms, we were able to explore questions about school-level structures and programs, school culture, achievement (opportunity) gaps, discipline gaps, use of school funding, school and community overlap, curriculum development and monitoring, and teacher quality and training in ways that our peers have not.

After reviewing all of the sources, it became useful for us to develop a framework that allowed us to discern which sources would be useful and would be incorporated in this review. First, despite the sources available on culturally responsive leadership, we only used those explicitly about education and school contexts. Then, we focused on sources that included empirical evidence. We also concentrated on and included sources with connections to areas of school leadership and uniqueness or difference—“culture,” “language,” “sexual orientation,” “national origin,” “gender,” “race,” “identity,” or “social class.” We conducted searches using each of these terms, but again, only included articles that were empirical. And finally, we narrowed these sources by selecting those that specifically highlighted some type of unique or specific leadership behaviors used with students in any area of difference or with minoritized populations. These leadership behaviors were actual principal behaviors or school-level policies such as leveraging of school recourses or structures. We then collated all of the behaviors that were in the sources, and we compiled the leadership behaviors that had a direct impact on school climate, curriculum, policy, pedagogy, and student achievement. Table 1 demonstrates the process we used to narrow our search for this review.

### *Terminology and Key Terms*

Here, we briefly give some attention to which terms best describe this work. Multicultural and critical multicultural education (Banks, 1993, 2008; Giroux, 1992; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1997; Nieto, 1999) emphasized the *knowledge* of educators and school leaders, and the marginalization many people of color faced:

**TABLE 1***Review of scholarly sources in literature review*

Sources	Books	Articles/chapters
Total in initial review on CRSL	8	37
Additional sources found around school leadership and uniqueness or difference (e.g., race, culture, sexuality, gender, SES, language, etc.)	43	71
Total from two lines above	51	108
Number of empirical sources from the total	19	60
Empirical sources on school leadership behaviors directed specifically minoritized students	7	32

*Note.* SES = socioeconomic status; CRSL = culturally responsive school leadership.

“The school, college and university curriculum marginalizes the experiences of people of color and of women” (Banks, 1993, p. 4). As Banks (1993) deconstructed earlier discourses around multicultural education, he noted that, essentially,

Knowledge reflects the values and interests of its creators, and (the conflicting discourses) illustrates how the debate between multiculturalists and the Western traditionalists is rooted in their conflicting conceptions about the nature of knowledge and their divergent political and social interests. (p. 4)

Thus, the emancipatory tone that would legitimize the voices, epistemologies, knowledges, and practices of marginalized educators—which was central to multiculturalist and critical multiculturalist understandings—would come to also largely inform work around culturally relevant, responsive, and even sustaining pedagogies (Paris, 2012).

Although terms like “culturally responsive” and “culturally relevant” are close in meaning and respond to the unique learning needs of marginalized students, even more recent terms like culturally *sustaining* pedagogy (Paris, 2012) include elements of ongoing practices that address a continuing need and a changing demographic. In situating culturally *responsive* pedagogy, Cazden and Leggett (1976) suggested “all school systems should bring the invisible culture of the community into the school through parent participation, hiring and promotion of minority group personnel, and in-service training for the school staff” (p. 17). Other terms, such as “culturally compatible” (Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), “cultural collusion” (Beachum & McCray, 2004), “cultural synchronism” (Irvine, 2002), and “culturally proficient” (Lindsey, Roberts, & CampbellJones, 2004; Terrell & Lindsey, 2008) have also been used. Yet, in essence, they all share a common, central point: the need for children’s educators and educational contexts to understand, respond, incorporate, accommodate, and ultimately celebrate the

entirety of the children they serve—including their languages and literacies, spiritual universes, cultures, racial proclivities, behaviors, knowledges, critical thought, and appearances.

We settled on the term “*culturally responsive school leadership*” for two reasons. First, in addition to culturally responsive being one of the earlier and more recognizable terms employed to describe this work, it has also been most consistently employed in educational leadership studies (Johnson, 2006; Merchant, Garza, & Ramalho, 2013; Webb-Johnson, 2006). Second, by emphasizing the word *responsive*, we capture an important action-based, and even urgent, aspect of the term: the ability of school leaders to create school contexts and curriculum that responds effectively to the educational, social, political, and cultural needs of students. Of course, culturally responsive leadership is also *relevant* to the context. In much the same spirit, this literature review responds to a rapidly expanding body of literature that often has unclear, if not conflicting, characterizations. Given the gravity of the topic—and the inequities that continue, despite the pervasiveness of instructional, transformational, and other forms of school leadership—this one is timely.

Finally, CRSL encompasses aspects of antioppressive/racist leadership (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Kumashiro, 2000), transformative leadership (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Shields, 2010), and social justice leadership (Bogotch, 2002; Theoharis, 2007), but pushes further. For example, although these forms of leadership all focus on liberatory practices that resist oppression or marginalization and minoritized students, CRSL is not only liberatory and antioppressive, it is also affirmative, and seeks to identify and institutionalize practices that affirm Indigenous and authentic cultural practices of students. So for instance, culturally responsive leaders—like antioppressive, transformative, social justice leaders—will challenge teaching and environments that marginalize students of color, and they will also identify, protect, institutionalize, and celebrate all cultural practices from these students. This affirmative behavior is a shift from imbuing only emancipatory leadership practices of resistance. Performing cultural work (Cooper, 2009) is much more involved and complex than advocating for it, for, although it does involve the advocacy, it also requires leaders to learn about each community they serve, and situate aspects of their schools so they celebrate all cultures.

### *Guiding Leadership Framework*

We situate the leadership framework of this literature review at the school level, and more specifically, on the influence principals have on the school environment (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Leithwood, 1995). Most of this scholarship focuses on ways principals serve as instructional leaders, which affect student achievement. Researchers have found that principals can influence teachers’ own learning, instruction, and ultimately, student achievement (J. B. Anderson, 2008; Branch et al., 2013; Drago-Severson, 2012; Eilers & Camacho, 2007; Griffith, 1999). In this sense, principals can “shape growth-enhancing climates that support adult learning as they work to manage adaptive challenges” (Drago-Severson, 2012, p. 1). However, in addition to expressions of instructional leadership, principals have also served as transformational leaders, wherein they have successfully promoted environments with strong relationships of trust, vision, goals, and

a sense of community (Giles, Johnson, Brooks, & Jacobson, 2005; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Similarly, we also consider the expanding bodies of literature that suggest principals can influence student success by having strong relationships with students and families (Ishimaru, 2014; Khalifa, 2013; Sanders & Harvey, 2002) by advocating for community-based interests (G. L. Anderson, 2009; Cooper, 2009; Khalifa, 2012) and by creating schools as spaces of inclusivity (J. E. Davis & Jordan, 1995; Ingram, 1997; Khalifa, 2010, 2013; Riehl, 2000). All of these expressions of leadership emphasize the central role of the principal in school reform, and it is with this framework that we examine CRSL.

### *Understanding the Need for Culturally Responsive School Leadership*

For the past half-century, closing the racialized achievement (opportunity) gap has been one of the central issues in education research studies and debates, particularly in the United States.<sup>1</sup> It has driven several major legislative initiatives, and reform efforts have cost taxpayers hundreds of billions in tax dollars (Payne, 2008). Ironically, though, a viable solution to closing the opportunity gap has remained elusive. Hallinger and Leithwood (1998) realized culture plays a significant role in shaping the thinking, behaviors, and practices of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other school stakeholders. Still, however, current research suggests students of historically oppressed groups are still marginalized in school. Schools will only become more racially and culturally diverse in the future, and by 2020, nearly half of all high school graduates will be minoritized students (Prescott & Bransberger, 2008).

B. L. Young, Madsen, and Young (2010) indicated principals in their study were not only unprepared to lead in diverse schools and implement policy that would respond to diversity issues, but also they could not even articulate meaningful discourses around diversity. This is tragic given the centrality of principals who address “issues of meaning construction, promote inclusive school cultures and instructional practices, and work to position schools within community, organizational, and service-related networks” (Riehl, 2000, p. 68). Unfortunately, most leadership reformers focus almost exclusively on instructional, transformational, and transactional leadership models to address the cultural needs of students. It has become increasingly clear, however, that an intensification of these same leadership strategies will do little to address the needs of minoritized students.

In fact, Black, Latino, and Indigenous students perform worse on nearly every educational measure valued by U.S. schools. And the discipline gap—which is often characterized by racialized disparities in disciplinary referrals, suspensions, expulsions, and court citations—is a direct indication that school cultures are hostile toward minoritized students. Scholars (Vavrus & Cole, 2002) found that when African American students violated White middle-class rules of interaction, such as speaking louder or questioning class rules or teacher authority, they were referred to the principal’s office more often than White students. And despite there being no evidence for behavioral differences, Blacks and Latinos are more likely than Whites to be referred to the office for such subjective offenses, such as defiance or noncompliance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008). These responses create a



hostile school environment and lead to student disengagement in school, as frequent suspensions appear to significantly contribute to the risk of academic underperformance (J. E. Davis, 1995; J. E. Davis & Jordan, 1995).

Like other students, minoritized students struggle with a range of academic and personal issues, including low school performance, but they do so in a culture that disproportionately disciplines them and questions their intelligence, leading to discomfort in school. This situation indicates a strong need for CRSL to address the social culture in schools. Indeed, Black, Latino, and poor students face a hostile school climate and are often being pulled and pushed out of school (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Khalifa, 2010; Lee & Burkam, 2003; Okey & Cusick, 1995). Low school performance for students of color is directly related to the educators in the buildings that serve these students. Teacher expectations are often lower for minoritized students than for their White classmates (McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Students' race, language, cultural behaviors, proclivities, and mannerisms all inform teachers' expectations for students (Dusek & Joseph, 1983; S. L. Lightfoot, 1978; Rong, 1996; Terrill & Mark, 2000), despite scholarship that shows high achievement in all of these groups (Felice, 1981; Flores-González, 1999; Hébert & Reis, 1999; Hilliard, 2003; Lee, Winfield, & Wilson, 1991).

If low expectations occur because teachers do not feel students are smart enough based on their behaviors or appearances, then the marginalization of students' social and cultural capital occurs and perpetuates a cycle, indicating that educators either do not value or recognize the worth of these minoritized perspectives (Ginwright, 2007; Khalifa, 2010; Ream & Rumberger, 2008). Policies that require school leaders to address the academic and discipline disparities have not been enough to address the problems, and in a number of instances, racial gaps continue to worsen (Ford & Moore, 2013; Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 2006). CRSL addresses issues associated with the educational improvements for minoritized students. In the forthcoming section, we provide an overview for CRSL behaviors.

### *Overview CRSL Behaviors*

In our synthesis of the literature, four major strands of CRSL emerged. But many of the terms we use have also been used in uniquely different ways. Moreover, scholars of curriculum or teacher preparation may understand and even use some of these terms differently from how school leadership scholars may use them. Therefore, we briefly define what we mean by each of the four more salient CRSL behaviors. Following this brief overview of the behaviors, we then offer a much more detailed synthesis of the literature around each major behavioral strand.

#### *Critical Self-Awareness*

In articulating the first aspect of culturally responsive leadership, we found a number of works referred to the notion that the leader needed to have *an awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it came to serving poor children of color*. This is also referred to as a critical consciousness (Brown, 2004; Dantley, 2005a; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gooden, 2005; McKenzie et al., 2008), and we suggest that this awareness can be developed. A good leadership

preparation program that addresses race, culture, language, national identity, and other areas of difference is necessary but not sufficient in developing a critical consciousness. The principal's critical consciousness of culture and race really serves as a foundation to establish beliefs that undergird her practice.

For instance, Gay and Kirkland (2003) emphasized the critical consciousness aspect of culturally responsive teaching, arguing that teachers must know who they are as people, understand the contexts in which they teach, and intently question their knowledge base and assumptions. Similarly, leaders must have an awareness of self and an understanding of the context in which they lead. Additionally, leaders must use their understanding to envision and create a new environment of learning for children in their building who have been marginalized because of race and class. They must be keenly aware of inequitable factors that adversely affect their students' potential. Likewise, they must be willing to interrogate personal assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the school organization.

#### *Culturally Responsive Curricula and Teacher Preparation*

The second aspect comes from scholars who argue that teachers are primarily not culturally responsive and that they do not have access to culturally responsive teacher training programs (Gay, 2010; C. Hayes & Juarez, 2012; Sleeter, 2001). Culturally responsive teacher education preparation—be it school-based professional development or a university preparation program—is necessary, even when teachers are from the same cultural, racial, and socioeconomic background of students (Gay, 2002, 2010; Irvine, 2002; Ware, 2006). Therefore, in this strand, we highlight the crucial role of the school leader in *ensuring that teachers are and remain culturally responsive*. Thus, we focus on the ability of the school leader to articulate a vision that supports the development and sustaining of culturally responsive teaching. This claim does not necessarily mean the principal will prepare and continuously develop culturally responsive teachers in school; however, she must have enough knowledge to recognize and challenge common patterns of inequities that lead to the disenfranchisement of poor urban youth.

In much the same way that *instructional leadership* scholarship positions the principal as one who supports the development of teaching effectiveness by managing the instructional program (Leithwood et al., 2004), we argue principals must play a leading role in maintaining cultural responsiveness in their schools. This outcome can be achieved by recruiting and retaining culturally responsive teachers, securing culturally responsive resources and curriculum, mentoring and modeling culturally responsive teaching, or offering professional developments around CRSL. After they have become more culturally responsive, leaders must be willing to guide teachers into having courageous conversations where they interrogate their assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the classroom (Singleton, 2012). Research suggests leaders must develop strategies for developing teachers who are not, and may even resist becoming, culturally responsive (Khalifa, 2013). However, culturally responsive school leaders must also be willing to make the hard decision to counsel out those teachers who recognize this work is not for them.

### *Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments*

Third, in addition to recruiting, retaining, and developing teachers directly, the literature suggests that school leaders must actually promote a culturally responsive school context with an emphasis on inclusivity (Dantley & Tillman, 2006; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2006). The ability of the school leader to leverage resources to identify and foster a culturally affirming school environment is also paramount (Ainscow, 2005; Riehl, 2000). Racialized suspension gaps, for example, would call for a culturally responsive leader who challenges the status quo by interrogating such exclusionary and marginalizing behaviors. Such leaders would seek to challenge and support teachers who fell into the familiar pattern of disproportionately referring minoritized students to special education or punishing students of color more severely than their White classmates for the same infractions (Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002). Here, critical consciousness as well as ability to have courageous conversations about inequities is crucial (Singleton, 2012; Terrell & Lindsey, 2008) in changing the culture of the school. Thus, in this case, it would be important for CRSL leaders to affirm and protect Indigenous student identities in the school.

### *Engaging Students and Parents in Community Contexts*

A fourth layer of culturally responsive leadership, which is most salient in the literature to date, highlights the ability of the school leader to engage students, families, and communities in culturally appropriate ways. For example, the ability of a school leader to understand, address, and even advocate for community-based issues has been discussed by a number of scholars (Khalifa, 2012; Walker, 2009), as well as the role school leaders may play in promoting overlapping school–community contexts, speaking (or at least, honoring) native students’ languages/lexicons, creating structures that accommodate the lives of parents, or even creating school spaces for marginalized student identities and behaviors all speak of this community aspect.

The overall purpose of this literature review is to identify, describe, and demonstrate the value of the primary strands of behavior reported in CRSL literature. This, we believe, will be tremendously helpful for school leaders at multiple levels and in diverse contexts. We then integrate these findings to show how culturally responsive leadership behaviors are useful to other school leadership behaviors, namely instructional and transformational leadership.

## **Results**

### *CRSL Behaviors*

In this section, we synthesize the literature around the four primary strands of CRSL (see Table 2 for a summary of behaviors in each strand). Under the four major strands, there were sometimes additional bodies of literature that were pronounced and common enough to constitute a substrand, and they are highlighted below as well. However, they were so intricately linked to one of the major strands that we embedded and connected these substrands to the relevant major strands. In our synthesis of the literature below, we also mention the interconnectedness of the strands, and we note the importance for other researchers to further refine this body of literature.

**TABLE 2**  
*Behaviors of culturally responsive school leaders*

Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors	Develops culturally responsive teachers	Promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment	Engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts
Is committed to continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006)	Developing teacher capacities for cultural responsive pedagogy (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz, Brazil, & Scott, 2003)	Accepting indigenized, local identities (Khalifa, 2010)	Developing meaningful, positive relationships with community (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Johnson, 2006; Walker, 2001)
Displays a critical consciousness on practice in and out of school; displays self-reflection (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006)	Collaborative walkthroughs (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)	Building relationships; reducing anxiety among students (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)	Is a servant leader, as public intellectual and other roles (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006)
Uses school data and indicators to measure CRSL (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia, & Nolly, 2004)	Creating culturally responsive PD opportunities for teachers (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003)	Modeling CRSL for staff in building interactions (Khalifa, 2011; Tillman, 2005)	Finding overlapping spaces for school and community (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012)
Uses parent/community voices to measure cultural responsiveness in schools (Ishimaru, 2013; Smyth, 2006)	Using school data to see cultural gaps in achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services (Skrla et al., 2004)	Promoting a vision for an inclusive instructional and behavioral practices (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Webb-Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007)	Serving as advocate and social activist for community-based causes in both the school and neighborhood community (Capper, Hafner, & Keyes, 2002; Gooden, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Khalifa, 2012)

*(continued)*

**TABLE 2 (continued)**

Critically self-reflects on leadership behaviors	Develops culturally responsive teachers	Promotes culturally responsive/inclusive school environment	Engages students, parents, and indigenous contexts
Challenges Whiteness and hegemonic epistemologies in school (Theoharis & Haddix, 2011)	Creating a CRSL team that is charged with constantly finding new ways for teachers to be culturally responsive (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006)	If need be, challenging exclusionary policies, teachers, and behaviors (Khalifa, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)	Uses the community as an informative space from which to develop positive understandings of students and families (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006)
Using equity audits to measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice (Skrla et al., 2004)	Engaging/reforming the school curriculum to become more culturally responsive (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002)	Acknowledges, values, and uses Indigenous cultural and social capital of students (Khalifa, 2010, 2012)	Resists deficit images of students and families (Davis, 2002; Flessa, 2009)
Leading with courage (Khalifa, 2011; Nee-Benham, Maenette, & Cooper, 1988)	Modeling culturally responsive teaching (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)	Uses student voice (Antrop-González, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)	Nurturing/caring for others; sharing information (Gooden, 2005; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012)
Is a transformative leader for social justice and inclusion (Alston, 2005; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Shields, 2010)	Using culturally responsive assessment tools for students (Hopson, 2001; Kea, Campbell-Whitley, & Bratton, 2003)	Using school data to discover and track disparities in academic and disciplinary trends (Skiba et al., 2002; Skrla et al., 2004; Theoharis, 2007)	Connecting directly with students (Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2012; Lomotey, 1993)

*Note.* CRSL = culturally responsive school leadership; PD = professional development.

### *CRSL and Critical Self-Reflection*

Studies that employ a CRSL approach emphasize the need for critical self-reflection of one's own leadership practices (Cooper, 2009; Gooden, 2005; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006; Lomotey, 1989; Theoharis, 2007). Scholars have argued that engaging in critical self-reflection or antiracist reflection supports the personal growth of leaders and unearths their personal biases, assumptions, and values that stem from their cultural backgrounds (Capper, Theoharis, & Sebastian, 2006; M. D. Young & Laible, 2000). In this sense, cultural background refers to racial, linguistic, ethnic, national identity, or class.

The ability of educational leaders to critically self-reflect about their biases and their practice is integral to both transformative (Cooper, 2009; Shields, 2010) and social justice (Bogotch, 2002; Brown, 2004; Larson & Murtadha, 2002; Theoharis, 2007) leadership. Critical reflection, which is also important to culturally responsive leadership, is foundational and actually precedes any actions in leadership. Yet, it must also be ongoing. As Dantley (2005b) contended, "A psychology of critical self-reflection involves the education leader coming to grips with his or her own identity and juxtaposing that against the identity of the learning community (p. 503). In this process, an individual leader is recognizing that she or he is a cultural being influenced by multidimensional aspects of cultural identity, even as she or he attempts to do the work of leadership. In the literature, such leaders are urged to examine their own biases and how they affect their professional practices (Dantley, 2005a, 2008; Furman, 2012; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Critical self-reflection also establishes the foundation for the development of critical consciousness in leadership preparation programs. In moving toward critical consciousness, scholars have suggested activities that get at attitude development like cultural and racial autobiographies, educational plunges, cross-cultural interviews, diversity panels, and journaling on critical topics of culture (Brown, 2004; Capper et al., 2002; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Jean-Marie, Normore, & Brooks, 2009; Pounder, Reitzug, & Young, 2002). Although social justice leadership scholars have recognized the importance of praxis—the combination of reflection and action—as an important aspect of leaders' work, it is now beginning to appear more frequently in the social justice leadership literature.

Scholars have also started to recognize the need for professors of social justice leadership to develop their own critical consciousness before they attempt to impart this knowledge or affect the work of those they train as educational leaders. For instance, educational administration departments have been called upon to model the change they wish to see in their graduates to spark a rethinking of educational leadership, including an emphasis on hiring diverse faculty (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; J. Lightfoot, 2010; Pounder et al., 2002; Santamaria, 2014). Although broader in scope, CRSL incorporates aspects of transformative and social justice leadership, mainly critical consciousness and praxis.

### *Internalized Racism and the Normalization of White Western Epistemologies*

As we mentioned in the previous section, it is deleterious for students to have their cultural identities rejected in school and unacknowledged as integral to student learning. Although some White administrators may be less aware of their culturally oppressive leadership practices, some administrators of color may

contribute to exclusionary (and otherwise oppressive) school environments as well (Flessa, 2011; Khalifa, 2013). When school leaders reproduce racial oppression, a number of practices are visible, including internalized racial inferiority among administrators of color, embracing of the color-blind ideology, and maintaining questionable leadership preparation programs that minimize or exclude altogether meaningful conversations on race, culture, and community.

Unfortunately, the dominant hegemonic (often, White, Westernized) ways of understanding and practicing school leadership have been detrimental for minoritized students (Alemán, 2009; Dantley, 2005a; Gooden, 2005; Khalifa, 2013; López, 2003). These understandings are coterminous with race-neutrality, ahistorical, White supremacy, colonialism/postcolonialism, along with other epistemologies that ultimately all lead to aberrant, deficit characterizations and treatment of minoritized students. For example, Alemán (2009) criticized the behavior of some Mexican American educational leaders who seemed to ignore the existence of historical and institutional racism in distribution of funds in the Texas school finance system. The leaders endorsed a “whiteness perspective” to “politically pass” (Alemán, 2009, p. 197) in the face of political costs involved in questioning the inequitable funding system. Alemán (2009) referred to this kind of behavior as “internalized racism,” where the leaders justified inequitable distribution of finances in their districts. The leaders, according to Alemán (2009),

were happy to see the days of “real poor” gone, although they also realized the system was still “not quite fair.” They failed to see the political benefits of addressing racism within the system. Instead they resisted seeing racism as an ‘excuse’ or inappropriate weapon in the ‘battle cry’ for reform. (p. 194)

The leaders failed to critique the school funding from a critical race perspective because of the assumption that Whiteness always comes with privileges that should not be contended. According to Alemán (2009, p. 198), “The leaders in this study prevented continued and sustained progress by adopting a survival mechanism of ‘politically passing.’ The goal of a LatCrit educational leadership requires ‘politically passing’ as a strategy be problematized and countered.”

Harris-Tigg (2005) also spoke to the issue of internalized racial inferiority in her study of culture, education, and schooling assumptions that influence African school administrators’ efforts to improve academic achievement of African children. In her study, the African administrators and policymakers failed to stand by the cultural values of the African children who were the majority in their schools. They seemed to “ignore what African children bring to the classroom situation, and they deny the oppressive, dominant, hegemonic institutional and societal operatives from which many of the stereotypes disseminate” (Harris-Tigg, 2005, p. 94). Harris-Tigg continued,

Cultural self-negation and internalized inferiority has grave consequence for African people in school systems [because] it skews our ability to resolve many of the symptomatic negative behaviors demonstrated by children who are not loved and acknowledged for who they are. (p. 67)

This internalized racial inferiority was summed up in Khalifa's (2015) research, as he argued two Black principals in a predominantly White school district "rejected the cultural and social capital, and proclivities of Black students, and blamed Black students for their lower achievement and unique behaviors" (p. 1). Much more than an indictment on the principals themselves, these studies demonstrate just how deeply ingrained racism and oppression are in U.S. education.

*Developing Culturally Responsive School Teachers  
and Curriculum*

Although there is only a limited literature around the role principals must play in developing their teachers into cultural responsiveness (Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004; Tillman, 2003, 2005), we consider this to be one of the most important aspects of culturally responsive teachers. As we outlined earlier, research indicates the importance of culturally responsive teaching and pedagogy. Yet, in our focus on the principal's role in the development of cultural responsiveness, we ask how systemic structures can be situated to develop culturally responsive teachers as well as school climates. For instructional, transformational, transformative, and other leadership practice, scholars have found it useful to establish leadership teams and research-oriented reform dialogues among school staff (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Establishing a culturally responsive school context and curriculum are also functions of CRSL. Villegas and Lucas (2002) suggested instructional contexts must be culturally responsive. In addition to relationship building, engaging students' home lives and communities, and culturally responsive teaching, Villegas and Lucas argued the curriculum used in schools must be culturally responsive. Similarly, Sleeter (2012) argued that the dominant culture and White students also benefit from learning a curriculum that is culturally responsive. In her research, she demonstrated that White New Zealanders gain tremendous benefit from learning in ways, epistemologies, and curriculum that are actually Maori. Based on this research, we suggest culturally responsive leadership teams could be used to ensure that teachers and other staff *sustain* (Paris, 2012) their cultural responsiveness in their teaching and curriculum. Banks (1996) suggested four approaches to reforming curriculum to become culturally responsive. Here, we focus on the transformative and social action approaches because it allows us to emphasize the relationship of CRSL and leadership preparation.

*Culturally Responsive Instructional and Transformational Leadership*

As previously noted, a number of studies have been conducted on culturally responsive teaching/pedagogy (Gay, 2010; Ghong, Saah, Larke, & Webb-Johnson, 2007; Weaver, 2009) in an effort to understand strategies teachers use to help their culturally diverse students learn without devaluing students' cultural beliefs. This is paramount to developing culturally responsive school leaders and curricula. School leaders, in turn, are responsible for ensuring that their teachers are culturally responsive, and that the vision of the school imbues cultural responsiveness (Khalifa, 2011; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Riehl, 2000).

Such leadership activities will vary from one context to the next, but overall, school resources, leadership teams for cultural responsiveness, and mentoring



(or challenging) teachers for culturally responsive teaching must be a constant part of the ongoing professional development in schools. Khalifa (2011) made this point as he described a leader who regularly mentored a teacher who was exclusionary toward low-income, minoritized students. When the teacher showed little desire to change, the principal began directly challenging the teacher's exclusionary behaviors. Inclusiveness and exclusiveness are at the center of culturally relevant teaching; culturally responsive teachers not only center students' cultural norms but also their very beings, proclivities, languages, understandings, interests, families, and spaces (Foster, 1995; Howard, 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Given that some teachers may come better prepared to do this—or may be more comfortable doing this—than others, it is the duty of the principal to ensure this is a priority for individual teachers in their instruction as well in the overall school culture.

Given that transformational leadership has a tremendous impact on the organizational conditions and student engagement within a school (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000), we argue this must also imbue an acceptance of minoritized youth who are most often marginalized in school. Lindsey et al. (2004) noted, "Culturally proficient educational leaders take responsibility for helping each student understand himself or herself as a unique, competent, and valued member of a diverse cultural community rather than a deprived minority in a dominant culture" (p. 44). Therefore, creating a culturally responsive classroom and school environment in general is a joint effort particularly between school leaders and teachers, and it is an aspect of transformational leadership. Thus, a culturally responsive transformational leadership would promote the conditions and a school vision in a school that would be inclusive and validating for minoritized youth (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Khalifa, 2011; Murtadha-Watts & Stoughton, 2004; Riehl, 2000; Webb-Johnson, 2006; Webb-Johnson & Carter, 2007).

### *Culturally Responsive Leadership Preparation Programs*

Besides culturally responsive transformational and instructional leadership approaches within the institution, there is a need for leadership preparation programs to emphasize culturally responsive leadership. Touré (2008) associated poor leadership programs in leadership training institutions with limited culturally responsive leadership knowledge among school leaders. Informed by the results of her study, Touré (2008) recommended that the study may serve to encourage educational leadership professors and policymakers to perform "a reexamination of requirements for leadership preparation which currently lack an emphasis on culturally relevant leadership content knowledge or issues of social justice" (p. 200). McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) added to this discussion with their research on equity traps. They found preparation programs must specifically train school leaders to avoid racist behavior and understandings.

Foster and Tillman's (2009) groundbreaking text on African American perspectives in leadership is a powerful source that argues race and culture are not just relevant but integral to effective leadership; in that edited work, J. Lightfoot (2009) reported on a study of three leadership preparation programs that "purported to offer the candidates richer opportunities to engage issues of social justice, oppression, and critical consciousness in education than many of the more traditional school administration programs" (p. 211). J. Lightfoot (2009) engaged

in the study because of a deep-seated concern that traditional school leadership preparation programs appeared subtractive and inefficient in their ability to prepare school leaders for professional practice required to operate successfully in the 21st century. He noted that, as a society, we still continue to grapple conceptually with issues of race (racism), ethnicity (ethnocentrism), class (classism), and gender or sex (sexism). He further suggested that our ability to practically implement equal, or equitable, educational opportunity among diverse learners is impaired and will continue to be hindered unless we first deal with all of these issues. Several principal preparation programs, such as the University of Texas at Austin and the University of Colorado, Denver, have strong foci on antiracist leadership.

*Promoting Culturally Responsive and Inclusive  
School Environments*

One quality culturally responsive school leaders exude is a strong association with social justice and a commitment to advocating for the inclusion of traditionally marginalized students (Bogotch, 2002; Brown, 2004; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Theoharis, 2007). Madhlangobe (2009) has noted that culturally responsive leaders show determination to create a welcoming school environment for all students and their parents. But this is not easy given that student marginalization is often historic, normalized, and “invisibilized” in most educational contexts. Leaders who are not critically self-aware and knowledgeable about racism and other histories of oppression may likely reproduce racism and other systemic oppressions in their schools (Gooden & Dantley, 2012). One principal’s modeling of cultural responsiveness enabled her to “transform attitudes and convince teachers to embrace new teaching approaches that were inclusive and empowering to students, especially to students of color” (Madhlangobe, 2009, p. 236).

Researchers have demonstrated a need for school leaders to address and focus on the educational needs of minoritized students. As Gerhart, Harris, and Mixon (2011) observed, having high expectations for all students regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds and also striving to help the students meet those expectations may be one way school leaders and teachers can step out CRSL responsive school leaders, therefore, mentor, model, and if necessary, insist on culturally responsive practices among their school staff.

*CRSL and Resisting Deficit Constructions of Marginalized Children*

Literature on CRSL is explicit about the need to resist oppressive education and leadership (Kumashiro, 2000, 2002) for minoritized children. This oppression most often comes when school leaders hold deficit-oriented opinions and views about minoritized children and families (Flessa, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Scholarship suggests that educators blame poor students and families of color for the problems in education (Flessa, 2009; Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Trent, Artiles, & Englert, 1988). Yet, such deficit constructions and thoughts about students of color and economically disadvantaged students are a barrier to equitable learning environments (Ford, Harris, Tyson, & Trotman, 2001; Garcia & Guerra, 2004).

As pertains to having a positive mind-set, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) found there are occasions when some school principals lack prior knowledge on how to

deal with multicultural issues in their schools. However, their willingness to learn on the job enables the principals to become better leaders in their venture to address cultural diversity among students they serve. Similarly, Robinson (2010) believed that “school leaders develop effective processes and strategies that successfully reform their schools because they sincerely love all children and they believe all children are capable of learning if given an equal opportunity to excel” (p. ii). Such thinking has the power to enable school leaders to seek to understand what it is that will help all their students learn despite the cultural beliefs and practices they carry to school. In sum, all of these leaders have a critical consciousness that recognizes their context but leads to a positive mind-set about the abilities of their students. That does not mean they are not critical of the current context; rather, it means they work in the process of pointing out inequities and taking actions that critically examine and change inequities by working at the school level.

### *Engaging Students and Indigenous Community Contexts*

CRSL leaders seem to have developed a unique skill set that allows them to create authentic overlapping school–community spaces (Cooper, 2009; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012). These leaders create welcoming spaces that feel like they are just caring communities and learning organizations at the same time (Senge et al., 2012). This approach is very different from urban schools, which have adopted the often rigid, rote, and tightly controlled opportunities within which school and community often, under strain, meet: parent–teacher conferences, sporting events, fund raising events, and emergency meetings and phone calls during which parents are only contacted about their children’s negative progress. And even the more positive book readings, plays, or student musicals are often not authentic community-based events. A march for migrant workers’ pay, a rally against Chicago neighborhood murders, or frequent trips to a local recreation center are all community-based activities directed at improving the lives of community residents, which, of course, includes students. In other words, community organizing and advocacy for community-based causes are central to CRSL (Gooden, 2005; Green, 2015; Ishimaru, Gordon, & Cervantes, 2011; Khalifa, 2012, 2013).

It has been widely reported that minoritized school identities are often marginalized, excluded, and eventually pressured out of school (Ferguson, 2001; Lipman, 2003; Monroe, 2006). But culturally responsive schooling accepts and validates the Indigenous home cultures and proclivities of students. So although receiving a good education and having highly qualified teachers is paramount, these benefits do not transcend the need for Indigenous identities and communities to be valued in school—in their authentic expressions—and the principal is central in constructing these spaces (Chambers & McCreedy, 2011; Ginwright, 2004; Khalifa, 2010). It has been difficult for educators and researchers to accept this native, Indigenous student though, and schools often become hostile to many of these identities (J. Davis, 2001; Ferguson, 2001; Low, 2010). Researchers have spoken of the need, for example, to bring hip-hop education, and other cultural forms of education, into urban classrooms (Stovall, 2006).

CRSL leaders use official school structures and resources to promote inclusive school environments (J. E. Davis & Jordan, 1995; Gooden, 2005; López et al.,

2001; Morris, 1991). They consider the student's cultural needs in school planning resources and structures. López et al.'s (2001) work on migrant families demonstrates the families' range of needs. Although students prioritized family needs over individual need and helped with farming activities, the school resources were leveraged in ways that would accommodate their ways of being, including student language needs. Other research indicates that there are myriad ways in which school resources could be situated to intentionally address the cultural needs of students. In some examples, time allocations were granted to teachers to allow them time to visit homes and other community-based locations (Khalifa, 2012). Similarly, cultural artifacts, curricula, space for community members and partnerships, and other resources were all leveraged in ways that responded to student needs (Howard, 2003; Kirkland, 2008).

### *Validating Social/Cultural Capital of Students*

Recognizing and nurturing the cultural identity of students, staff, and the community in which the school is located is another culturally responsive leadership approach that has benefited schools particularly in the American Indigenous communities. Indeed, scholars collectively argue that the cultural and social capital of Black, Latino, Indigenous First Nation, and English language learner students are routinely not recognized and or valued, and thus their geniuses not tapped (Ginwright, 2004; Monkman, Ronald, & Thérémène, 2005; Ream & Rumberger, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Wayne (2009) examined the experiences of an American Indian public school district education leader on an American Indian reservation. In his endeavor to preserve native knowledge and also support the cultural identity of the community, he opted to involve parents and communities in the process of creating a culturally relevant curriculum. As the study verified, "Cultural identity has an impact on the voice of the individual, tribe, and community [and] having a voice is essential to feeling valued, respected, listened to, heard, and validated as American Indian people" (Wayne, 2009, p. 170). By inviting the community to take part in important educational decisions, school leaders will have made an effort to take care of some of the cultural conflicts that are bound to arise between school administrators and the larger community outside school.

Validating all cultural epistemologies and behaviors requires a critical self-reflection and courage that is not common in many school leaders (Aveling, 2007; Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011; Lawrence & Tatum, 1997; López, 2003; Scheurich & Young, 1997). Given the pervasiveness of deficit understandings of students, fostering identity confluence and intersectionalities of students who identify as Latino or Black, and "smart" has been difficult for some school administrators (Khalifa, 2010; López, 2003). School resistance to student representations of hip-hop culture, for example, has been a cause for minoritized students to be excluded from school, as Ginwright (2004) and others have shown (Alim, 2011; Alim, Ibrahim, & Pennycook, 2009; Baszile, 2009; Dimitriadis, 2009; Hill, 2009; Petchauer, 2009; Prier & Beachum, 2008; Stovall, 2006). For example, baggy or sagging clothing, hair-braiding, displays of hypermasculinity and hypersexuality, unique forms of language use including profanity, and performatives of gangster lifestyles or criminality are behaviors that hip-hop students may display—authentic or imitated; scholars suggest (Khalifa, 2015; Low,

2010) that these behaviors often lead to students being pressured to such an extent that some disengage from school.

*Resisting color blindness.* Similarly, color-blind epistemologies are oppressive yet pervasive epistemology in educational leadership practice. Touré (2008) and others (Cooper, 2009; Evans, 2008; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Khalifa, Jennings, et al., 2014; López, 2003; Mabokela & Madsen, 2005) described negative effects associated with color-blind ideology on the appreciation of cultural and racial diversity in schools. Touré (2008) examined the influence of school leaders on teachers' learning of culturally relevant pedagogy through the experiences of three White principals in three elementary schools serving African American children in two urban districts. As the study revealed, the participant principals "faced many issues of race, culture, and learning, yet tended to be colorblind and colormute" (Touré, 2008, p. v). By refusing to consider culture and race as relevant to student learning and also by denying the existence of White privilege, the teachers and school leaders failed to tap in to the uniqueness of individual student cultures, values, and beliefs as tools for developing culturally relevant pedagogy and leadership that could benefit all students.

### *Glimpses of Culturally Responsive Leadership*

Although we could not address all of the types of culturally responsive leadership even in an expansive book, we highlight in this section some of the more discussed styles in the literature around culturally responsive leadership. Indeed, race is the marker most often researched in CRSL literature. We chose to highlight five contexts: Latino, U.S. Indigenous, Black children and families, as well as postcolonial and spiritual contexts. Collectively, these creative expressions of CRSL can help us understand patterns across context, and they can also inform perpetually emergent forms of CRSL practice, far beyond what we have mentioned here.

#### *Latino Families and Strong Family Bonds*

On the same idea of valuing the voices of the community as culturally responsive leaders, Sosa (1996) investigated barriers to and strategies for involving Hispanic migrant and immigrant parents in school activities. Sosa noted that school personnel often criticize the poor involvement of Hispanic parents in schools. However, an important observation Sosa makes is that "the root of the problem is that Hispanic parents cherish beliefs and expectations different from those cherished by the schools and by the parents whom the schools most frequently engage" (p. 341). Therefore, being aware of such cultural clashes between schools and migrant families is necessary for school leaders who sincerely care about the education of all students regardless of their culture.

López et al. (2001) also realized the contribution of migrant parents toward successful programs in migrant-affected schools and school districts. For the study, all state-level administrators from four selected school districts with a large population of migrant families were interviewed concerning the impact of parental

involvement on the school programs instituted. Findings from the study indicated that parental involvement was crucial in the success of those programs. One important reason behind the positive response from the migrant parents is that before expecting migrant parents to participate in school activities, the schools and districts found it necessary to cater to economic, social, and physical needs of the migrant families first above all other commitments. For example, on one occasion when the school required parents to attend a school meeting, one of the state-level administrators reported purchasing some personal hygiene items to distribute to the parents who attended the meeting, not only as an incentive but also as a way of supporting the economic needs of the families. In summary, parental involvement was a success in the studied districts because the school administration and staff believed that “they were primarily responsible for ensuring parental well-being in the local community, and recognized that unless parental needs were met, any effort to enact routine or prescriptive ‘involvement’ activities at the school site would reap less fruitful results” (López et al., 2001, p. 281).

#### *Indigenous Leadership Practices: Focus on Tradition*

Warner and Grint’s (2006) study, similarly, challenged the Western leadership approaches by developing a first/Indigenous nations (or as Westerners may say, “tribal”) leadership model to illustrate that leadership approaches adopted by some American Indian tribes are simply different but not deficient. As Warner and Grint stated, “American Indian leadership was often interpreted by non-Indigenous observers as an inability to lead rather than a different ability to lead” (p. 225). According to Warner and Grint, Western models usually exemplify positional leadership, whereas American Indian leadership models quite often value persuasive methods. The findings from their study confirmed that persuasion works best in American Indian education institutions not because “American Indian traditions are ethically superior to traditional western models” (Warner & Grint, 2006, p. 227), but because they are different and culturally responsive components of leadership in American Indian school contexts.

Other works that have shed light on Indigenous and culturally relevant approaches make compelling cases for the central role of compassion and the empowerment of community. Ahnee-Benham and Napier (2002) suggested that the validation of Nation and Indigenous cultural practices must be a part of any leadership practice. Whereas we Western researchers critique the role of strong relationships and help as nepotism in education, this assistance can actually be an admirable aspect of social-capital that can play a positive role for school leadership of First Nation peoples. Similarly, Castagno and Brayboy (2008) argued, “For a more central and explicit focus on sovereignty and self-determination, racism, and Indigenous epistemologies in future work on CRS (culturally relevant schooling) for Indigenous youth” (p. 941).

#### *Blacks and Advocacy of Community-Based Issues*

Apart from embracing a positive attitude, a number of studies have realized that the leadership styles or approaches that school leaders adopt can significantly contribute to the leaders’ ability to create a culturally accommodating school atmosphere. In Reitzug and Patterson’s (1998) study, a female African American

middle school principal realized that allowing students, particularly urban school students, to take charge of their own lives was more rewarding than imposing directives on them. The authors agreed that school principals often face the dilemma of whether to control or empower their students. However, based on the findings from their study, Reitzug and Patterson (1998) argued that “focusing on connections with other people and putting people and individual contextual circumstances before bureaucratic rules and regulations” (p. 179) are qualities that leaders committed to care for and empower students in urban schools should strive for. By allowing contextual circumstances to define their leadership behavior, school leaders are likely to value the diversity of their students and, as a result, seek to adopt leadership approaches that will accommodate students from all cultures.

In his effort to understand the leadership approaches of three African American elementary school principals employed to help their students obtain exemplary scores on the California Assessment Program test, Lomotey (1989) discussed three leadership style components that all three principals appeared to have in common. These components were (a) commitment to the education of African American children, (b) compassion for and understanding of African American children and their communities, and (c) confidence in the educability of African American children. Lomotey also observed that though the three principals did not perform their leadership in exactly the same way, they appeared to possess shared qualities. One of the principals delegated much of her leadership responsibilities in the following four ways: goal development, energy harnessing (or getting consensus), facilitating communication, and instructional management. The two other principals executed the leadership responsibilities, themselves. So although having high expectations for students is central, school leaders must also make a commitment toward helping the students attain the expected goals using contextually relevant leadership styles in the contexts they serve.

### *Leadership in the Postcolonial Contexts*

The practice of culturally responsive leadership is often dependent on the geographic and/or cultural setting of the school. Because of these differing circumstances, which can determine relevant strategies for dealing with cultural issues in schools, there is not necessarily a universal package of guidelines for becoming a CRSL leader. In that regard, critics against universalizing leadership as a practice argue it is detrimental to institute one culturally linked leadership practice over another, particularly the promotion of Western leadership styles over other leadership approaches (Hofstede, 1991; Khalifa, Bashar-Ali, Abdi, & Arnold, 2014). In his study of the influence of Korean culture on educational administration in South Korea, Jong Ho (2000) recognized that Confucianism (teachings of Chinese philosopher, Confucius, that underscore love for humanity) has a strong impact on secondary school Korean principals. He emphasized,

Trying to graft a western leadership concept may not work for leaders in the Korean culture, or perhaps, in any Eastern culture [because] when packaged programs about leadership are transported to Eastern cultural contexts those packages may be misunderstood or misused. (p. 94)

Jong Ho also stressed the point that for any kind of leadership approach to work in most Eastern countries, it must value Confucianism, though the same may not be true in other contexts.

Along the same lines as the above, Bryant (1998) argued that what may be regarded as a positive leadership value in one context may be disreputable in a different setting. Even in Indigenous colonial contexts like this, the practice of CRSL is defined by what is appropriate within the culture of the local community. Bryant's (1998) observation is a good example of the complexity of universalizing one or more leadership practices due to the differences in cultural values among different groups of people.

*Between Criticality and Spirituality: Prophetic Traditions of Leadership*

Many of the school leaders who work with the most marginalized students are leading from places that reflect their community-based traditions of leadership. For many in Black and Latino communities, this spiritual and prophetic leadership exemplifies resistance to the oppressive contexts and practices they have faced (Harris, 1999; Rael, 2002). Cone (1970) and others (D. L. Hayes, 1996; Jackson, 2005; Smith, 1991) argued that minoritized people used forms of Black protest-oriented religion to resist White supremacy and the oppression that they have experienced. Like earlier protest-oriented Catholicism from Latin American countries (Cone, 2000; Gutierrez, 1988), U.S. Black protest-oriented religion informed the identity, agency, resistance, and advocacy activities of Blacks in the United States (Evans, 2008; Jackson, 2005). In this same tradition, West's (1989) notions of prophetic pragmatism (Dantley, 2003, 2005a; Wood, 2000) emerged, as he philosophized about ways to carry on works that resisted oppression and serviced humanity.

Indeed, several scholars have begun to describe the work of school leaders—particularly those that serve minoritized communities—as people who engage in this similar “prophetic” (West, 1989) work that both subverts oppressive White supremacy and liberates/emancipates oppressed youth (Dantley, 2003, 2005a; Shields & Sayani, 2005; Witherspoon & Taylor, 2010). Given the spiritual positionalities of many minoritized communities, this pragmatic prophetic expression of school leadership is responsive to their cultural needs.

*The Continued Promise of CRS: Advocacy and Expectations*

There are two additional contributions of the literature that demonstrate the promise of CRSL: maintaining high student expectations and the central role of advocacy for students, parents, and community-based causes. Maintaining high expectations of minoritized students is central to CRSL (J. E. Davis, 2003; Irvine, 1990; Walker, 2009). In the theorizing and research around what researchers call “warm demanders” (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Foster, 1997; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ware, 2006), educators are culturally responsive but maintain high academic expectations of students. We suggest that CRSL leaders embody this approach to relationship-building with students and communities. Although sometimes critical of certain local student behaviors, this approach ultimately imbues love and hope in school environments (Daniels, 2012). What seems important to these researchers is that students are challenged to learn but may not learn from educators whom they believe do not care about them (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Kohl,



1994). This is where advocacy becomes such a crucial part of what culturally responsive leaders must do for minoritized youth and their communities.

The role of advocacy in educational leadership is well established as a way for CRSL leaders to lead, earn the trust and credibility of families and communities, and leverage community wealth (Yosso, 2005) to help the learning of students in school (Khalifa, 2013). G. L. Anderson (2009) argued strongly that principals who advocate for students and community-based causes really open opportunities for minoritized students. If minoritized students will not learn from educators whom they feel do not care (Bridgeland, Dilulio, & Morison, 2006), then culturally responsive leaders must establish practices that imbue an ethic of care and hope (Daniels, 2012). The literature suggests that community-based advocacy leads to trust, rapport, and credibility between the school leaders and the communities they serve (Alemán, 2009; G. L. Anderson, 2009; Khalifa, 2011, 2012). Indeed, there is no shortage of authors who argue that community organizing can be leveraged for successful school reform (Gold, Simon, & Brown, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Shirley, 1997). But Ishimaru et al.'s (2011) work in San Jose most suggests that the power of this organizing can be very culturally responsive.

## Discussion

It would be improper and somewhat ironic for us to claim these expressions of CRSL are exhaustive. Certainly, the aforementioned expressions of school leadership should only be considered a small fraction of the culturally responsive leadership performative. And there are likely culturally responsive expressions of leadership that are yet to emerge or be captured in literature. For example, what leadership is relevant for refugee youth, for homeschooled children, or for children with disabilities? In another noteworthy example, we recognize the works on CRSL in the Deaf Community.<sup>2</sup> We are aware there are innumerable forms of CRSL that are currently emerging from burgeoning cultural contexts.

CRSL has tremendous promise for children of color as well as other minoritized children. In this review of the literature around CRSL, we identified four primary strands of leadership behaviors. We have considered works that emphasize the importance of *critical self-reflection*. This serves as an impetus for school leaders to constantly challenge their own inadvertent, or even acknowledged, oppressive understandings and performatives. Next, this review suggests culturally responsive leadership activities (by either an individual or distributive leadership activity) should consistently *contribute to culturally responsive teaching and curricula*. This is important given that teachers are often unable to identify and unpack their biases, and it would therefore not be culturally responsive. For example, some teachers may disparage indigeneity in some urban Black youth, confirming oppressive perceptions of broader U.S. society. Yet, the identity of Black Indigenous youth and their minoritized student identity must be validated or even praised in school.

Even though school leaders will constantly prepare teachers to be culturally responsive, they must not stop there. This review suggests that the leaders must also *promote culturally responsive school environments*. This outcome happens through resisting exclusionary practice; promoting inclusivity, Indigenous youth

identities; and integrating student culture in all aspects of schooling. The final primary task of CRSL leaders is to engage the community in culturally responsive ways. This often occurs through the promotion of overlapping school–community spaces—bringing the community into the school and establishing a school presence in the community; this happens by leveraging school resources for cultural responsive schooling.

### *Implications*

The implications of this work are far reaching. In consideration of the published works on instructional, transformational, transactional, transformative, managerial, and distributed leadership, we acknowledge that CRSL is deeply undertheorized and underresearched. Thus, this research has deep implications for principal preparation programs. We argue that leadership preparation programs should prioritize CRSL as much as, if not more than, other forms of leadership, especially considering the consistent poor performances and exclusionary schooling practices that often confront students of color. Consequently, CRSL will help minoritized communities that are so likely to be underserved. The collective works reviewed in this article suggest that it is possible for marginalized students—particularly students of color—to have a safe, affirming, and academically challenging place in school.

With the implications for principal preparation programs and the local communities, this work also has implications for federal, state, and local district policy in this age of accountability. If situated correctly, policy requirements for collecting school data can affect school equity, inclusivity, curriculum standards, and climate. If equity audits (Skrla et al., 2004) are implemented consistently and properly, then schools could implement data-driven CRSL. As it stands now, many states and local districts do not require data collection or monitoring, specifically around issues of school climate and discipline. Finally, in this emerging field of educational leadership studies, we hope that school principals will learn how to be culturally responsive, and that this will ultimately help all children reach their fullest potential.

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>Although the term “achievement gap” is more commonly used, we use the term “opportunity gap” because we agree with Ladson-Billings that this puts the onus of the challenge on educator (especially educational leaders) to directly address this issue by being conscious of providing more opportunities for students to achieve.

<sup>2</sup>Katherine O’Brien of Gallaudet University for her extensive works in the Deaf Community. She was the recipient of the 2012 AERA Dissertation of the Year Award (Division A) for her study, titled “The Influence of Deaf Culture on School Culture and Leadership: A Case Study of a State School for the Deaf.”

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