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Culturally Responsive Leadership: A Case Study to Explore Stakeholders' Perceptions of Culturally Responsive Leadership in a K-12 Public Charter School in North Carolina

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Culturally Responsive Leadership: A Case Study to Explore Stakeholders' Perceptions of

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North Carolina A&T State University

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has met the dissertation requirements of
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2014

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Biographical Sketch

Kimberly Michelle Jones-Goods was born on October 4, 1978, in Corning, New York. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology with a concentration in Race and Ethnic Relations from Ithaca College and a Master's of Professional Studies degree in Africana Studies (African and African American Studies) from Cornell University. Her Master's thesis was titled: "Felony Disenfranchisement: Its Origins and Effects on African American Males." Kimberly also completed a graduate add-on licensure program at High Point University in educational leadership.

Kimberly's background in education spans 9 years. She holds certifications as a Level 3 Early Childhood Administrator, a Level 3 School Age Administrator, Elementary Education (K-6), Middle School Social Studies (Grades 6-9), High School Social Studies (Grades 9-12), and a School Principal (Grades K-12). She has also received a passing score on the Educational Leadership praxis exam in the state of North Carolina for a Curriculum Coordinator. Her background includes experiences as a principal intern, building-level administrator, beginning teacher support coordinator, mentor trainer, AP© coordinator, program coordinator and director, master teacher, high school teacher, curriculum writer, and educational consultant.

Kimberly is a member of The Honor Society of Phi Kappa Phi and also holds memberships in the North Carolina Association for Research in Education (NCARE), the American Education Research Association (AERA), and is a member of Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Inc. Kimberly has received numerous awards for teaching excellence throughout her career.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my GENIUS, my son Javion.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family and colleagues who provided me with the emotional support and encouragement needed to reach the end of this journey. Thank you for listening to my trials and tribulations during this process and for reassuring me that I would survive. To my son, Javion, thank you so much for being patient with me throughout this dissertation process. To my husband, Oscar, thank you for your love and support. I am grateful for your belief in my ability to write this dissertation even when I doubted myself.

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took time from their busy schedules to share with me their perceptions and experiences with

culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina. THANK YOU!

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Abstract

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the culturally responsive leadership practices of charter school leaders. The goals were: (a) to explore how the school leadership team perceived culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina, (b) to explore how the teachers perceived culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina, and (c) to explore how parents perceived a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina. Because this study involved an examination of stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a charter school, a willing participant pool of charter school stakeholders was needed. Data were gathered through in-depth focus group interviews with three stakeholder groups (i.e., school leadership, teachers, and parents) in a K-12 public charter school located in the Triad area of North Carolina that was selected based upon specific criteria. Three themes emerged from the analyses of the data: (a) modeling cultural responsiveness, (b) teaching and learning, and (c) home-school connections. Findings revealed the school leaders, teachers, and parents were unanimous in their belief that culturally responsive leadership established a welcoming and supportive school culture through instructional leadership and created a sense of belonging for all stakeholders.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Schools are microcosms of the larger society. As the racial demographics within society change, schools must also change in order to meet the needs of the diverse cultures that permeate the school. Statistics suggest that by 2020, students of color will constitute 50% of the total school population; therefore, cultural responsiveness should be given priority by school leadership (Marshall, 2004). School leadership faces issues when it comes to meeting the needs of racial/ethnic students and the changes in demographics within the United States will require changes in the way children are educated (Banks, 2000; Trail, 2000). In *The Souls of Black Folk*, W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1965) focused on ways to make a quality education available to Black children. W. E. B. Du Bois provided a wealth of material, in the form of Southern heroes and villains, that could serve as material for curriculum. A great many of W. E. B. Du Bois' insights are also relevant to students from immigrant backgrounds (Jiménez, 2013). On the issue of educating students from immigrant backgrounds, Sánchez (1940) wrote the book, *Forgotten People*, in which he stated the problem today, is presented as a bilingual problem related to language; however, that is not the case. The problem of language differences was the fault of the schools failing to teach English and completely ignoring the language brought to school by students of immigrant backgrounds. W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1965) and Sánchez (1940) both suggested students' culture should inform the curriculum and recognized this could only be done through examining the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students to modify and adapt the content and instructional methods used to teach them (Jiménez, 2013). It is the challenge of school leadership to ensure these strategies are implemented.

Traditional public schools in the United States are rooted in White Eurocentric ideologies and philosophies that are embedded in school leadership and the educational inequalities found within the school structure (Buras & Apple, 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The cultural underpinning of schools in the United States is largely congruent with middle-class, European values (Boykin, 1994; Nieto & Bode, 2012), causing many school leaders to ignore or downplay the strengths of diverse students and their families. The cultural and linguistic makeup of the United States has changed and this diversity is reflected in the nation's schools. In the United States, this increasing demographic diversity is occurring within a political and social context of Eurocentrism. There is a need for culturally responsive leadership in diverse K-12 settings as in the coming years classrooms will evidence even greater diversity than can be found today (Banks, 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Questions remain surrounding to what extent the educational system will default and these children will not learn because the school leadership has not created an inclusive school culture or modeled the expectations for cultural responsiveness, and to what extent these students will continue to be taught ineffectively (Banks, 2013; K. B. Clark, 1965; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Educators today encounter students from families whose beliefs and practices vary significantly from those of mainstream American families. The challenge confronting school leaders and teachers is how to best meet the needs of this changing and expanding population of students (Banks, 2013; Gargiulo, 2012; Nieto & Bode, 2012). As the United States continues to experience a population shift it becomes increasingly important for school leaders to enact culturally responsive leadership practices. This shift results in "increasing numbers of children on playgrounds and in classrooms whose first language is not English; who are poor, African American, or Hispanic and who exist in an underserved population" (Crew, 2002, p. 189).

For vast numbers of schools, education has thus far not reflected the needs of the new diverse racial/ethnic majority in the student population; instead, the Eurocentric curriculum remains in varying degrees in the nation's schools (Banks, 2013; Gay & Banks, 1975). The percentage of students of color in U.S. public schools has doubled in the 30 years between 1973 and 2004, growing from 22% to 43% of the school population. One-third of all students currently in public schools are culturally and linguistically diverse; by the year 2035, children of color will represent the statistical majority; by 2050 they will make up 57% of all students; and by 2050 Whites will no longer be the majority population in America (Martin & Midgley, 1999; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a; Yen, 2009).

These statistics are problematic because the majority of American students are being taught by mostly Euro-American female teachers (Artiles & McClafferty, 1998; Artiles, Trent, Hoffman-Kipp, & Lopez-Torres, 2000). White middle-class leaders and teachers possess very limited intercultural experiences to bring into the classroom that will provide students with the knowledge and skills to work for a more just society (Jenks, Lee, & Kanpol, 2001). Recent studies suggest knowledge of history and an understanding of the impact of its events can help school leaders lead more effectively (Bowman, 2010; Madhlangobe, 2009; Noonan, 2010). School leaders must understand their own respective cultures as well allow their staff to understand theirs (Roberts, 2010). The most complex goal in the field of education is preparing school leaders and teachers to work with students who are racially, ethnically, and economically different from themselves (Gay, 2002).

The reality is that school leaders are more than likely unprepared to address the diversity in public schools. Critical areas of cultural responsiveness in education present 21st century leaders with the daunting responsibility of deconstructing the traditional approaches to education

that have ill served students of various races, religions, social classes, and ethnic groups (Pitre, Jackson, & Charles, 2011). An increasing body of research demonstrates the importance of addressing the needs of culturally diverse students and their families (Bazron, Osher, & Fleishman, 2005). Literature on school leadership highlights the school leader as being the catalyst for student achievement and a positive school culture but there has not been much research into culturally responsive school leaders and the perceptions of teachers and parents. While "stakeholders' perception in the process of leadership is controversial" (Ayman, 1993, p. 137), their perceptions have proven to be useful in the understanding of leadership.

The toughest problem for leaders is to come to terms with their own lack of expertise and wisdom (Hickman, 2010). Leaders are not only impacted by the culture of the school, they impact the culture as well. Within an organization, culture is there to "help the leader understand the environment and determine how to respond to it" (Yukl, 2010, p. 327). A culturally responsive leader can remove unintentional barriers to a child's success. K. B. Clark (1965) argued that Black children from low-income homes do not succeed in school because they are expected to fail and those who have the responsibility of educating them do not believe these students can learn and so they do not act toward them in ways that will help them to learn (Raz, 2013). School leaders have the power and responsibility to ensure each student is provided an equitable opportunity to reach his or her potential regardless of race, gender, or socioeconomic background—this is a critical role. School leadership influences the success of a school in that leaders can influence the culture of an organization through direct actions and by creating or modifying the formal programs, systems, facilities, structure, and cultural forms (Yukl, 2010, p. 327). Changing demographics require instructional leadership skills, advocacy skills, and specialized knowledge that work best for students who come from culturally and linguistically

diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2001). These leaders must be prepared to lead the school in a culturally responsive way (Bass & Stogdill, 1990; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004; Nieto & Bode, 2012). This study was designed to explore stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in order to add to the body of scholarly knowledge concerning this topic.

Statement of the Problem

Today's charter and public school leaders face an increase in the population of racially and ethnically diverse students and the continued adoption of Eurocentric curriculum, pedagogy and, leadership practices. Charter and traditional public school leadership struggle with meeting the needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations. Sheridan (2006) stated there is a cultural gap in many of the nation's schools as a growing number of educators strive to better serve students from cultures other than their own. In response to dramatic demographic changes that have created culturally diverse schools in many areas of the United States, school leadership is challenged now more than ever to increase academic achievement and create inclusive and culturally responsive school environments for all stakeholders. The practice of leadership in traditional public schools has emerged as a thread in the discourse on educational administration (Theoharis, 2007, 2008a, 2008b). The literature has yet to adequately address leadership within the context of charter schools.

In recent years, the number of racial/ethnic minorities entering charter schools has increased (Angrist, Pathak, & Walters, 2011; Zimmer et al., 2009). Charter schools are more racially segregated than are traditional public schools (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007). The NAEP (2011, as cited in Chudowsky & Ginsburg, 2012) data analysis showed student achievement is roughly even overall, but Black and Hispanic subgroups performed significantly higher in charter schools

than in regular public schools. It can be speculated that public schools are not responding to the cultural needs of students. This can be attributed to the lack of flexibility cited by many charter school advocates when discussing the rigid curricular structure of public school systems. The reality is charter schools are serving a higher percentage of racially and ethnically diverse students than are traditional public schools. With the increasing racial and ethnic minority student populations and the educational autonomy found in charter schools comes an opportunity to provide a different approach to education (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, 2008).

Charter school leadership has been overlooked in the literature. Due to the makeup of the charter school student population, charter school leaders attempt to address the inequities found in traditional public schools. This gap in the literature is important as researchers continue to seek practices to improve educational opportunities for all students. Cultural responsiveness has become a trending topic in academic circles. School leadership, attempting to balance quality education with diversity (M. Lynch, 2011), may find this to be a complex, if not daunting, task. However, as Ylimaki and Jacobson (2013) pointed out, if culturally responsive school leaders are to be successful they must find ways to infuse the diverse aspects of students' home lives and communities into the curriculum.

Context of the Study

Charter schools and schools of choice were a part of a larger school reform of the 1980s and were created to meet the specific needs of students. In order to address the issue of traditional public schools underserving a racially and ethnically diverse student population, some reformists looked to the creation of charter schools as the answer (Anyon, 2005; Finn, Manno, &

Vanourek, 2000; Noguera, 2003; Payne & Knowles, 2009). Finn, Manno, Bierlein Palmer, and Vanourek (1997) reported:

> [Charter schools] respond to frustrations, demands, and dreams that the regular system - for whatever reason - is not satisfying. In that sense, they are consumer oriented, and their consumers include parents, voters, taxpayers, elected officials, employers, and other community representatives. (p. 488)

Charter schools were originally designed to provide choice and a competitive pedagogical edge for public schools (EdSource, 2013). As a result, charters are not bound by many regulations that apply to traditional public schools (EdSource, 2013). This freedom may give insight into the overwhelming interest in charter schools, as 32 of the 37 states that adopted charter school legislation by 1999 report over 2,000 of them remain in operation and are attended by roughly half a million students (Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). Although the effectiveness of charter schools remains undetermined, these entities are as popular as they are contentious and operationally complex (Russo, 2013). Charter school proponents contend the competitive pedagogical edge and choice offered by these schools will force traditional public schools to improve the quality of curriculum and feel this can be done through revolution and equity. Charter school detractors are apprehensive that charter schools could not only cause racial and economic segregation, but reduce resources that would otherwise be available to traditional public schools (Ertas, 2007). Charter schools are categorized as "semi-private" choice programs that are "neither clearly public nor clearly private" (Metcalf, Muller, & Legan, 2001, p. 4). Additionally, they have been characterized as "quasi-public schools" that straddle the boundary between public and private settings as they are operated by parents, community leaders, educators, and a host of others (Vergari, 1999, p. 389; Witte, 1996, p. 161).

The current study was conducted in a charter school in North Carolina. The concept and first use of the term *charter* originated with a professor named Ray Budde in a conference paper presented in 1974 and later published in 1988 that suggested schools could conceivably create their goals and set their own policies. Small groups of teachers, Budde asserted, could be given contracts or "charters" by their local school boards to explore innovative pedagogical techniques (Connor, 2011; Renzulli & Roscigno, 2005). This concept was further expanded by the American Federation of Teachers president, Albert Shanker, in the late 1980s (Vergari, 1999). The first public charter school legislation was not introduced until 1991 in Michigan (Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, 2013).

Charter schools in North Carolina. The history of the North Carolina charter school movement dates back to 1996 when the General Assembly approved the Charter School Act (CSA) which allowed any individual or organization to apply for a school charter. Once the charter legislation passed in North Carolina, thousands of parents withdrew their children from traditional public schools and enrolled them in charter schools because they believed their children would be better served in a new, innovative environment (Lewis, 2009).

North Carolina's first charter school opened in the 1997-1998 school year (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; F. Brown, 1999; McNiff & Hassel, 2002). North Carolina's original charter school legislation included a provision that capped the number of charter schools authorized by the North Carolina State Board of Education at 100 (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; F. Brown, 1999; McNiff & Hassel, 2002). The charter school cap has since been lifted.

Critics envisioned that charter schools would lead to "cream skimming" and elitism but did not account for the Black and Hispanic flight from traditional public schools. Charter school students were expected to be the White, bright, and economically advantaged (Vergari, 1999).

However, many racially and ethnically diverse parents who were dissatisfied with the traditional public school methodology of instruction chose charters as a means of providing an alternative to learning for their children. According to data from the National Study of Charter Schools from 1996-1998, sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education, on average, charter schools enroll a larger percentage (22%) of Black students than all public schools (16%; Vergari, 1999). The Center for Research on Education Outcomes (2013) at Stanford University published the National Charter School Study in which the executive summary reported that since 2009 the proportion of Hispanic students in charters has begun to approach the proportion of Black students. Charter schools enroll a lower percentage of White and Hispanic students and a higher percentage of Black students (Center for Research on Education Outcomes, 2013). North Carolina charter schools tend to follow the national trend of enrolling a higher percentage of Black students than in traditional public schools (Noblit & Corbett, 2001). The percentage of Black students in North Carolina charter schools (48%) is disproportionately higher than the percentage of Black students in North Carolina public schools statewide (31%; Noblit & Corbett, 2001). The appeal of charter schools could be linked to the fact that these schools are allotted a certain degree of flexibility because they are not held to the state laws that govern local school districts (Dunklee & Shoop, 2006). Supporters of these types of schools are quick to point to the flexibility that enables these schools to be more innovative when it comes to addressing the needs of students (Hoxby & Rockoff, 2005).

According to NC Senate Bill 8/S.L. 2011-164, North Carolina limited the number of charter schools that could operate in the state to 100 until 2011 when the General Assembly lifted the cap. Currently, the law allows for varying levels of teacher certification at charter schools. The previous bill required at least 75% of teachers to be certified in kindergarten

through fifth grade and at least 50% in Grades 6 through 12. NC Senate Bill 337 removed those requirements and now requires at least 50% of charter school teachers in North Carolina to be certified. NC Senate Bill 337 also requires that charter schools reasonably reflect the racial and ethnic composition in the area in which the school is located.

Charter school leadership. For the purpose of this study, charter school leadership was defined as *school-based stakeholders*, which included school leaders and teachers. They are those people who affect the development of school-based curriculum decisions (Zhang, 2006). Effective leadership is important to the operation of charter schools. The role of leadership in charter and traditional public schools is becoming more complex and no one person can lead alone (Daresh & Playko, 1997; Portin, Schneider, DeArmond, & Gundlach, 2003). Shared leadership in a charter school is essential to the school's operation. Shared leadership is a democratic process by which leadership decisions and responsibilities are shared among a larger group of stakeholders (Savery, Soutar, & Dyson, 1992). Charter school leadership can be characterized as "individuals who hold promise to provide the kind of leadership and day-to-day support that will ensure that the charter school is complying with its intended charter service" (Dressler, 2001, p. 174). For the purpose of the current study, school leadership included an ESOL director, exceptional children's director, and a teacher leader.

Charter versus traditional public school. In a study about charter schools, Napp (2008) weighed the positives and negatives associated with alternative education (i.e., charters, private schools) versus traditional public school education. The setting for the study was a newly founded charter school with an African-centered focus. Data collected and analyzed were related to the narratives of families that chose to leave a traditional public school because of several factors, including the perceived isolation of African American parents, families, and educators.

Using a qualitative study design, Napp used strategies such as observations, interviews, field notes, and archival data to explore the significance of and reasons behind Black flight into charter schools. Napp used six cultural indicators to inform data analysis: (a) culturally relevant classrooms, (b) classroom instruction based on student discovery of the authentic self, (c) academically rigorous programs that infused student background knowledge with cultural identity, (d) an emphasis on learning communities instead of individualism and competitiveness, (e) hidden curriculum dismantled so students are able to gain the ability to critically read and evaluate what is being presented by dominant societal institutions, and (f) dialogue between students and teachers focused on strategies that could be used to explore current cultural trends. Napp found that educational leaders and educators serve in positions of power and control. Accepting that responsibility requires educators to behave in a manner that ensures all students receive access to high quality education. The results of Napp's study suggest this requires that all educators:

- Understand that culture is a complex and multilayered concept.

- Reflect on the customs and traditions in one's own backgrounds.

- Consider how one's cultural background influences the way one sees the world, makes decisions, and treats people like or unlike oneself;

- Observe and reflect the customs and traditions of the adults and students at a school or site of practice.

- Evaluate one's personal level of cultural competence and working to develop or deepen it.

- Work to understand the cultural backgrounds of the children in one's care. This includes learning how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomics, history of

immigration, religious beliefs, and family dynamics inform culture, becoming familiar with the cultural backgrounds of the people who work with the children in one's care, assessing the level of cultural awareness in the educational setting, and working to develop cultural competency within the educational setting.

- Ask how the educational setting can help the children in its care develop the skills they need to reach their highest potential, including their cultural, intellectual, political, and economic independence.

- Ask whether the educational setting is child friendly and child centered. Do all children see themselves in the curriculum? Are there symbols in the building that remind children of home? Is the tone of the building welcoming to parents and families? Does the educational setting reach out to families? Do educators listen to parents when they call? Do educators ask families, "How can we help you help your children achieve their dreams?"

- Ask how the school can work together to behave as a welcoming and resilient community. Are welcoming and resilient community behaviors evident between the adults in the building? Between the adults and children in the building? Among the children?

- Think about how to reflect on and plan for that community's challenges and celebrate its accomplishments.

Limited quantitative research exists to shed light on the academic effects of magnet or choice schools (Okpala, Bell, & Tuprah, 2007). Chudowsky and Ginsburg (2012) studied prevalent trends in charter schools, including levels of student achievement in comparison to traditional public schools. In their study, archival data were used to compare and contrast

information collected from several sources related to student achievement in the core areas of reading and math. Bloomfield (2013) found that successful charter schools are those in which the leader effectively promotes a school culture focused on success, encourages teacher leadership, uses data to drive instruction, manages finances with proficiency, and seeks the support of the community in reaching common goals.

According to Chudowsky and Ginsburg (2012), the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has consistently found higher than average achievement scores for regular public schools than for charters on a national level, but in larger cities charter schools have more favorable results. In large cities achievement scores for Black and Hispanic students are higher in charter schools, particularly in major urban areas like Washington, DC, Atlanta, Chicago, and Milwaukee. Chudowsky and Ginsburg found students in these areas who attended charter schools substantially outperformed their peers in traditional public schools. The authors pointed to the smaller class sizes (which equates to more instructional time) as a possible reason for the increased student success in charters.

There are some controversies in the research with regard to the achievement results of charter schools. Despite the positive associations between charter schools and student achievement, some research suggests far different results. As cited by Okpala et al. (2007), earlier research results implied there have been varying levels of achievement for magnet and charter schools as well as open-enrollment programs. A study issued by the National Center for Education Statistics (2004) found students in charter schools were actually under-performing their counterparts in traditional public schools based on 2003 reading and math assessment results for fourth grade. In addition, a meta-analysis conducted by Betts and Tang (2011) concluded charter elementary schools showed positive trends in reading and in math compared to

regular education schools, but showed no significant difference in math or reading achievement between high schools or in reading achievement at the middle school level when comparing traditional and charter schools.

A study conducted by Gleason, Clark, Tuttle, and Dwoyer (2010) found mixed results when looking at 36 charter middle schools in 15 states. Two sets of students were tracked over 2 years and data on student achievement, academic progress, behavior, and attitudes were collected. Student achievement varied across schools and was not linked to any set of variables or criteria. In other words, there was not a readily identifiable cause of positive or negative achievement based on the study. Added to the premise of low academic achievement is the belief that charter schools encourage more racially segregated learning environments because of the lack of appropriate measures than would occur if students attended assigned zone schools (Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2010).

North Carolina. A report by the Institute on Race & Poverty (2008) suggested the majority of charter schools in the state are producing less than desirable achievement outcomes, citing a direct link between lower test scores and racial/economic segregation of charter school students, particularly African Americans (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007). In other words, African American students who transferred into charter schools are more likely to experience negative academic achievement (Frankenberg et al., 2010).

In a study entitled *A Comparative Study of Student Achievement in Traditional Schools and Schools of Choice in North Carolina*, Okpala et al. (2007) compared the differences in student achievement results in the areas of reading and math between public middle schools of choice and traditional public middle schools. The selected schools had similar demographics and socioeconomic characteristics and the study focused on the schools for three consecutive school

terms. The study was designed to measure whether there were significant differences in student achievement based on end-of-grade scores in reading and mathematics at the middle school level. Results from the one-way ANOVA revealed significant differences in academic achievement between the two participating groups of students based on score results from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

California. A case study conducted at two urban schools in California looked at student achievement data and found a significant difference in achievement between charter students and traditional public schools students (Zimmer et al., 2009). A review of the literature revealed there is no consensus about charter schools, but results vary by state. Moreover, Zimmer et al. (2009) found charter schools in California provide comparable performance results to traditional public schools and charter school performance varies by charter type.

Grace (2010) examined two charter schools in California using qualitative methods with various instruments, including pre-site interviews, interviews with the school principal, interviews with teacher leaders, archival data, and observations. The use of various instruments allowed for triangulation of the data and served to further validate the research findings. The conclusions demonstrated both charters experienced similar benefits and challenges. Implementation of school leadership programs had a positive effect in the core areas of increased teacher leadership, collaboration, empowerment, improved student achievement, and parent satisfaction. Grace cited research that suggested charter schools have the potential to reverse long-standing trends in education in the United States.

Minnesota. The Institute on Race & Poverty (2008) presented a scathing report charging that charter schools failed to deliver the promises made by their advocates. The report determined students who attended charter schools in the state actually performed worse when

compared to their counterparts in traditional public schools. The authors concluded that even when charter schools had positive performance overall, minority and low-income parents were still more often faced with the choice between inferior charter schools and inferior traditional public schools.

Texas. In their literature review, Penning and Slate (2011) drew several conclusions about charter schools in Texas using demographics, academics, financial allotment, and the effect on traditional public schools. The results were: (a) charter schools in the state served larger numbers of minority students compared to traditional public schools, (b) charter schools received less funding than traditional public schools per student, and (c) academic achievement for charter school students was not significantly better but there was more potential for growth compared to traditional public school students. Citing other research studies, Penning and Slate analyzed academic growth and noted that Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) Math scores showed greater improvement among traditional public high school students compared to scores of charter high school students. However, charter high school students demonstrated increased reading scores. Likewise, gains were higher for students who enrolled in charter schools from traditional public schools and remained in those charter schools for at least 3 years.

Purpose of the Study

In order for schools to be successful, leaders must adopt strategies that work best within the context and needs of the school (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2008). While racially and ethnically diverse students are rapidly integrating into schools across the country, many leaders still prefer to promote a traditional, non-universal curriculum that serves as a barrier between the school and its racial/ethnic minority students. It has been suggested that for school leaders to be successful they must adopt and model attitudes, values, and characteristics that

express cultural competence, cultural understanding, and embrace the primary principles of cultural responsiveness (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

E. Young (2010) studied seven teachers in an urban school who had been working to examine the link between race and student achievement to find out how they understood culturally relevant practices. Significantly, although all seven spoke of valuing and building on student culture, none linked this directly with improving students' academic learning. Sleeter (2012) posited there is a need to educate parents, teachers, and educational leaders about what cultural responsiveness means and looks like in the classroom. Research into the practices of charter school leadership is minimal and the topic of leadership requires more investigation.

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the culturally responsive leadership practices of charter school leaders. The goals were: (a) to explore how the school leadership team perceived culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina, (b) to explore how the teachers perceived culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina, and (c) to explore how parents perceived a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina. *Culturally responsive leadership* is defined as skills demonstrated by a school leader's ability to understand and respond to cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more meaningful and relevant (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Students' home cultures, contexts, and languages are respected, valued, and utilized to improve academic achievement (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001). The current inquiry into the leadership practices focused on three areas of culturally responsive leadership: (a) purposeful and effective

leadership practices, (b) culturally responsive practices, and (c) creating a home-school connection.

Research Questions

The following questions guided this study:

Central Research Question: How do stakeholders perceive culturally responsive leadership in the context of a K-12 charter school?

1. How does the school leadership team perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

2. How do the teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

3. How do parents perceive a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

Theoretical Framework

This study was grounded in the theoretical framework of social constructivism which has its roots in the theories of constructivism and cultural responsiveness. Within the past 10 years, the results of several studies have indicated student achievement can be directly linked to the assimilation of student culture into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2001). The issues of culture and learning have been inseparable for centuries (Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev, & Miller, 2003, p. 15).

Constructivism is grounded in the early work of Immanuel Kant who argued there are inherent organizing principles within every person's consciousness by which he or she structures, arranges, and understands all data (M. Lynch, 2011; Rebore, 2001). William Dilthey expanded on Kant's hypotheses and attempted to explain the distinction between the natural and

cultural sciences. Dilthey further suggested the outward manifestations of human life needed to

be understood and the study of human knowledge needed to be done by reliving or reenacting

other peoples' experiences, which he called *verstehen* (M. Lynch, 2011 p. 167). Max Weber built

on Dilthey's idea of verstehen in his own philosophy and argued that the objective reality of the

world was not the main issue; instead, the way the individual interprets was central (Burrell &

Morgan, 1979; M. Lynch, 2011 p. 167). Social constructivism is one of two types of

constructivism, the other being psychological constructivism. *Social constructivism*, also known

as Vygotskian constructivism, places emphasis on using education to transform societies and is

essentially the theory of human development that attempts to place the individual within a

sociocultural context. Social interactions beget individual development through internalization of

the cultural meanings shared by the group (M. Lynch, 2011 p. 169; Richardson, 1997).

　　　Social constructivism suggests effective learning is promoted by leadership and practices

that align with students' culture. The social constructivist framework holds that effective

learning unfolds in the direction of culturally appropriate practices (Freire, 1980; Madhlangobe,

2009; Vygotsky, 1978). The basic principle of constructivism is built on the idea that learners

decode stimuli based on prior knowledge and construct understanding that makes sense to them

(Eggen & Kauchak, 2001). Vygotsky's own theories of constructivism drew upon the importance

of culture in education, particularly as it relates to those ideas of culture that teachers integrate

into their instructional practices in order to support students' acquisition of knowledge (Kozulin

et al., 2003). The way people understand and connect with the world is profoundly dependent

upon the beliefs, norms, and practice of the people and institutions around them (Kassin, Fein, &

Markus, 2010). This is important, as educators are facing even greater pressures for students to

succeed not only because of laws like No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002), but also due to the influx of racial/ethnic minority students in schools across the country (Saifer & Barton, 2007).

Cultural responsiveness has been cited by scholars from a number of disciplines (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009; Lum, 2005; Wu & Martinez, 2006). The cultural responsiveness framework closely aligns with social constructivism in terms of cultural considerations in the learning environment. Gay (2002) argued cultural responsiveness refers to:

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

In *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research and Practice*, Gay (2002) identified five critical elements of culturally responsive teaching: (a) the development of a culturally diverse knowledge base, (b) the immersion of ethnic and culturally diverse content within the curriculum, (c) demonstrating learning communities built on caring, (d) communicating and collaborating with ethnically diverse students, and (e) enacting a responsibility to ethnic diversity through instruction. The *ethic of critique* was identified by Starratt (1991) as a critical element of culturally responsive teaching:

> The ethic of critique provides a framework for enabling school leaders to move from a kind of naivete about the way things are to awareness that the social and political educational arena reflect arrangements of power and privilege. . . . The theme of critique forces school leaders to confront moral issues involved when schools disproportionately benefit some groups in society and fail others. . . . From a critical perspective, no

organizational arrangements in schools "have to be" that way; they are all open to

rearrangement in the interest of greater fairness to this student population. (p. 190)

These elements are important as they prepare school leaders and teachers to become culturally

responsive to the needs of racially/ethnically diverse students. The cultural frames of reference of

racially/ethnically students can be addressed through instruction, professional development, and

collaborative opportunities for leaders and teachers.

The idea of integrating culture into the academic environment was first introduced

through biculturalism and multiculturalism and is finally taking shape into what is today known

as cultural responsiveness (Banks, 2013; Hanley & Noblit, 2009; Nieto & Bode, 2012). Lindsey

et al. (2009) described cultural proficiency or responsiveness as "a way of being, a worldview,

and a perspective that are the basis for how one moves about in our diverse society" (p. 5). More

specifically, cultural proficiency or responsiveness is an approach to dealing with diversity by

acknowledging and working through issues that come from differences. Culturally responsive

leadership builds upon the principles of integrating culture into the curriculum in order to support

student achievement (Aguilar, 2011). Data suggest an estimated one in five children in the

United States live in immigrant homes, changing the composition of school classrooms through

diverse populations of learners that represent many different cultural backgrounds (Magno &

Schiff, 2010). In order for schools to be successful, leaders must adopt strategies that work best

within the context and needs of the school (Glickman et al., 2008).

Ladson-Billings (1995) suggested:

Culturally responsive leadership rests on three propositions: a) students must experience

academic success; b) students must develop and/or maintain cultural competence; and c)

students must develop a critical consciousness through which they challenge the status

quo of the social order. (p. 160)

Bazron et al. (2005) suggested school leaders should consider the following approaches to

promote culturally responsive school cultures: (a) match classroom instruction with cultural

norms for social interaction to enhance students' social skill development and problem-solving

ability; (b) adjust wait time after asking questions or giving directions for students from different

cultures to enhance classroom participation and the development of critical thinking skills; (c) be

sensitive to the cultural shifts with immigrant students or students with racial/ethnic minority

families and community cultures and be aware of when they move because it affects the

student's school and home life (Bazron et al., 2005; Rong & Preissle, 2009). The successful

adaptation of immigrant children into the educational system is dependent upon the school's

response to them (Rong & Preissle, 2009, p. 2); (d) Help parents gain skills (i.e., cultural capital)

to negotiate the education system and knowledge of the behavior norms that govern schools; (e)

use culturally responsive and respectful approaches in character education, socializing,

instruction, and discipline; and (f) to achieve growth in culturally competence that is lasting and

more than superficial, what is needed are opportunities for public school staff, parents, students,

college faculty, and professional organizations to work together.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to explore charter school leadership in the context of a racially

and ethnically diverse K-12 charter school in North Carolina to add to the existing body of

research concerning culturally responsive leadership. A litany of research focused on the lack of

culturally responsive instruction found in the classroom (White, 2009). There is an abundance of

information that provides insight into the theoretical and empirical components of culturally

responsive education, though little or no research exists that provides guidelines that are specific to culturally responsive leadership practices in charter schools (Monroe, 2006). Exploring stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in charter schools can provide insight to assist in the teaching and learning of the large percentage of racial/ethnic minority students who populate charter schools.

Definition of Terms

The following terms have multiple everyday uses but are defined here as used in this study:

Culture: A group's program for survival in and adaptation to its environment. Culture consists of knowledge, concepts, and values shared by group members through systems of communication (Madhlangobe, 2009; Saifer, Edwards, Ellis, Ko, & Stuczynski, 2011, p. 218). Lederach (1995) stated "culture is the shared knowledge and schemes created by a set of people for perceiving, interpreting, expressing, and responding to the social realities around them" (p. 9).

Cultural competence or cultural proficiency: Cultural competence or cultural proficiency is the ability to think, feel, and act in ways that acknowledge, respect, and build upon ethnic, sociocultural, and linguistic diversity (E. W. Lynch & Hanson, 2004). It is the ability to effectively operate within different cultural contexts. It is the integration and transformation of knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, behaviors, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services, thereby producing better outcomes (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Guerra & Nelson, 2007; Isaacs & Benjamin, 1991).

Culturally responsive leadership: Skills demonstrated by a school leader's ability to understand and respond to the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more meaningful and relevant. Students' home cultures, contexts, and languages are respected, valued, and utilized to improve academic achievement (Delpit, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2009, 2001; Skrla & Scheurich, 2001).

Culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally responsive practices: Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as a pedagogy that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural references to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally responsive pedagogy or culturally responsive practices involve using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them (Gay, 2010). These practices include the (a) behavioral expressions of knowledge, (b) beliefs, and (c) values that recognize the importance of racial and cultural diversity in learning.

Culturally competent school: A culturally competent school is one that honors, respects, and values diversity in theory and in practice and where teaching and learning are made relevant and meaningful to students of various cultures (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004).

Diversity found in schools: Cultures found in schools include race, ethnicity and language, disabilities and exceptionality, class, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, and all other aspects of culture (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 166; Madhlangobe, 2009).

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is the sociocultural and racial background of individuals used to describe "groups of people with shared history, ancestry, geographic and language origin, and physical type" (Lindsey et al., 2009, pp. 27-28; Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Leadership: "A process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (Bennis, 1994; Northouse, 2010, p. 3). It is a democratic process exercised to encourage willingness from diverse group members to do what is best for the organization, its members, and those they serve. Therefore, leaders must acknowledge the importance of group members by paying attention to what they say and inviting them to create a common vision (Madhlangobe, 2009, p. 18). This suggests leadership in schools should perform functions that include: (a) fostering a common view of the organization's vision and mission among all stakeholders or members of the group, (b) equitably distributing organizational resources and opportunities to meet the needs of diverse students and their diverse teachers, and (c) providing conditions that allow teachers and parents to react to the learning needs of diverse students. In short, principals and teachers as educational leaders should act as the nerve center of effective decisions (Bauer, 2003).

Multicultural education: Multicultural education is a field of study and an emerging discipline with the major aim of creating equal educational opportunities for students from diverse racial, ethnic, social-class, and cultural groups (Banks, 2013). Multicultural education involves policies and practices that proactively demonstrate respect for cultural diversity and advocate for a transformational approach to educational equity (Banks, 2010; Chamberlain, 2005; Gay, 2000). It is defined in a sociopolitical context as a process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender) among others that is reflected. Multiculturalism permeates curriculum and instructional strategies as well as the interactions among teachers,

students, and families and the very way schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning

(Nieto & Bode, 2012).

School-based stakeholders: Identified as school leaders and teachers. They are those

people who affect the development of school-based curriculum decisions (Zhang, 2006). Internal

or school-based stakeholders include members of the school board, district-level administrators,

faculty, and staff (Denslow, 2009).

School culture: Can be defined as the traditions, beliefs, policies, and norms within a

school that can be shaped, enhanced, and maintained through the school's principal and teacher

leaders (Short & Greer, 1997). It is the common way of doing things that serves as a setting to

steer people in a common direction, provides a set of norms that define what people should

accomplish and how it should be accomplished, and provides a source of meaning and

significance for teachers, students, and leaders (Madhlangobe, 2009).

School leadership team: The school leadership team is responsible for the day-to-day

operation of the school. The school leadership team is a collection of people focused solely on

supporting student achievement at the school (McKeever, 2003). This team may include the

school leader, building level leaders, Directors of Exceptional Children, Directors of English as a

Second Language, Curriculum Coordinators, and teacher leaders.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations describe how a study can be narrowed in scope and limitations describe

possible weaknesses of the study (Creswell, 2013). This study was limited to a purposeful

sample of three stakeholder groups from one K-12 charter school within North Carolina. Their

amount of experience in diverse environments differed within the school, leading to greater

differences in their perceptions (Lindsey et al., 2009, p. 71). Stakeholders differed in terms of

their willingness to disclose their perceptions of the school leadership and a few believed their perceptions were not a true indication of the actual culture of the school. Data for this study were collected within a short time span and because a small sample was used the findings may not be applicable to other schools. The researcher made no attempt to generalize the findings to all public or charter schools. Certain data analysis strategies were used in the creation of this research study and it is possible that readers will be able to apply the results of this study to other similar situations.

Organization of the Research

This dissertation is divided into chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study, including a statement of the problem, purpose and significance of the study, research questions and definition of terms. Chapter 1 also provided the theoretical framework that grounded the study and essential theories that shaped the study.

Chapter 2 contains the results of a review of relevant literature that formed the backdrop for the study. The literature is categorized into five strands: culturally responsive framework; culturally responsive practices; perceptions of culture and cultural responsiveness; leadership practices; and finally, teaching, learning and social constructivism.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology and design of the study. This chapter includes the role of the researcher, the data collection process, and how the data collection process informed data analysis. Participant information, strategies for ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings, and expected outcomes of the study are included in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the findings to the research questions posed in Chapter 1. Chapter 5 presents a summary of the findings, discussions, recommendations, implications for practice and policymaking, and recommendations for future study.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The roots of cultural responsiveness can be found in the idea of multicultural education that began in the civil rights movements of various historically oppressed groups (Banks, 2000). Among the institutions targeted by the civil rights movements were educational institutions (Gorski, 2009). Leaders in K-12 schools scrambled to address the concerns of historically marginalized groups by implementing programs and policies designed to address the traditional Eurocentric curricula (Gorski, 2009). According to Banks, this pressured leaders of educational institutions to change the curriculum to "reflect the experiences, histories, cultures, and perspectives" of those who had been oppressed (Banks & Banks, 2013, p. 5). Over the past 20 years the overall composition of the U.S. population has significantly changed, leading to changes in the way in which diversity is defined (Trail, 2000). Historically, the values and behavioral preferences of many ethnically and culturally diverse students were not integrated into the classroom because of preferences for mainstream cultural norms and values in public school classrooms, in addition to prejudices against alternative cultural norms and values of racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse students.

Multicultural education can be traced back to the early settlement of America, though principles of multiculturalism in education were first documented in the 1960s with references to diversity, cultural pluralism, and ethnic content (G. C. Baker, 1979). Multiculturalism is an issue of great importance in 21st century schools (Banks & Banks, 2013). Nieto and Bode (2012) explained multicultural education as a means of basic education for all students that challenges and rejects all forms of bigotry and biases in schools and society and accepts and asserts the idea of diversity that is represented by students, their communities, and teachers. In other words,

multicultural education must be both inclusive and authentic and present in every school and classroom, from pre-kindergarten to higher education (Gallavan, 2004).

With this in mind, there must be some consideration of the fact that while the United States is moving toward a more diverse student population, 87% of the teaching staff are White, 72% are female, and they tend to come from middle-class environments (Banks & Banks, 2013). Gay (2000) suggested teachers need to not only recognize and assimilate qualities that are important to students, they should honor them through their teaching practices as well. Thus, the purpose of ideas such as multicultural education is to provide a means by which to decrease race and other minority issues in education and help all students gain the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need in order to become successful (Valdez, 1999). The sociopolitical context in which multicultural education emerged and the operationalization of its principles are incorporated into cultural responsiveness (Bazron et al., 2005). The concepts of multiculturalism and cultural responsiveness have since merged, as noted in Nieto and Bode's (2012) definition of multicultural education:

> A process of comprehensive school reform and basic education for all students. It challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect. Multicultural education permeates the schools' curriculum and instructional strategies, as well as the interactions among teachers, students, and families, and the very way that schools conceptualize the nature of teaching and learning. Because it uses critical pedagogy as its underlying philosophy and focuses on knowledge, reflection, and action

(praxis) as the basis for social change, multicultural education promotes democratic

principles of social justice. (p. 346)

Culturally Responsive Framework

Cultural relevance or responsiveness was first introduced in the early 1990s by scholars

such as Delpit (1988, 1995), Ladson-Billings (1995, 2009), Sleeter and Grant (2003), It is

believed that students of color are prone to low academic achievement because of the

discontinuity between school and home. Because many researchers have advised that the cultural

dissonance that subsists between home and school influences poor educational outcomes

(Cartledge & Kourea, 2008), it would be fair to conclude that educators should work to increase

student success by helping students bridge that discontinuity (Banks, 2013; Nieto & Bode, 2012;

Taylor, 2010). If educators were to infuse elements of culture and language into the curriculum,

evidence of student achievement would likely emerge (Ladson-Billings, 2006) As more students

from immigrant families find their way into the American school system, a greater need exists to

provide an education that is relevant to their experiences (Au, 1993). As the population of

students becomes increasingly racially and ethnically diverse, public school educators are forced

to evaluate their own beliefs and prejudices and determine how the education system is adversely

affecting overall student achievement (Taylor, 2010).

In a study exploring the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, Greenwood

(2011) focused on the experiences of teachers who were engaging in culturally responsive

practices and the experiences of the administrator, who served as an instructional leader and a

cohort in the building of student knowledge. Greenwood used a participatory action research

method, which allowed teachers to remain actively involved in the research as the study

progressed. Data collection methods for the study included surveys, district documents,

observations in the classroom, and dialogue. The data suggested teachers were interested in continuing to implement culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, district administrators found student achievement increased at the study site, which suggested a positive relationship with the use of culturally responsive practices.

As Richards, Brown, and Forde (2006) suggested, leaders at institutions aspiring toward more culturally responsive environments must pay close attention to three acute areas within the organizational hierarchy: (a) school structure and culture, (b) rules and regulations as they relate to instruction and the curriculum, and (c) home-school connections and community partnerships as they relate to student achievement. Change can only be made through collaboration between school districts and teacher preparation programs that are designed to send educators into the field prepared to respond appropriately to the diverse classroom and provide instruction accordingly (M. R. Brown, 2007).

School leaders seeking to become more culturally responsive should be prepared to support student learning and should set high expectations for student achievement (Bazron et al., 2005) as opposed to making determinations that racial/ethnic minority students are not capable of learning, thus lowering the motivation of these students to achieve in the classroom (K. B. Clark, 1965; Good & Nichols, 2001). A person who is culturally competent not only embraces the similarities and differences that exist among cultures, but develops an appreciation for those cultures (Singh, 1996).

Culturally responsive leaders use the cultural backgrounds within a school community to create an effective climate for student success (Riehl, 2000). School leaders who understand and practice culturally responsive leadership help students build academic achievement. Gay's (2000) culturally responsive framework was used as a framework for the current study. Effective

culturally responsive leaders incorporate these components into their leadership practice. A modified version of Gay's definition of cultural responsiveness is: (a) develop a culturally diverse knowledge base; (b) demonstrate cultural caring, build a culture of learning; (c) develop effective cross-cultural communication; and (d) design culturally relevant curricula and ensure its effectiveness in ensuring cultural congruity.

Culturally Responsive Practices

Culturally responsive practices are often articulated in the most limited, simplistic manner, which creates an issue in understanding the greater implications of culture and learning (Sleeter, 2011a, 2011b). Nykiel-Herbert (2010) pointed out that immigrant students are often celebrated culturally but their culture is not appropriately identified as a learning tool. This is because culture, an extension of ethnicity, is viewed by many educators as a characteristic of individuals (May & Sleeter, 2010). The result is decreased opportunities for educators to make informative decisions regarding instruction based on the "academic, social, personal, and emotional needs of all learners" (Shealy, 2007, p. 3). According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant pedagogy is centered on three primary ideologies: (a) students have to be academically successful, (b) students must develop and maintain a sense of cultural competence, and (c) students must develop the ability to become critical thinkers. This view remains, as the basis of culturally responsive pedagogy is to facilitate academic success for all children through identifying, nurturing, and utilizing culturally-supported student-centered methodologies to promote student achievement (Richards et al., 2006). Culture shapes individual ethics, mindsets, principles, and behaviors (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, 2008). The influx of diverse student populations into the nation's public school systems has

ignited a trend toward pedagogy that underscores a familiar and educationally-enriched

environment for students of all backgrounds (M. Lynch, 2011).

Culturally responsive pedagogy covers three dimensions: (a) institutional, (b) personal,

and (c) instructional. The *institutional dimension* reflects the administration and its policies and

values. The *personal dimension* refers to the cognitive and emotional processes in which teachers

must engage to become culturally responsive. The *instructional dimension* includes materials,

strategies, and activities that form the basis of instruction. All three dimensions significantly

interact in the teaching and learning process and are critical to understanding the effectiveness of

culturally responsive pedagogy (Richards et al., 2006).

In the original 1994 study, *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American

Children*, Ladson-Billings (2009) stated there are six tenets of highly effective culturally relevant

teaching. She stated that through culturally relevant teaching:

Students whose educational, economic, social, political, and cultural futures are most

tenuous are helped to become intellectual leaders in classrooms . . . students are

apprenticed in a learning community rather than taught in an isolated and unrelated way .

. . students' real-life experiences are legitimized as they become part of the 'official'

curriculum . . . teachers and students participate in a broad conception of literacy that

incorporates both literature and oratory . . . teachers and students engage in a collective

struggle against the status quo . . . teachers are cognizant of themselves as political beings

(pp. 126-128).

Institutional. An eruption of social awareness and ethical solemnity has transpired about

the harsh inequalities experienced by minorities and poor children in many of America's urban

schools today (Kea & Utley, 1998). Social capital is based on mutual trust, respect, and norms

epitomized within a community (Gallavan, 2004). When exploring the cultural responsiveness of an institution, particularly as related to its physical and political configuration, there are three primary areas: (a) school formation as it relates to administration, diversity, use of physical space, and classroom composition; (b) school-based policies and procedures, chiefly those that have an impact on the delivery of services to diverse student populations; and (c) community involvement as it relates to bridging the relationship between school, families, and the community (Richards et al., 2006).

Personal. Standards-blending engages a direct connection between students' home life and the classroom curriculum, allowing teachers the ability to learn about the cultures and backgrounds of all of their students (Taliaferro, 2012). For example, when it comes to African American children, researchers maintain that teachers are not in tune with the cultural context of behaviors that manifest in the classroom and how big of a role culture actually plays in the teaching and learning environment (Siwatu & Polydore, 2010). In fact, over 80% of teachers across the nation are of a middle-class White background (Sleeter, 2008), creating a huge obstacle to successfully implementing culturally responsive instruction due to their inability to set aside cultural biases and familiarize themselves with the backgrounds of the students in their classrooms (M. Lynch, 2011). Without an understanding of the interconnection between culture and learning, culturally responsive practices remain elusive to educators (Gay, 2000). A case in point is teachers often see African American males as being aggressive, which results in higher disciplinary referrals for behavior that may be the product of a misunderstanding or misconception about a student's actions (Sullivan, Larke, & Webb-Hasan, 2010). Calabrese (1990) found racial/ethnic minority students are disadvantaged academically because of overt

and covert school policies and practices that have been created to oppress minorities and continue trends of disproportionality in the social-class system.

Despite the racial differences that exist between many educators and racial/ethnic minority students, it should not be presumed that these differences automatically make it impossible for Caucasian teachers to successfully educate students of color (Henfield & Washington, 2012). As a positive practice, educators should reach out to students in an effort to evaluate and understand their behaviors using activities such as lunch-time meetings or personal sharing time by allowing students to bring in family photos, arranging meetings with family members, inviting members of the community into the classroom to give presentations, and taking part in community events (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008).

Instructional. Instructional leadership alone does not eliminate underlying biases or prejudices that interfere with teaching and learning. Teacher quality correlates to a student's academic success (Barone, 2006). Schools need teachers who not only know how to teach, but who also know the methodologies needed to teach effectively (Kea & Utley, 1998). According to the research, teaching practices that disregard student norms of behavior and communication cause student opposition, while teaching practices that promote these ideas promote student involvement (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Cultural norms for social interaction and classroom instruction should be interlinked in order to enhance students' academic performance, social skills, and critical thinking ability (Bazron et al., 2005). While data trends show culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in schools are on the rise, not all teacher education programs thoroughly cover multicultural education or culturally responsive teacher education pedagogy (Kea, Campbell-Whatley, & Richards, 2006). In fact, teacher education faculty rejects

cultural diversity because they view it as being politically motivated and lacking any true relevance in academics (Ukpokodu, 2007).

Ladson-Billings (2009) reflected that the focus of the classroom must be instructional (p. 124). Teachers must use methods that incorporate both theoretical and culturally responsive principles (Richards et al., 2006). Lam (2009) suggested educators should examine how students of diverse backgrounds are interacting with current technologies. Doing so will facilitate the creation of pedagogical practices that utilize resources that make education more relevant to culturally and linguistically diverse children (Derderian-Aghajania & Cong, 2012).

Researchers like Cartledge and Kourea (2008) and Ladson-Billings (2000) strongly believed low academic performance among students from racially and ethnically diverse populations is exasperated by the mismatch in cultural backgrounds between students and teachers (Ball, 2009). Teachers should examine their own set of cultural experiences and beliefs and how they may influence their perceptions of students who are culturally different; they must be honest about their own existing biases and reach some level of consideration as to how limiting and un-permitting those biases are when it comes to understanding other cultures (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). In the areas of reading and math, research indicates economically disadvantaged and racial/ethnic minority children consistently perform below their peers on all grade levels (Neuman & Celano, 2006). Children's intellectual abilities (i.e., process information, analyze, communicate, and perform academically) are naturally enjoined with their social and cultural settings (Merry & New, 2008). Education research confirms that the best environments for student learning are those that reflect their culture and language in the school's curriculum (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, 2008). Instruction that is inclusive of students' home culture should be viewed by administrators and

teachers as a means to improve the academic achievement of culturally and linguistically diverse students (Bakken & Smith, 2011).

Influence of Ladson-Billings. The term *culturally relevant teaching* (CRT) was introduced by Ladson-Billings (1995). It is described as instructional practices that use the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as channels for more effective teaching (Indiana Department of Education, 2012). Fundamentally, CRT guides instructional practices that teachers should use to bridge students' home and school lives while continuing to meet state and district-level standards. A common theme of CRT is that it relies on students' backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge in order to inform instruction. Ladson-Billings (1995) believed culturally relevant pedagogy must meet three criteria: (a) student experiences academic success, (b) student develops or maintains cultural competence, and (c) student develops critical consciousness and challenges the norms of society (p. 160).

The education of children of color is exasperated by low teacher expectations, disproportionate special education placement (Sleeter, 2011a), lack of curriculum rigor, poor teacher education preparation programs, incompetent school leadership, and the phenomenon known as charter school (Almond, 2013). Even while evidence has been presented to support the idea that culturally and linguistically diverse students are in the greatest need of quality teaching methods, many researchers contend that these students are least likely to be educated with the most operative evidence-based instruction (Taylor, 2010).

In culturally responsive pedagogy, curricula, behaviors, and materials should be modified to align with students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds to create an environment that is more conducive to effective learning (Rueda, Lim, & Velasco, 2007). Cultural and individual differences are embraced through a sense of community and individuals are accepted for their

uniqueness (Valenzuela, 2000). If students are not introduced to the differences (e.g., dress, foods, religion, music) of those around them, this invites fear, suspicion, and prejudice to become dominant (Banks, 2013). Moreover, if educators do not address students' race and culture, the students may become disengaged (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

Teachers are encouraged to get to know who their students are in order to welcome cultural differences into the learning environment, thus accepting that their own views are not applicable to all (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Students should not feel as though they must separate themselves from their cultural beliefs and practices when they enter the school in order to fit into what is perceived as the norm (Gutiérrez & Rogoff, 2003).

In a research study examining the use of culturally responsive pedagogy in reading instruction, Shealy (2007) found educators have limited opportunities to meet the needs of each learner individually. Shealy sought to explore whether teaching through sociocultural contexts had any impact on the reading achievement of urban students. Vygotsky (1978) posited that sociocultural theories attempt to connect the social facets of learning and the framework in which students create meaning. Shealy's study incorporated both the abstract and concrete framework of sociocultural language and literacy procurement. The setting was an elementary school in the southeast region of the United States in a district that serves approximately 60,000 children. At this particular school, there are 700 students, of whom 90% are of ethnically diverse backgrounds. The findings suggested many of the same sentiments echoed in other studies: (a) teachers must examine their own beliefs about culture and diversity, (b) teacher education programs must prepare prospective teachers for diverse environments, and (c) greater accountability is needed to address cultural competence. While Shealy focused only on the urban

school setting used for the research, the findings can be used to encourage the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies to engage minority students in the learning process.

Evidence exists that intimates public education is lacking when it comes to reaching culturally and linguistically diverse students, principally those who have or are at risk for having disabilities (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). There is a great need for educators who can use scientific, research-based pedagogy, or pedagogy that is responsive to the learning, emotional, and social needs of ethnically and linguistically diverse students with and without disabilities in urban schools (Villegas & Lucas, 2002a).

Perceptions of Culture and Cultural Responsiveness

Educators must understand that cultural tendencies can influence the manner in which children take part in education (Rosenberg, Westling, & McLeskey, 2008). It has been noted that linguistic and cultural differences in the classroom can give insight and allow a better understanding of others, though they can also be challenging for educators (Trail, 2000). The need for culturally responsive pedagogy has increased as more diverse student populations occupy 21st century classrooms (Richards et al., 2006). Educators should know as much about their students as possible in order to appropriately meet their needs, embrace the belief that all students have the ability to learn, deliver relevant curriculum, create balanced classroom environments, be flexible in their instruction, and give frequent feedback through assessments (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, 2008). In order for educators to thoroughly examine their own biases and work to create a more common, inclusive environment, they need to make a concerted effort to learn more about their students' backgrounds (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Successful culturally responsive practitioners seek to infuse the history, values, and cultural knowledge of students' home lives and communities into

the school curriculum as a pathway to critical consciousness that will eliminate the inequalities that exist in society and forge stronger relationships with parents from diverse communities (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013).

Cultural competency. A trend in the literature pertaining to culture is the development of strategies with the purpose of crossing the cultural boundaries that exist between educators and racial/ethnic minority students, most notably those from environments of low socioeconomic status (Ladson-Billings, 2000). Differences in socioeconomic status in this country play a critical part in the quality of education that children receive (Azizoglu, Junghans, Barutchu, & Grewther, 2011). In her tenets on cultural competence, Ladson-Billings (1995) made it clear that when students are treated as if they are competent, they are more likely to demonstrate competence.

Schein (1992) stated, "The only real thing of importance that leaders do is create and manage culture" (p. 5). One strategy, as advocated by Villegas and Lucas (2002b), is to challenge and shape the notions, thoughts, and actions of teachers by encouraging self-reflection and critical self-analysis as a means of promoting sociocultural consciousness. Likewise, pre-service teachers are urged to analyze the underlying formations of social reproduction that transpire within the inner and outer workings of the education system (Nieto, 2001). Teachers need to be challenged about their own views of culture and cultural diversity. Failure to do so may result in teachers using their biases against students rather than seeing their students' strengths (Burstein & Cabello, 1989; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Villegas and Lucas (2002a) stated pre-service teachers "need to understand that social inequalities are produced and perpetuated through systematic discrimination and justified through a societal ideology of merit, social mobility, and individual responsibility" (p. 22). Ladson-Billings (2007) concluded that most pre-service teachers do not self-assess, failing to challenge their own sets of values, beliefs,

and attitudes when it comes to how they perceive diverse cultural groups. They need to engage in critical reflection as a means of improving teaching and learning (Dewey, 1933).

Cultural influences. As schools become more diverse due to the increasing number of racial/ethnic minority students, educators must come to the realization that they need to develop a greater awareness of how culture and social behaviors among these students work. Instead of viewing student behavior through a limited, biased lens, educators need to view these behaviors from a cultural perspective (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). Educators must create an environment that nurtures all students regardless of their cultural and linguistic background (Richards et al., 2006). Children do not benefit when educators seek to minimize the importance of race or try to discount the social facts of racial inequality (Pollack, 2004). Community culture is viable to individual learning experiences for children, who usually develop intellectually based on their interactions with those around them (Merry & New, 2008). However, as Su (2007) posited, while community involvement is necessary, it will not necessarily be enough when looking to bring equality into the classroom.

Cultural biases. Many researchers point to cultural bias in teaching as evidenced throughout numerous academic texts and segments across various subjects and researchers in the United States posit the material found in academic texts is usually contributed by members of the majority race (American Psychological Association, 2003; P. B. Baker, 2005). Many texts minimize the accomplishments of minorities in the United States while promoting the achievements of the dominant group (Loewen, 2007) by focusing on a Eurocentric ideology (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001). In the United States, the dominant race is Eurocentric and is largely focused on tradition (Strickland, 2000). The presence of cultural values that reflect differences in beliefs have the potential to cause educators to form misconceptions based on the

value non-European American families place on education, thus creating a need to understand the backgrounds and philosophies of individuals and groups about education (Rosenberg et al., 2008).

Many educators persist in promoting instructional practices that adopt the traditional or mainstream ideology despite the cultural relevance of learning activities that demonstrate an alternative cultural point of view (Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006). This is even true in classrooms where the student population largely comprises ethnically and culturally diverse students (American Psychological Association, 2003). Cultural biases in teaching, through the determination that traditional forms of thinking, learning, and behaving are most acceptable (Loewen, 2007), dictate that ethnically and culturally diverse students will often have to cease learning behaviors that reflect facets of their home or native culture.

Evidence of cultural bias can be found throughout the practices that are implemented and encouraged by educators, including administrators (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005). For instance, when culturally diverse students fail to adopt classroom practices and behaviors that are aligned with mainstream cultural values, their learning ability is questioned and in some cases they are referred for remediation or psychological services (P. B. Baker, 2005). Higher motivation and achievement have been reported for students who adopt mainstream classroom practices as opposed to students who maintain their indigenous cultural behaviors and practices (Tyler, Boykin, & Walton, 2006). For some students, it is difficult and detrimental to adopt behaviors that are not reflective of their culture, as Vygotsky (1978) supported, suggesting students from ethnically diverse households are more likely to maintain cultural practices and behaviors that are aligned with their indigenous culture but may not necessarily reflect conventional beliefs.

Examining biases. Educators must make a concentrated effort to reduce cultural biases in order to meet the needs of all students and establish an environment that is conducive to students' emotional, social, cognitive, and cultural well-being (D. F. Brown, 2004). Teachers' attitudes about cultural diversity are more demonstrative of their willingness to create classrooms that are culturally responsive (Phuntsog, 2001). However, before teachers can begin to acknowledge and use the cultural values and belief systems of ethnically and culturally diverse students, they should reflect on their own perceptions that may cause cultural biases in teaching (American Psychological Association, 2003). Likewise, educators who self-reflect on their own culturally-based teaching principles and behaviors will be better able to establish a culturally responsive learning setting and reduce cultural bias in their instructional practices (Gay, 2000). It should be noted that the concept of culturally responsive teaching is frequently used by researchers when depicting an environment in which teachers properly address the diverse learning experiences and culturally inspired behavioral preferences of the learners in their classroom (D. F. Brown, 2004).

Cultural discontinuity. There is evidence that ethnically and culturally diverse students are often forced to adopt mainstream classroom practices (Tyler, Boykin, Miller, & Hurley, 2006). Constantine and Sue (2006) pointed out that participation in some facets of American society dictates there should be some alignment with mainstream cultural beliefs, particularly in public school. Furthermore, Ogbu (1982) suggested all students experience discontinuities throughout school, but ethnically and culturally diverse students have more profound experiences (Nieto, 2001). Despite an emerging body of research into cultural discontinuity and school performance for racial/ethnic minority students (Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003), few studies have actually provided empirical data to support the claim that cultural discontinuity exists and

precedes the academic difficulties experienced by this student population (Tyler, Boykin, Miller, et al., 2006).

Classroom diversity. The concept of diversity has become more synonymous with factors other than ethnicity and race, to include cultural and socioeconomic factors (Trail, 2000). Research shows developments toward more diversity have not been evenly allocated across the country (Hodgkinson, 2000). Children who are ethnic minorities face a greater risk of being misjudged or misperceived in terms of their behavior and as a result will have a negative attitude toward school and constantly work against the establishment, jeopardizing any chance of success (Cartledge & Kourea, 2008). When a child feels as though he or she is valued by his or her school, the chances for success and positive outcomes are greater (W. M. Young, 1969). In order to appropriately address the achievement gap, culturally responsive services must be included in any program in order to improve student performance and address inhibiting behaviors that negatively affect achievement (Taliaferro, 2012).

Leadership Practices

The cultural foundation of schools in the United States remains largely aligned with middle-class, Eurocentric values (Bazron et al., 2005). Leadership is a critical element of every school. Leadership sets the tone for the school culture and supports and reinforces the ideals and beliefs of the organization (Andrews, 2007; Auerbach, 2009). The importance placed on the need for culturally proficient leaders signals the effect of culture on education and performance (Edmundson, 2005). In their study, Magno and Schiff (2010) reported that out of 14 participants who were school leaders (i.e., principals and assistant principals) representing nine suburban school districts in Connecticut, many were aware of the presence of immigrant students but favored assimilation over diversity. Education based on culturally responsive leadership requires

cooperation between schools and families, especially in urban schools where parents are usually absent from the education process (Auerbach, 2007).

Purposeful and effective culturally responsive leadership. Belfiore, Auld, and Lee (2005) identified characteristics of culturally responsive leadership. Leaders must establish a school environment that is conducive to learning; one that is welcoming and supportive of the culture for all school stakeholders (Belfiore et al., 2005; Magno & Schiff, 2010). Organizations and leaders purporting to address racism must address their own issues of racism (Su, 2007). Instead of addressing issues such as under-education, which is frequently the experience of racial/ethnic minority students, local administrators choose to implant disciplinarian principals to reform schools single-handedly (Gooden, 2012). However, administrators must meet the demands of working with racially and ethnically diverse students as they: (a) have different racial and ethnic composites, (b) have linguistic differences, (c) have different beliefs, and (d) have different ways of expression that are part of their cultural uniqueness (Bakken & Smith, 2011). School leadership must be willing and capable of confronting barriers to advancement for racial/ethnic students by acting with a moral purpose to address these issues (López, Magdaleno, & Reis, 2006; Paige & Witty, 2010). Leaders must be willing to analyze the presence of institutional discrimination (overt or otherwise), racial tensions, or concerns associated with cultural differences that may exist within the organization (L. E. Davis, Galinsky, & Schopler, 1995). Effective school leaders possess a consciousness about cultural diversity that informs their instructional practices (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). Horsford, Grossland, and Gunn (2011) stated:

Efforts to demonstrate and engage culturally relevant leadership in schools will face challenge and resistance from those who prefer to keep things the way they are.

Educational leaders must therefore become familiar with not only the guiding principles, continuum, and essential elements of cultural proficiency but also the obstacles and resistance they will face as they seek to dismantle oppression and reveal privilege and entitlement within their respective organizations. (p. 598)

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is dependent upon the behaviors of school leadership in relation to student growth as well as the traditional (i.e., didactic) and non-traditional (i.e., progressive) approaches to instruction and assessment (Bloomfield, 2013). In a study conducted entitled *Developing Principal Instructional Leadership Through Collaborative Networking*, Cone (2010) examined the effectiveness of collaborative principal networking among urban school principals who met to learn about and improve their instructional leadership as well as build systems of support. The participant sample was a network of 15 principals and their facilitator in San Antonio, Texas. Cone used interviews and observations to describe the learning experience of the sampled principals as they participated in the networking collaboration and the benefits they derived from the experience. While Cone's research focused on collaborative leadership outside of the realms of the schoolhouse, it can be used in current research to inform collaborative practices within the school setting as well. The findings from the study proposed that networking focused on student achievement increased the principals' knowledge of instructional leadership learning. Moreover, principals can benefit from focused learning in collaborative settings that create trusting, collegial relationships. The study further served as a guide for the current study in the methods used by administrators to increase the use of teacher teams, application of data-driven approaches to improve student achievement, and implementing effective classroom management practices. Culturally responsive school leadership must assist teachers with integrating culture into their classroom culture and in

confronting barriers to student achievement (Jones, 2007; Lindsey et al., 2009; Magno & Schiff, 2010; Reeves, 2008).

Frankenberg et al. (2010) discussed the 2008 Civil Rights Project that conducted a study to examine current trends in America's teaching force. Given the changing racial demographics of the nation's schools and the primary role of teachers in shaping the education of their students, the report used a unique dataset of more than 1,000 teachers across the country to examine the following research questions: (a) What kind of preparation do teachers have for diversity; (b) What kind of practices and resources do teachers have for teaching about diversity or teaching in diverse settings; (c) Do teachers have resources within the schools (other faculty, administrators, staff) or outside the schools (family or community members, local university faculty) that they rely on to enhance their knowledge of teaching in new demographic environments, particularly for the vast majority of teachers who are White and may have had limited interaction with people of color; and (d) How does standardized testing aid or inhibit teaching in diverse classrooms (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008).

A positive finding from the study was that over 80% of all teachers reported supplementing their textbooks with culturally relevant materials (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). Almost 60% of teachers in schools with at least 90% Black and Hispanic students strongly agreed that they provided culturally relevant materials in addition to the textbook, while only 41% of teachers in schools with 10% or fewer Black and Hispanic students agreed strongly (Frankenberg & Siegel-Hawley, 2008). This study supports the literature that school leaders must structure their schools in such a manner that is appropriate to fully realize the educational benefits of the student body. Instructional leadership is a critical piece of the implementation process. Culturally responsive school leadership must provide professional development and

training for teachers geared toward infusing culture into the curriculum and providing support and accommodations for ELLs (Andrews, 2007; M. R. Brown, 2007).

Beliefs of collaborative leadership teams. The groundwork for high academic success and more prolific schools and students is the existence of resilient collaborative leadership among the team, comprising the local school board, the superintendent, principals, teachers, students, parents, and community-based alliances. Student development is best facilitated through the establishment of authentic inclusion and communities of care with a shared goal of supporting each other's welfare (Gallavan, 2004). School administrators should practice the desired behaviors and consistently model socially competent attitudes, values, and dispositions through understanding and respect as they relate to the three principles of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy (Bakken & Smith, 2011).

Stakeholders' involvement. School leadership should seek to engage families and communities in the process of creating partnerships, accessibility, and cultural responsiveness (Fruchter, 2007). Kalyanpur and Harry (1999) developed a cultural reciprocity model in which the school and parents openly communicated their cultural and ethnic beliefs in order to improve student achievement. Parents should be empowered as prominent stakeholders in the education process. They should be endowed with skills to advocate within the schools and given knowledge of how to navigate school-related policies (Bazron et al., 2005). Racial/ethnic minority parents often feel they are more estranged from the educational process than are White parents, are not invited to participate in the school as frequently as they feel they should be, and cannot depend on the district or school authorities for reliable information because of the frequency in which school policies change (Calabrese, 1990). School-based policies should make provisions for parents and family groups, district staff, and students to be involved in developing

school plans based on community needs and expectations; this would include screening, hiring, and training of staff in learning-community goals, as well as diagnosing and assessing students relative to their academic needs, personal interests, and goals (Garcia, 2000). It is important to have school leaders who are committed to creating partnerships between the school and the community (Ferguson, 2005).

Parent involvement. Research indicates parents who are involved in their children's education have a positive impact on performance, including better grades, attendance, attitudes, expectations, homework completion, and achievement on state tests (Cancio, West, & Young, 2004; Mahrous & Ahmed, 2010). Lazar and Slostad (1999) believed "parents care very much about the educational needs of their children and that negative perceptions of parents persist because schools of education have not adequately educated teachers to understand parents and to network with them" (p. 207). A review of the literature shows the school leader is responsible for promoting collaboration between the school and community (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). The rise of the charter school movement has been seen as an opportunity for urban parents to play a more central role in their children's education (Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011).

A crucial indicator of parent involvement is how parents view themselves in the context of the school environment; that is, their role in supporting their children's education (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Because of their struggles to integrate into the American culture, immigrant parents may see the school as an extraneous, elusive setting (Tinkler, 2002).

Modern curriculum should address ideas such as distributing or sharing leadership roles and responsibilities, participating in decision-making, and encouraging racial/ethnic minority students and their families to become active stakeholders in the learning process (Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013). For example, Valdez (1996) pointed out that Hispanic parents are more likely

to defer decision-making to teachers, as teachers are regarded as the experts on matters of education. On the other hand, Caucasian parents have been reported as being more involved in their children's education and are often more visible in the classroom. According to Yan (1999), a majority of the studies that investigated the issue of parental involvement were based on samplings of White students and the effect of parental involvement on children's school performances demonstrated with White students may not hold true for students of other racial/ethnic groups (Steinberg, Dornbusch, & Brown, 1992). Yan further stated that studies examining the effect of parental involvement on African American students often place focus solely on these students being at risk and ignore the ways in which African American families promote successful school achievement and experiences. R. Clark (1983) discovered in a study conducted on African American students from low-income homes that the parents of such students engaged in parent-child interactions that were distinct from those engaged in by their White counterparts. The African American parents created emotionally supportive home environments, engaged in frequent and meaningful dialogue with their children, helped them with homework, and communicated clear and consistent behavioral limits to their children. The findings from Yan's study indicated families of successful African American students demonstrate equal or higher levels of parental involvement than do those of successful White students and families need to increase their awareness and acknowledgment of cultural differences among parents.

In their study, Smith et al. (2011) used a qualitative approach using Epstein's model to explore the family dynamic in urban charter schools. The study focused on 12 charter schools that implemented parent involvement programs as a means of increasing student achievement. Findings suggested parent programs can be successful in increasing parents' participation in their

children's education. In addition, there seemed to be some indication that parental involvement may have been more preferable than parent engagement, or at least there was a need to differentiate the two through further research. It should be noted that data obtained for this study were collected from interviews with school leaders and did not include information from other stakeholders within the charter setting (e.g., parents, teachers, and students).

Teaching, Learning, and Social Constructivism

Social constructivism suggests effective learning is promoted by leadership and practices that are aligned with student culture. The social constructivist framework holds that effective learning unfolds in the direction of culturally appropriate practices (Freire, 1980; Madhlangobe, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). The constructivist perspective theorizes that knowledge is not passively taken in from the world or from imposing sources but constructed by individuals or groups by analyzing the world in which they live (Maclellan & Soden 2004). Traditionally, American educators have been socialized to believe that America is a nation built on principles of equality (Ukpokodu, 2007).

Some argue that racial/ethnic minorities are solely responsible for their own outcomes and any disadvantages experienced by racial/ethnic minority students could be attributed to the poor environment in which they live (Calabrese, 1990). According to Almond (2013), racial/ethnic minorities are more likely to attend schools with fewer resources and their teachers report more incidents of misbehavior, poor attendance, and little parental involvement. Additional funding and parent participation are not the answer to the ills that plague the school system; dedicated teachers are most needed in the poorest schools if real change is going to be made toward student achievement (W. M. Young, 1969).

There must be an element of respect for cultural history, practices, and behaviors (L. E. Davis et al., 1995) as individuals assign meaning and develop perceptions based on social construction (Keaton & Bodie, 2011). It was Pollack's (2004) theory that educators will become more empowered to make changes in the system to minimize the impact of racial inequality if researchers become more willing to self-reflect and admit their struggles to discuss race in education. Conversations must take place that delve into the critical issues that accompany race, such as sociocultural and political structures associated with education, ideas about color and gender blindness, realities of urban education, and team building in an effort to build relationships and interdependency (Ukpokodu, 2007).

Ladson-Billings (2009) wrote extensively about social connection in a chapter aptly titled, "We Are Family," when she stated "culturally relevant teaching encourages social interactions within the classroom that supports the individual in a group context" (p. 76). The group fails and succeeds as a unit. Psychological safety is emphasized in classrooms where teachers advocate for community building among students that will extend beyond the classroom into their own communities that are often infused with drugs, crime, and poverty. Yeoman (2000) used this as a premise for her study to explore the ways students connected as a community and the methods teachers used to build community within the classroom. The qualitative case study took into account the classroom teacher's belief about community as well as ways in which community building manifested inside the classroom. Common themes that emerged from the research included trust, mutual respect and concern, safety, shared responsibility, communication flow, problem-solving, and decision-making. While the teacher did not explicitly use strategies to cause community building, she engaged the class as if it were a community with positive implications for other teachers, administrators, and educators,

particularly as it pertains to heightening cultural awareness and advocating for respect of culture in the classroom.

Ideas of democracy must be challenged in a society that does not offer equal access to education (Ukpokodu, 2007). This is of immense importance, as Oakes and Lipton (2003) proposed, as education in American is considered to be the great equalizer in upward social mobility and access to opportunities. Teacher education programs remain committed to the traditional approach to education, void of any evidence aside from jargon meant to be made as an attempt at diversity (Pang, Anderson, & Martuza, 1998). When educators accept curriculum as-is, students become inclined to believe society determines who they are and they are powerless to make change or that change is unimportant within the broader scheme (Shor, 1992).

Applying principles of constructivism to teaching practices presents an issue on two levels: (a) little empirical evidence exists to support its effectiveness, and (b) the risk of disregarding practices that already have empirical support (Matthews, 2003). Sociocultural theories are in need of deeper analysis, particularly in terms of achievement gaps that keep racial/ethnic minority students from being academically successful (Whaley & Noel, 2011). In addition, sociocultural philosophies highlight the social facet of learning and the context in which students create meaning, including the learning rationale and setting as well as the cultural backgrounds of the learners (Shealy, 2007). Rigorous efforts must be undertaken so all students probe more deeply into their comprehension of multiculturalism, pedagogy, and social capital (Gallavan, 2004). Educators must understand that every act of teaching is politically motivated (Greene, 2007). Others counter that knowledge is exchanged between people and their environments (McMahon, 1997); it is created socially and culturally (Ernest, 1999).

The nucleus of social constructivism is based on the idea that an understanding of culture and context is important (McLeod, 2003). The role of the teacher is to ensure all students have access to equitable instruction and the teacher must be socially responsible by challenging the status quo and discriminatory teaching methods (Ukpokodu, 2007). Despite this apparent knowledge, constructivist-aligned pedagogy has not been widely used in the practices of classroom teachers (Clements, 2003).

Cultural differences in the family also play a major role in how students adjust to American schools (Irfaeya, Maxwell, & Kramer, 2008). In a study about Chinese-immigrant students, Li (2003) found individual family physiognomies influenced children's performance in school, which gave further weight to the theory that negative treatment, separation from their communities, and socioeconomic status caused low-income Chinese immigrant students to face a decline in mobility. Teachers who gain an understanding of the sociopolitical contexts of education are likely to develop a deeper commitment to their students and become more of an advocate for change (Ukpokodu, 2007), as meaningful learning can begin to take place when students' cultures are involved.

Richardson (1997) called constructivist pedagogy:

The creation of classroom environments, activities, and methods that are grounded in a constructivist theory of learning, with goals that focus on individual students developing deep understandings in the subject matter of interest and habits of mind that aid in future learning. (p. 1627)

Methods that involve peer and group work, such as reciprocal teaching, peer collaboration, problem-based instruction, and web quests, are all examples of social constructivist methods that can be used successfully in the classroom (Gillani, 2003). Effective learning is dependent upon

how learning experiences are differentiated, the relevancy of the content, and the ability to interconnect background knowledge and new learning (Bruner, 1978). Ladson-Billings (2009) maintained that teachers need to scaffold instruction so students can learn based on what they already know from their culture. Educators who ignore students' cultural needs cause students to view the course as irrelevant and subsequently lose interest because students learn in a sociocultural context (Shawer, 2006).

Summary

Charter schools mainly acquire their student populations from neighboring traditional public schools when their families do not feel they are being properly served by the traditional public school. As outlined in Chapters 1 and 2, because charter schools are most often located in lower income urban areas, their student population mainly consists of an overwhelmingly majority of Black and Hispanic students. Research into the role of charter school leadership also outlines the importance of school leadership in maintaining the academic and operational functions of the school and creating a positive and inclusive school culture (Ayman, 1993; Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). The literature suggests culturally responsive leadership must consist of modeling and providing effective teaching and learning that engages all students actively in the educational process, supporting and building the capacity of teachers who are willing to confront academic barriers through continuous professional development and by providing them with adequate resources. Lastly, school leadership must create and maintain a connection with the students' homes and families (Andrews, 2007; Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Irvine, et al., 2001; Banks, Cookson, Gay, Hawley, Jordan, et al., 2001; Barton & Coley, 2009; Saifer & Barton, 2007; Murrel, 2002; Touchton & Acker-Hocevar, 2001). The need for culturally

responsive leadership is critical. Culturally responsive leaders understand the unique needs of

their student population (Andrews, 2007).

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

This chapter includes a discussion on the qualitative research design, its characteristics, and why this approach was the most appropriate for the current study. Additionally, this chapter includes the researcher's role, a discussion on strategy of inquiry, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness and transferability.

Rationale for Qualitative Research

The nature of this research study called for a social constructivist worldview approach. Constructivism or social constructivism is a perspective in qualitative research. Social constructivists believe individuals seek an understanding of the world in which they live and work and these meanings are subjective of their experiences, varied and multiple, and are often formed through interactions with others (Creswell, 2013).

This research fills a knowledge gap by exploring stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school. There has been an increase in the number of racial/ethnic students within the public education system. Research has revealed culturally responsive practices help these students be successful and has positive effects on the school culture (Bartolome, 1994; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Novick, 1996).

Creswell (2013, p. 4) stated that qualitative research is an inquiry approach in which the inquirer: (a) explores a central phenomenon, in this case culturally responsive leadership; (b) asks participants broad, general questions starting with how or what; (c) collects detailed views of participants in the form of words or images; (d) analyzes and codes the data for description

and themes; (e) interprets the meaning of the information by drawing on personal reflections; and (f) writes the final study report that includes person biases and a flexible structure.

The researcher who undertakes qualitative research is "an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyzes them inductively, focuses on the meaning of the participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language" (Creswell, 2013, p. 197). A qualitative methodology was used to answer the following central research question and guiding questions derived from culturally responsive leadership approaches (Bazron et al., 2005).

Central Research Question: How do the stakeholders perceive culturally responsive leadership in the context of K-12 charter schools?

1. How does the school leadership team perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

2. How do the teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

3. How do parents perceive a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

Case Study Approach

The approach to this study was a single instrumental case study (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) defined a case study as an investigation of a bounded system through "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (p. xi). This case study was bounded in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina. The case study approach brings context to the findings. According to Stake, "Case studies are

investigated because: (a) one is interested in them [case studies] for both their uniqueness and commonality and (b) one would like to hear their stories" (p. 1).

Role of Researcher

According to Glesne (1999), a researcher's role is situationally determined and depends of the context of the study and the researcher's own personality and values. The purpose of a case study is to provide a full and thick rich description of the reality, or realities, experienced by the participants. To do so as objectively as possible, the researcher used standpoint epistemology and identified and reconciled personal biases that had the potential to color observations and later analysis (Collins, 1992, 1998; Naples, 2007; Weeks, 2005). A credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon under study and become aware of his or her own prejudices, biases, viewpoints, and assumptions so as not to influence the research process (Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2003).

My experience as an educator working with a diverse student and staff population has provided me familiarity with cultural responsiveness. Within education, I have worked in several capacities that have dictated the need for cultural responsiveness; I worked as a high school history teacher for 9 years and served as a building-level teacher leader, beginning teacher support coordinator, drop out prevention director, study skills coordinator, master teacher, and curriculum writer. I realize my experiences led me to choose this particular study and that with these experiences I brought certain biases to the study.

Qualitative methods reflect on a researcher's role in the inquiry and allow the researcher to be sensitive to how his or her personal experiences shape the study. Creswell (2013) stated the researcher must recognize this introspection and acknowledge biases, values, and interests because the personal-self is closely related to the researcher-self. There are multiple truths to a

story. My role as the researcher was to simply tell the truth as I saw it and narrate my perception of the data through my voice while being as authentic as possible in the roles of a participant observer, interviewer, story teller, and advocate.

Research Site

The study site was a K-12 charter school located in the Triad area of North Carolina that was selected based upon specific criteria. Because this study involved examining stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a charter school, a willing participant pool of charter school stakeholders was needed. Therefore, the first criterion was a charter school. The next criterion was the school needed to have a stakeholder pool that was actively interested in addressing cultural responsiveness for the purposes of evaluating their progress toward the goal of increasing the achievement of all students.

The name of the school was altered to give anonymity to the school, leadership staff, students, parents, and the larger school community and as a condition of mutual agreement with the school. For the purposes of this study, the school name was changed to the Culturally Responsive Charter School (CRC). The school has an approximate student population of 500 racially and ethnically diverse students in grades K-12. The student population is 49% African American, 49% Hispanic, and 1% bi or multiracial. Over 90% of the student population receives free and reduced-priced lunch.

The school has a multiracial and credentialed staff. Twenty-nine percent of the teaching staff have 0 to 3 years of teaching experience, 48% of the teaching staff have 10 or more years of teaching experience, and 23% of the teaching staff have 4 to 9 years of teaching experience. Over 50% of the teaching staff have or were working toward a master's degree and less than 1% were working toward a doctorate.

Participants

The participants in this study included three members of the school leadership team, three teachers, and three parents at a K-12 charter school in North Carolina. Participants were nominated by the charter school's executive director and then selected from that participant pool based on purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2013; Tongco, 2007). Purposeful sampling involves selecting research participants according to the needs of the study (Creswell, 2013; Tongco, 2007). Participants were chosen who could give a richness of information that is suitable for detailed research (Patton, 2003). The nomination criteria for participants were school leaders who had been employed with the charter school for 5 or more years, teachers who had been employed with the charter school for 5 or more years, and parents whose children had attended the charter school for more than 5 years and could articulate their perceptions related to the phenomena being studied. Every attempt was made to interview and include the narratives of parents from a range of racial/ethnic, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds and the final parent selection made every attempt to include participants with children in a range of grades from K-12. Participants at the Culturally Responsive Charter School were required to sign a consent form (See Appendix A, B, and C) prior to their participation in the study.

Data Collection Procedures

A series of focus group interviews with leaders, teachers, and parents were the primary data source (See Appendix D, E, and F). The interview guide was a previously used research instrument, so prior to its use permission had to be obtained from Dr. Lewis Madhlangobe (See Appendix G). Lofland and Lofland (1995) stated focus group interviews provide "the advantage of allowing people more time to reflect and to recall experiences; also, something that one stakeholder mentions can spur the memories of and opinions in others" (p. 21). Along with the

opportunity to obtain a number of responses on a particular topic, focus groups interviews allowed participants not to talk for a specific period of time. This encouraged reconsideration of previously mentioned points (Lofland & Lofland, 1995). Such reflective space encouraged "amplification, qualification, amendment, or contradiction" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 21) and led to rich interactive discussions addressing differing viewpoints. Patton (2003) claimed the "interview guide approach" allows for the "interviews to remain fairly conversational and situational" (p. 349), while allowing the researcher to explore, probe, and ask questions that illuminate the topic at-hand.

Mishna (2004) noted a study using interviews and document analysis requires qualitative methodology to capture the context, personal interpretations, and experiences of the participants (p. 235). Patton (2003) asserted that qualitative designs are naturalistic to the extent that the research takes place in real world settings and the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (e.g., group; p. 39).

This study drew upon multiple data sources. The focus group interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions based on relevant literature. This was done in order to focus the interviews around relevant research topics but allow individuals to talk in detail and share their perspectives on topics that related to and impacted the research. The focus group interviews were audio-recorded to allow for complete transcription and coding. During the interviews, notes were taken that assisted in fully understanding the information in later coding. The school leadership team and teachers participated in three in-depth focus group interviews and the parents participated in two in-depth focus group interviews.

These interviews captured the stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in the school. Each focus group interview comprised different questions but addressed similar issues. The focus group guides dealt with questions of the racial/ethnic makeup of the student population, curriculum choices and teaching and learning, professional development opportunities, sensitivity, home-school connections, community partnership, and other similar concerns as brought up by the participants. The discussion was allowed to evolve according to respondents' interests and reactions. The interviews varied in length from 30 to 60 minutes. Focus group interviews were audio-recorded and the transcripts were edited by the researcher. The first two initial interviews with the stakeholder groups provided the researcher an opportunity to gain information that added to the depth of the follow-up focus group interviews so the researcher could probe deeper in order to enhance the data. During the subsequent interviews, questions were developed based on the data obtained from the initial interview and stakeholder suggestions. The interviews were used to describe stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership. The focus group interviews were held at the school site at three different times.

Document Analysis

Merriam (1998) contended that the researcher collects documents that can be analyzed and utilized in the research study. Artifacts and documents can reveal information that cannot be gained from interviews. The school's written documents provided details on the stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership. The analysis of these documents was invaluable in providing insight into the perceptions of culturally responsive leadership and served as one way to improve the quality of the research findings (Fetterman, 1998). Documents and information that spoke to teachers' and parents' satisfaction with the school leadership, teaching

and learning, curriculum, and home-school connection were viewed and analyzed. The researcher incorporated the analysis of documents into the data analysis stage of the research. Information from the documents was analyzed and used to triangulate with other data.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data were analyzed and interpreted for meaning based on the literature review and research questions, coded for description and themes, and the final study report was written to include personal biases and a flexible structure (Creswell, 2013). There is no formula or recipe for the analysis of data (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The initial task in analyzing qualitative data was to find some concepts that helped make sense of what was going on in the case. Text and image data are dense and rich and not all of the data can be used in a qualitative study (Creswell, 2013). The intent of data analysis is to make sense of text and image data; therefore, the data needed to be "winnowed" as a means of focusing in on some of the data and disregarding other parts (Creswell, 2013; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

Creswell (2013) offered a model for data analysis that follows a linear, hierarchical approach to building from the bottom to the top. The model contains six linear, hierarchical "steps" of data analysis:

1. Organize and prepare the data for analysis

2. Read or look at all the data

3. Start coding

4. Use the coding process to generate a description of the setting or people as well as categories or themes for analysis

5. Use a narrative passage/draft to convey the findings of the analysis

6. Interpret the findings or results

Focus group interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audiotapes. Transcripts were coded for themes and edited in order to focus on discussion and statements that directly related to stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership. In order to treat the audio-recording as a document, much of it was indexed and summarized, transcribing only what seemed essential (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 149). Focus group interview tapes were also transcribed in order to allow for the non-verbal aspects of social interaction and situations to be taken into account (Hammersley & Attkinson, 2007, p. 150).

All documents were coded for themes. Coding is the last form of data analysis. According to Schwandt (2001), coding is a process of analyzing the large volume of data generated in the form of transcripts, field notes, photographs, and other documents. Data were broken down into small or manageable pieces and given a name or code representing the concept. Merriam and Associates (2002) similarly described the coding of data for qualitative research as beginning with a particular incident from data collection and comparing it to another incident in the same set, looking for common patterns.

Trustworthiness and Transferability

Creswell and Miller (2000) believed the researcher must check for accuracy from the viewpoint of the researcher, the participants, and other readers of the study. In qualitative research, there are several strategies for addressing trustworthiness that lead to its authenticity (Creswell, 2013, p. 201; Guba, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam & Associates, 2002; Patton, 2003). This study's findings were based on data collected from two different sources: focus group interviews and document analysis. The trustworthiness and authenticity of the current study were enhanced through the application of multiple approaches including: (a) authenticity; (b) triangulation and crystallization; (c) member checking, in which individual

responses were reviewed and checked with each participant; and (d) use of rich, thick description (Creswell, 2013; Gibbs, 2007).

Authenticity is one of the strengths of qualitative research. It is based on determining whether the findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participants, or the reader (Creswell, 2013; O'Leary, 2005). According to Nietzsche (as cited in O'Leary, 2005, p. 60), authenticity means there is more than one version of any event and truth is dependent upon the context. It is concerned with describing the phenomenon in a manner that is "true" to the experience (O'Leary, 2005, p. 58). Qualitative researchers check for the authenticity of the findings by employing certain procedures. Patton (2003) claimed that validity and dependability in qualitative studies rely on the credibility of the instrument, also known as the researcher. The researcher must be skilled, competent, and rigorous (p. 14). "Dependability indicates trustworthiness through methodological protocols that are designed and developed in a manner that is consistent, logical, systematic, well documented, and designed to account for research subjectivities" (O'Leary, 2005, p. 60).

The basic question addressed by the notion of trustworthiness, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is: "How can an inquirer persuade his or her audiences that the research findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to and are the findings applicable to other studies?" (p. 290). Qualitative researchers think in terms of trustworthiness as opposed to the criteria of internal and external validity, reliability, applicability, and objectivity (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Padgett, 1998).

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) stated the term *triangulation* derives from a loose analogy of navigation and surveying. For someone wanting to locate his or her position on a map, a single landmark can only provide the information that the individual is situated

somewhere along a line in a particular direction from that landmark. With two landmarks, however, exact position can be pinpointed by taking bearings on both; one's position is at the point on the map where the two line cross. In social science, if researchers rely on a single piece of data there is the danger that undetected errors in inferences may render the analysis incorrect. If, on the other hand, diverse kinds of data lead to the same conclusion, researchers can be a little more confident in that conclusion (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007, p. 183). Triangulation is the use of different data sources to build and corroborate evidence from different sources to shed light on coherent justifications for themes or perspectives (Creswell, 2013). Focus groups, interviews, and relevant literature were all used to triangulate findings in the current study.

Creswell (2013) stated that member checking is used to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings through taking the final study or specific descriptions or themes back to the participants and determining whether the participants feel they are accurate (p. 201). Member checking occurred when the transcripts, initial findings, descriptors, and themes were shared with the school leadership team, teachers, and parents and then checked for accuracy.

The use of rich, thick narrative occurred by using quotes from the school leadership team, teachers, and parents as related to the various themes that help connect the readers to the phenomenon of culturally responsive leadership. The use of rich, thick description conveyed the findings and the description may transport the readers to the setting and give and element of a shared description and the results become more realistic and richer adding to the trustworthiness of the findings (Creswell, 2013, p. 202; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Transferability deals with whether findings and conclusions from a sample, setting, or group lead to lessons learned that may be germane to a larger population, a different setting, or to another group (O'Leary, 2005, p. 58). Transferability means, in essence, that other researchers

can apply the findings of the study to their own (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Malterud, 2001; Stake, 1978, 1995). Qualitative methods usually have reduced generalizability because of the small sample, but these cases typically provide rich descriptions (Patton, 2003). Transferability suggests researchers have provided highly detailed-rich descriptions of the research context and methods so readers can determine applicability by reading the research account (O'Leary, 2005). Lincoln and Guba (1995) argued that as long as the researcher presents sufficient descriptive data to allow comparison, he or she has addressed the problem of transferability. The researcher made no attempt to generalize the findings to all public or charter schools. Certain strategies were used in the creation of this study and it is possible that readers will be able to apply the results of this study to other similar situations.

CHAPTER 4

Data Analysis

The nation's educational system includes a number of culturally responsive charter schools. Many of these schools enroll a higher percentage of Black and Hispanic students than their traditional public school counterparts. Since the inception of charter schools in North Carolina, a convergence of students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds has shifted the makeup of the school population. This shift has caused school leadership to change their leadership styles and practices in order to meet the needs of their student populations.

Through focus group interviews and document analysis this study involved an exploration of stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy in a K-12 public charter school in North Carolina. This study was guided by four research questions:

Central Research Question: How do stakeholders perceive culturally responsive leadership in the context of K-12 charter schools?

1. How does the school leadership team perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

2. How do the teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

3. How do parents perceive a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

School Profile

The CRC boasts a wall mural that states, "We believe that our future is inextricably tied to our children and that we must prepare our children to be able to handle the challenges of a global world." Through conversations with the school leadership, the researcher found the

leadership team believed the education Black and Hispanic children receive can either help or hinder their ability to meet those challenges. Leader A stated:

>   The school founders believe that the record of the conventional public school system indicates an alarming degree of neglect and hindrance to racially/ethnically diverse children's preparation toward acquiring the skills necessary to become productive, successful and fulfilled individuals. Having access as a charter school to the same funds as the regular public school system affords us the direct opportunity to determine and influence the quality of education our children receive.

The CRC arose from the frustrations of a group of parents who were profoundly concerned about the future academic success of their children. Leader B discussed how the charter school's founder took to heart the African proverb, "It takes a whole village to raise a child," and worked to collaborate on ways to create a new culturally responsive educational model that would honor the unique capabilities of racial/ethnic minority students. The school was founded by parents whose major purpose was to educationally "not do to others what was historically done to them," meaning the CRC would not deny students of different racial/ethnic backgrounds the right to feel included in the school culture and to be taught in an environment that embraced them through teaching and learning. Human compassion has been the cornerstone for creating a learning community across race and culture at the school. Leader A stated:

>   Our teaching and administrative professionals, parents and the community of the Culturally Responsive Charter School collaborate to create an environment where academic achievement is the norm, not the exception. The growth and transformation of our students inspires me to never lose sight of our mission, our obligation and our

responsibility to give our children the tools they need to achieve the desires of their

hearts.

Leaders at the CRC believe students should be treated with dignity and respect with

regard to their racial/ethnic cultures and have the right to learn, grow, and maximize their full

potential without limitations or stereotypes placed on them by the school staff. Marketing

materials for the CRC boast that the school's vision is to see all children achieve academic

success. The school's initial charter states, "their aim is to provide all students, including those

who are perceived to be 'at risk' of academic failure, the vehicle and the opportunity to obtain

success while pursuing educational advancement." It is fully believed this will prepare students

to identify and enhance their skills to live fruitful and fulfilling lives as adults in society. The

parents believe the school offers every child an appropriate education while imparting to every

child a sense of self-worth in a positive, consistent environment. In order to fulfill this mission,

the school implements research-based practices and skills that address the needs of a

racially/ethnically diverse student population. It is important to school leadership that they affirm

diversity as a means of ensuring the growth of all students. The CRC has a philosophy that

children respond to the expectations adults have of them and if adults expect students to achieve

and provide the impetus and freedom for them to do so, they will.

The CRC is governed by a Board of Directors, a voluntary, priority-driven working board

committed to honoring the school's history, mission, and philosophy to provide every student,

without exception, the vehicle and opportunity to achieve success through academic

advancement. The CRC believes in a comprehensive, non-biased, and inclusive culturally

responsive multicultural education approach that promotes the strength and value of cultural

diversity. In creating a culturally responsive school culture, teachers build relationships with the

diverse racial/ethnic student population and their families. Teachers engage students in a multicultural curriculum that goes beyond the celebration of holidays and figures and involves critical conversations surrounding racial and diversity issues. Teachers in the CRC allow students to share their experiences and knowledge from their perspectives. The school leadership team provides and makes teachers aware of professional development opportunities that foster multicultural awareness and model high expectations for student achievement by: (a) using opportunities to allow conscious conversations with students about issues surrounding race and ethnicity; (b) integrating multiculturalism into the school culture so all students feel included; (c) including a range of cultural perspectives that address racial, ethnic, gender, religious, ability, and socioeconomic differences; (d) portraying racial/ethnic groups realistically in the curriculum; (e) increasing cultural and linguistic awareness; and (f) including multicultural texts (not only in language, but in content) that provide examples of all cultures.

Educational strategy. Parent C boasted that the school employs administrators and staff who are dedicated, tireless, and fearless, and who use their skills to create a culturally responsive learning environment. Parent C loved that the CRC provides a nurturing, loving, and student/parent friendly learning environment. The CRC's educational strategy is to do only that which works for the good of the students so they will have a successful, far-reaching experience as a result of attending this school. The CRC believes all children are due only the very best of what the stakeholders can offer them, and with that, requires the teachers to conduct themselves in a manner that is aligned with the school's mission, vision, and philosophy.

The CRC believes teachers have the responsibility to teach and should give students the freedom to learn, and the guarantee of equal opportunity for all is essential to the achievement of these principles. The CRC educators acknowledge the worth and dignity of every person and

demonstrate the pursuit of truth and devotion to excellence, acquire knowledge, and nurture democratic citizenship. Through conversations during the focus group interviews, the researcher found the stakeholders believed the school exemplifies a commitment to the teaching and learning processes with accountability to the students, maintains professional growth, exercises professional judgment, and personifies integrity. The educators strive to maintain the respect and confidence of colleagues, students, parents and legal guardians, and the community, and to serve as appropriate role models especially due to the racial and ethnic makeup of the school population.

The school has a multiethnic staff, consisting of African American, Indian, Jamaican, Columbian, Mexican, and African American teachers. Twenty-nine percent of the teaching staff have 0 to 3 years of teaching experience, 48% of the teaching staff have 10 or more years of teaching experience, and 23% of the teaching staff have 4 to 9 years of teaching experience.

Community served by school. The K-12 public charter school is located in North Carolina. The current school population is approximately 450 students in grades K-12. The student population is 49% African American, 49% Hispanic, and 1% multiracial. Based on the historical data for the CRC, over the past 17 years the population has undergone numerous changes. The school has had an increase in Hispanic students. The faces of the CRC have changed in the student body. The school has also seen a change in the socioeconomic representation over this 17-year period with a steady increase in free and reduced lunch students to the point where CRC is now approximately 99% free and reduced lunch.

Participant Profiles

Participant profiles were developed based on information gathered from the focus group interviews. These narratives highlight the participants' individual demographics; impression of

the school, teaching, and learning; and view of the school leadership. For confidentiality

purposes, participants were assigned first-name pseudonyms that are used as appropriate when

referring to each participant.

ESOL director. Leader A is Damián. Damián has been an educator for 17 years,

beginning his career in his native country of Venezuela. After obtaining his undergraduate

degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) at the Universidad Pedagogica

Experimental Libertador, Damián worked for 7 years in K-16 as an English as a Foreign

Language Teacher and for 3 years as a school administrator (K-12 English department

coordinator). After moving to the United States in 2003, he began teaching English to Speakers

of Other Languages (ESOL) and completed his coursework to earn a master's degree in TESOL;

he also completed an add-on licensure program in school administration and is a licensed school

principal. At the CRC, Damián has served in the capacity of ESOL department director, LEP

coordinator, and LEA test coordinator.

As the director of services provided to ESOL/ELL/LEP students, Damián is very

concerned about parent-teacher involvement at the CRC. He feels parents are only contacted

when misbehavior occurs and notes many of the Hispanic parents feel they are not involved with

their children's education to the extent that they desire. Language prevents them from setting up

conferences with teachers although they are aware that translation services are available if

needed. In the last couple of years, there has been major growth in the Hispanic student

population, almost doubling. Several educators feel they are not able to properly reach these

students and rely on student peers to assist them. Along with the growth of the Hispanic

population came an increase in the number of special education referrals for speech. While

Damián admits some of these referrals may prove justifiable, others are a matter of a lack of

understanding about language acquisition by students with limited English proficiency. Many teachers, he has heard, insist children speak only English in the classroom and are suspicious when their Spanish-speaking colleagues speak to the children in their native language but do not translate what they have said for the English-speaking teacher.

Overall, Damián feels as though the school has good intentions when it comes to cultural responsiveness. The activities and programs hosted at the school are done so with the intention of bringing the school and community/home together. On the other hand, he does not see a lot of diversity or differentiation in teacher lessons that incorporate elements of culture. Some of the textbooks used in classrooms now include characters or stories about people from other countries but teachers do not go beyond that to explore inclusion, diversity, and acceptance.

Student services director. Leader B is Cheryl. Cheryl is one of the founding members of the school and has served in several roles within the CRC, most recently as the director of student services. She has experienced first-hand the cultural transformations that have occurred over the course of 13 years and feels the school has responded well to the changes by providing the necessary resources to accommodate all learners, though she admits finances have prevented the school from utilizing the more expensive, research-based approaches to learning that public schools are afforded.

In her role in student services, Cheryl has encountered many of the issues that plague children from families at the low end of the economic ladder. She has referred families to agencies for homelessness, poverty, suicide, teen pregnancy, emotional/physical issues, and so forth. While these are issues that can be found in any demographic, they tend to be more prevalent among poor minorities. In an effort to meet the needs of all students, Cheryl keeps a comprehensive list of resources to use from both the county and state. She also works with other

school leaders to address many of the problems that are common within their environment. With the growing Hispanic population, Cheryl has collected a catalogue of agencies across the state that are actively involved in the Hispanic community. In addition, she holds sessions with students and their parents to address more severe or detrimental concerns that may impact academics. For example, in the last year, there has been an increase in the number of pregnancies in the high school population and a stronger emphasis on sex education has been determined necessary. Likewise, an increase in tensions between African American and Hispanic students has caused school leaders to begin drafting a cultural awareness curriculum that they hope to adopt by the next school year that will teach students to be more accepting of differences through explicit instruction and modeling of behavior.

Teacher leader. Leader C is Amla. Amla is a native of South Africa and is currently completing course requirements for her doctoral degree. She spent 12 years in South Africa working with students from low socioeconomic environments and feels she is well equipped to work with the student population at the CRC. However, unlike in her native country, she finds the attitudes of students at the school to be less appreciative of their education and less respectful of their teachers. School leaders simply conclude that Amla is not familiar with the types of students at the school and are not too concerned about her ability to do her job. This is Amla's seventh year working as a high school English teacher at the school and her fifth year serving as the lead teacher and teacher mentor.

Amla has had many discussions about classroom practices with her colleagues and administration. On several occasions she has found herself embarking upon lectures about ethics and responsibility with her students, who seem to not be interested in English literature, as it has no relevance to their lives. She feels that apart from accommodations and modifications, there is

little she can do to diversify Shakespeare or Bronte. Some of Amla's classes have end-of-course exams and she is forced to simply stick with the class curriculum. In some of her classes, Amla has been able to introduce literature from other countries, including her native land, but students are not engaged and complain of being bored. On occasions when students are asked to write about aspects of their own culture, they appear highly engaged and motivated to complete the assignment. In her opinion, many of the students are experiencing negative or stressful situations outside of school that impact their ability to stay motivated in the classroom. There have been times that administration has gone to students' homes to meet with their families and discuss some of the issues they are having in school. Parents report feeling helpless when it comes to their own children and have no idea where to begin. There is a large amount of stress associated with adapting to life in a new country because they do not speak the language and are oftentimes treated as outcasts. Amla is sympathetic but she is exasperated with the knowledge that things will likely remain the same in her classes, as she feels that her teaching style is not culturally sensitive for either the Hispanic or the African American students she encounters.

Teacher A. Teacher A is Terrance. Terrance is an Exceptional Children teacher who provides inclusion services to the students at the CRC. He is one of three individuals who work with this population of students. Prior to this position, Terrance worked as a teacher in the local public school system where he also completed his student teaching assignment. Terrance is a fifth year teacher at the CRC. His previous experiences have allowed him to assimilate into the CRC and interact with parents, teachers, and students in a manner that is both professional and inviting. Having grown up in New Jersey, he feels as though his diverse experiences have enabled him to communicate on an individual basis and effectively reach out to people from other backgrounds.

Terrance is an African American male in his late 30s. He feels he is able to identify with a lot of the young men in the school and they look to him as a mentor. On occasion, he is called to mediate disruptions that many occur with the male students and he does so without the use of restraints or any physical involvement. He has established rapport with both the African American and Hispanic males by teaching them basic skills like tying a tie or more profound skills like filling out college applications. In addition to teaching, Terrance serves a track coach, which allows him further interaction with many of the students at the school. He feels one of his greatest strengths is his ability to create a community of learning that permits students to be exposed to as much authentic interaction as feasible. His goal is for students to feel autonomous in the classroom and responsible for their own learning.

Terrance finds some of his colleagues may have a difficult task when it comes to working with students, especially African American males and Hispanic children, although all of his colleagues are racial/ethnic minorities. He feels African American males are seen as behavioral problems a lot of the times and are not taken seriously. Hispanic students, especially those still struggling with language, may seem hard to reach because of the language barrier. Although ESOL services are provided, the population of Hispanic children is so large that these services may not be adequate. When he works with classroom teachers he prefers to divide classroom responsibilities equally so students see them sharing classroom authority. He admits that while he engages well with the teachers and students, he has not made any parent contacts so far this year. However, it is his opinion that the school has an open-door policy and parents who have concerns are generally heard. Parents who need interpreting services are provided with them. When the school hosts various functions, the community is invited to attend. This is a way to involve all stakeholders. Terrance is quick to point out that the school establishes a better bridge

between school and home than anything he has ever seen before. He credits school leadership with creating events and activities that allow parents and members of the community to support student education.

Teacher B. Teacher B is Lomond. Lomond is in his sixth year of teaching and is serving as a middle school English teacher at the CRC. He had no teaching experience prior to coming to the school. He started at the middle school level teaching sixth and seventh grade language arts and is now also teaching social studies. Lomond admits that when he began his professional career he was very excited about teaching in this school. However, after 6 years, he feels he is not reaching many of his students who are, for the most part, academically low achieving. He also knows many of the Hispanic students only speak Spanish at home and he is hesitant to reach out the parents as a result.

Lomond does not feel he has the adequate resources to teach to the diverse group of students in his classroom and notes school funds are not adequate enough to allow him to implement the kinds of lessons that will reach all of his students. Lomond finds administration to be sympathetic to his concerns, but he senses things have remained relatively the same since he began teaching at the school. While the school has been dedicated to bringing in parents and members of the community, the needs of the children are of great trepidation. With 100% of the students being minorities, he realizes resources and suggestions are scarce. He has tried executing teaching techniques recommended for ESOL/ELL/LEP students that he found on the Internet, as in some classes these students outnumber English-speaking students. He has used visuals, technology, and manipulatives as part of his lesson plans as a means of enriching the learning opportunities for all of his students. Lomond is quite certain his teaching strategies are successful in closing the language gaps and allowing students to make gains academically, but

feels the students lack motivation to learn. He also worries about how well his strategies are preparing students to meet expectations on the end-of-year standardized assessments. While he strongly embraces cultural responsiveness in the classroom, he is well aware that that end-of-year assessment scores will reflect his teaching ability as well as impact the school's overall assessment results.

      Teacher C. Teacher C is Karyn. Karyn felt well prepared for her culturally diverse high school students this school year. She had spent the summer attending workshops on developing teaching strategies for ESOL students and was looking forward to integrating what she had learned into her classroom lessons. She has completed all of the requirements to add ESOL certification to her teaching license. It was Karyn's decision to expand her knowledge so she would have the skills necessary to enhance her lessons to accommodate second language learners as well as the other diverse students she encountered every day. It is her belief that her colleagues would benefit greatly from ESOL training due to the rapid increase in Spanish-speaking children enrolling in the school every year.

      For the past few years, the administrators and the teaching staff at the CRC have seen declining results in their end-of-year scores. Karyn attributes this to a misalignment between the student population and culturally responsive instruction. The school district does not offer extensive professional development workshops for teachers and relies on in-house employees to conduct any necessary trainings and development. Karyn reports that she financed the courses she took and she will now procure the advantages of her hard work and efforts. Her students' scores on the end-of-course test in English for the past 2 years have exceeded her expectations and those of the other teachers at the school. School administrators have been delighted with the level of progress her students have made on their exams and have asked Karyn to conduct a

teaching strategy workshop for her colleagues that showcases the culturally responsive practices she utilizes so effectively in her classroom.

Parent A. Elisa is the mother of a sixth grade student named Frank who attends the CRC. She did not complete high school but did earn her GED. Elisa works long hours as a nurse's assistant in a nursing home in the community to support Frank and his other two siblings, both of whom attend the school. Prior to attending this school Elisa's children were enrolled in the local school system. Elisa felt her children were not receiving adequate instruction in the local public school system because the teachers were not really teaching basic skills. Children who could not keep up were at risk of being referred for special education and, in her opinion, teachers were not giving students the extra help they needed. Frank, like his siblings, is classified as LEP and receives language services under the ESOL/ELL/LEP program. During the interview, translation services were provided because Elisa does not speak English fluently. She believes in the past her language was a barrier to her children's success in school. Teachers seemed impatient with her when she asked questions and when translation services were needed to help her communicate. She had to rely on her children to pass information along on some occasions and, at one point, stopped involving herself altogether because it was too difficult. Once she felt disconnected from her children's education, she felt depressed for a period of time.

Elisa works the third shift so she is usually not awake when her children get home from school. She admits her children may not get the extra help they need in completing homework because they spend a great deal of time with a relative who provides child care so Elisa can work to support her family. Elisa chose to enroll her children at the CRC because she had heard from other parents that the school was very open to the Hispanic community and the parents were generally pleased with the progress their children were making. Because of her work schedule,

Elisa is not able to physically go to the school to talk with her children's teachers but she does receive correspondence on a regular basis in her native language. She would like to be more connected to the school in terms of volunteering or attending parent-teacher conferences, but she is not able to sacrifice the time from work because hers is the only income the family has at this time; she always worries about finances. She also reports her car is unreliable and there is no bus line that serves her area.

Elisa feels Frank is somewhat behind other 12-year-olds in language skills and the school has been working hard to provide LEP services as well as interventions. She has spoken on the phone twice this year with the ESOL director, who always talks to her in Spanish and tells Elisa to call if she has any concerns. She has been invited to several events at the school this year but has been unable to attend. At the Open House, there was a Spanish interpreter available to assist parents as needed, something Elisa said she had not expected. Her experiences with the public school system were less than pleasant and she often felt like an outsider because she spoke very little English. She feels the CRC has not only allowed her children to flourish as students, it has embraced her culture and allowed her to be a part of the learning process, even if she is not able to do so on a regular basis.

Parent B. Ana has a son in middle school and a daughter in elementary school. She is the head of the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and volunteers at least once a week at the school. Ana enrolled her children in the CRC because she had read articles that suggested charter schools involve more parents. She had read the parents who choose to enroll their children in charter school are more involved than parents whose children are automatically assigned to a local public school. Ana felt her children were being neglected in the public school system, particularly her son who has a learning disability and reported behavioral problems. The

Caucasian teachers were not interested in meeting with her to create a success plan for her son and the racial/ethnic minority teachers were too afraid to go against the grain. Administrators in the public school tended to side with the teacher at all times and saw her son's behavior as a symptom of his home life rather than his disability.

Ana has had mixed success in trying to get other parents to join the PTA or volunteer at the school. She has found many families are made up of single parents who work consistently long hours and depend on the income generated from their jobs to take care of all the family's needs. The idea of missing any time at work creates apprehension, although parents generally report they want to be more involved at school. On the other hand, Ana was not able to appropriately communicate with the Hispanic parents and urged school administrators to hire a Spanish-speaking person part-time to address the need for more collaboration between school and home. As funding dwindled, the Spanish interpreter's role decreased as well.

Because she understands the need of the communities from which most of the students at the CRC come, Ana has pushed for the adoption of more robust and more specific parent involvement activities. At the beginning of the school year, as many parents as possible are sat down and thoroughly educated about the family partnership plan and the importance of remaining involved with the school (supervising events or volunteering as needed). School administration suggested using incentives to get parents involved. For example "free dress" passes were offered to students whose parents completed volunteer hours.

Ana reports that while African American parents are more involved, the Hispanic families are not. She attributes this to a feeling of fear and apprehension that may be associated with parents' legal status although parents are assured they are not at risk of any negative consequences should they decide to volunteer. However, the school does require a criminal

background check for anyone who wishes to volunteer at the school, as required by law. This prevents some families (both African American and Hispanic) from becoming involved. Yet, to their credit, families usually attend events hosted by the school in record numbers to show support for their children. As an added effort, the school sends out informational brochures about how to get involved and hosts monthly workshops for parents who are interested in getting involved.

Parent C. Marcy acknowledges she has several ongoing challenges that keep her from being more involved at the school, specifically her immigration status and her inability to speak English fluently. She senses that her children are suffering academically because she does not always know what is going on and she is hesitant to contact the ESOL director at the school because she is not sure what to say. The CRC is known for its acceptance of Hispanic children and, after several years in public school, she decided to enroll her children. Many of the parents in the community praised the school for reaching out to parents in order to draw them closer to the school. Academically, other parents report their children are flourishing in ways they never had before and are teaching their parents some of the things they are learning at school. Marcy, however, is disheartened because while her children are doing well, two of her children have been referred for speech language services. Because she has limited English acquisition she feels helpless as to what to do for them. Speech had never been an issue for her children before and all of her children speak fluent Spanish.

Table 1 illustrates the demographics of the school leadership participants, Table 2 illustrates the demographics of teacher participants, and Table 3 illustrates the demographics of the parent participants in the study.

Table 1

School Leadership Participants

ID#	Racial/Ethnic Identity & Gender	Education	Position at CRC	School Experience	Years involved with CRC
A	M Venezuelan	Master's School Administrator License	ESOL Director	K-16; 17 years	6
B	F Black	Master's in Counseling	Founding Member Student Services Director	K-12; 17 years Student Services Graduation Coach	17
C	F South African	Master's in Education	Teacher leader English Teacher grades 9-12	12 years traditional public school teacher	5

Table 2

Teacher Participants

ID#	Racial/Ethnic Identity & Gender	Education	Position at CRC	School Experience	Years involved with CRC
A	M Black	Master's in Education	Exceptional Children's Teacher (K-12)	K-12; 5 years	5
B	M Black	Master's in Education	English Teacher High School, Grades 9-12	6 years charter school teacher	6
C	F Columbian	Master's in Education	Teacher, Middle School, Grades 6-8	14 years traditional public school teacher	5

Table 3

Parent Participants

ID#	Gender	Education	Active Volunteer at CRC	Number of Children Attending	Years involved with CRC
A	F Mexican	GED Nurse Assistant	No, due to long work hours	1	5
B	F Biracial (Black and White)	Master's in Social Work	Yes	2	6
C	F Mexican	Did not complete high school or earn GED	No, due to language barrier	4	5

Emerging Themes

Prior to this research study, leaders at the CRC conducted a semester-long, school-wide professional learning community with a focus on re-evaluating its implementation of cultural responsiveness. The school staff began this process by reading various authors who researched cultural responsiveness in order to understand how to successfully implement cultural responsiveness with the growing Hispanic student population at the charter school. Stakeholder groups met as a whole school, by grade level, and with members of the PTA. Stakeholders' responses to focus group interview questions generated themes based on the literature review in Chapter 2.

Theme one: Modeling cultural responsiveness. There has been scant research into the methods culturally competent leaders could use to help teachers improve teaching and learning. Modeling of practices that facilitate both teacher and student development is important to overall school improvement.

The first research question focused on the perspective of school leaders. The question was: How does the school leadership team perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina? In considering this question, the theme of modeling cultural responsiveness emerged and was examined in relation to the school. To answer this research question, three leaders at the CRC were interviewed in a focus group. Each leader was expected to bring his or her thoughts about this issue with complete candor in the hopes of gaining much-needed insight into the impact of culturally responsive pedagogy.

Subtheme: Modeling cultural responsiveness through professional development. Ladson-Billings (1995) believed teachers should acquire the skills needed to work with diverse students. Each year school leadership hosts a faculty and staff retreat designed to acclimate new and returning teachers to the school's culture. Workshop topics over the years have covered everything from immigration status to engaging parents and the community in the academic progress of the students. The school leadership realized teaching diverse students, particularly those who live in low socioeconomic environments, could be stressful for educators. The workshops were intended to give employees the resources they need to be successful which will, in turn, lead to the success of the students. With respect to these workshops, Leader B stated:

> We attend the workshops along with the staff because it is important for us to hear the dialogue and see things from the perspective of those who are in the classroom. We can get a good sense of who will be proficient teachers and who may need some extra mentoring or support.

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that teacher education programs fail to prepare prospective teachers to work with minority students, promoting packaged multicultural curriculum programs. Leader A acknowledged many of the teachers at the school were new to

teaching or did not go through traditional teacher education programs. This made it even more of a challenge when preparing them to assume a central role in a diverse classroom. The curriculum coordinator and others in leadership roles designed a new beginning teacher program that would make the transition into teaching at the school more seamless. The school leadership team was assigned two to three teachers to mentor, meeting with them individually and in groups. Meetings can center on case studies, discussions, or reading and almost always focus on cultural competence and responsiveness.

> Right now we are reading *Dreamkeepers* by Ladson-Billings. We read chapters together or bring questions and comments to our meetings so that we can engage in meaningful conversations. We talk about what it means to teach children of color—who may not be the best readers or the best math problem solvers—but who look to us to reach them by any means necessary. (Leader B)

> ***Subtheme: Fostering cultural responsiveness among others***. Despite the rapid increase in the ethnic makeup of the United States, the curriculum remains centered on concepts, events, and paradigms that reflect the experiences of White culture (Banks, 2010). Limited funding has been an issue that prevented the school from acquiring textbooks in the past. Leader A stated:

> This may be a blessing in disguise because most of the textbooks used are not reflective of Black and Brown cultures. Students are limited to the usual figures in history: Martin Luther King, Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and maybe Frederick Douglas. They are not privileged to know Benjamin Banneker, Isabel Allende, Cesar Chavez, Carter G. Woodson, Ben Carson or the likes. Traditional schools will never give a full rendition of Spanish or African history that is also vital components of American society.

The school leadership team designed the curriculum at the CRC around four principles using ideas from Gorski (2009) and Ladson-Billings (1995) as a foundation: delivery, content, resources, and assessment.

With regard to delivery, instruction must be delivered in a manner that acknowledges diverse learning styles exist and addresses the presence of these learning styles through differentiated instruction. This method of instruction includes, but is not limited to, peer-based activities, group or cooperative learning, reciprocal teaching, and whole group discussions. Students must be challenged to learn and expected to learn. Activating background knowledge and interest is very important.

When it comes to content, what students learn must be accurate. If history is to be reported it must be reported without half-truths and urban myths. For example, because Native Americans already inhabited the Americas, it is hard to support the old theory that America was "discovered" by Europeans. Cultures are fairly represented throughout the curriculum as part of the whole, not some incidental occurrence.

With respect to resources, classroom materials should represent diversity and should be free from biases. Teachers should preview materials to ensure they do not include inaccurate depictions of minorities or cultures. Visuals should be prominent in the classroom that represent the student population. Images of minorities (including women) should be prominently displayed and referenced during "teachable moments." Students should be given the opportunity to learn from each other and feel free to discuss their own backgrounds and experiences. School leaders are responsible for conducting formal and informal observations to ensure resources are being used often and effectively.

When it comes to assessment, school leadership examines the curriculum quarterly to ensure it is relevant, accurate, and free from biases. Mid-year, several teachers are identified to work with the school leadership team on the curriculum development team. Teachers are also encouraged to observe their colleagues in order to provide feedback about lessons or instructional practices that may be exemplary or that may be lacking and need to be revised.

Theme two: Teaching and learning. The second research question was designed to explore how teachers work to cultivate the learning environment for culturally diverse students. The question was: How do the teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

One teacher from each level of the school (i.e., elementary, middle, high) was interviewed regarding this question in an attempt to gain varying perspectives on culturally responsive teaching and learning.

To examine the theme of teaching and learning, this study subscribed to those ideas most notably articulated by Ladson-Billings (2009): academic success, cultural competence, and critical consciousness. In other words, children should learn what is most significant to them in the framework of their respective cultures.

Subtheme: Equity pedagogy. Equity pedagogy exists when teachers use techniques and methods that facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups (Banks, 1998). The teacher participants felt the school leadership was on target with holding them accountable for the use of techniques and methods in their classrooms that would lead to student success regardless of their racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Technology was identified as a source of information or a resource most commonly used for classroom instruction. Teacher A, who felt he was very much in tune with

the cultural climate of the school, recounted a trip a group of students from the school took with several staff members and chaperones to Africa for 3 weeks. Although Teacher A did not participate in the trip, he used the experience as a tie-in to classroom lessons, not only to prepare the participating students for what to expect in a foreign country but also to engage those students who would not have the opportunity to go. As stated by Banks (2013), multicultural education allows misconceptions about cultural differences to be corrected while bringing greater unity among students to prepare them to work together in a diverse society.

Teacher A directed the students to gather information on the various cultures of the continent of Africa. Using this information, students were asked to complete a Venn diagram that represented similarities and differences between their respective cultures and at least one culture from Africa. Most importantly, Teacher A wanted students to focus on the characteristics and behaviors that were common to their own family units rather than their culture as a whole. Teacher A stated:

> Surprisingly, the students were highly engaged in the assignment and exhibited great enthusiasm for the lesson. Students initially thought that they would have far more differences to list than similarities and were surprised to find out that there were major similarities that they never considered.

Because the students were so motivated to complete the assignment, Teacher A decided it would be a good idea to allow students to present their findings to their classmates. He felt it would give them exposure to African culture and to the cultures of their peers. Prior to the presentations, Teacher A established rules that required students to be sensitive to others as each classmate presented his or her findings. Students were asked to write any questions or comments on a sticky note and place it on the "parking lot" in the rear of the class. The parking lot was a

piece of chart paper taped to the wall for comments and questions. Teacher A was able to read each sticky note beforehand to make sure the content was appropriate. For him, the assignment gave him the opportunity to teach cultural awareness and allow students to understand principles of diversity and cultural sensitivity.

Subtheme: Content integration. Content integration refers to the way in which multicultural content is integrated into the school curriculum (Banks, 2010). Teachers A and B stated "teaching and learning are placed within this context so that it supports success for all their students. This requires the use of familiar and meaningful experiences drawn from the lives of the students and their cultural backgrounds."

The primary goal of models like multicultural education has been to refine the traditional concept of education so it becomes more relevant to all those who are part of the U.S. population (Jay, 2003). For the past decade, the CRC has included an Intergenerational Day (ID) that allows students and staff to invite people from their community and family to the classroom to read and share stories. Family and community members are asked to engage in activities that will bring new insight to students about the world around them. The teachers and leaders who participated in this study agreed that ID was beneficial in bringing home and school together; however, participants also agreed improvements were needed.

Teacher A pointed out the school did not require a lead-in lesson that would give students a foundation for the occasion. He understood the purpose for ID but failed to see how cultural aspects were to be tied into the classroom. In speaking to colleagues, there was at least a consensus that the true meaning of the event was lost completely. Even after the event was over, there was no follow-up activity that would allow students to use what they learned in their academics.

Teacher B wanted to see a more active pursuit of information and resources from teachers in order to make the most out of the events scheduled by the school for the purpose of bringing families and members of the community to the school to support the children. In the past, teachers have had their students design invitations to send home to ask people to attend events. Teacher B pointed out that while the Hispanic/Latino community does support their children, their involvement is limited to "showing up" because of the language barriers. Even activities centered on Cinco de Mayo are largely orchestrated by non-Hispanic/Latino adults. Teacher B has begun constructing an action plan that is geared toward multiculturalism and tapping into cultural resources in the community.

   Subtheme: Knowledge construction. Multicultural education is largely focused on curriculum reform (Garcia,2000) based on bringing different histories, events, and perspectives into the classroom (Banks, 2013; Banks & Banks, 2013). Teacher C stated:

   Although I grew up in Africa, I don't pretend to know what it's like to be Black in the

   United States, but I can share from my African perspective what it's like and explain the

   world from that view. I think this puts me in the ideal position to discuss views from

   another perspective that influence how knowledge is constructed based on different

   beliefs and opinions to my students, and I do.

As a practice, Teacher C integrated various cultural perspectives when teaching literature in her high school classes. She especially liked to bring in works that related to her own country in an effort to not only expose students to what life was like for her but to also demonstrate that her way of life was not extremely different from their own. Racism, she has taught, is present regardless of where an individual was born. Cultural diversity is a struggle that people face all over the world. Teacher C found her students often lacked the maturity to fully read or view

literary pieces with difficult themes such as prejudice, rejection, and socioeconomic hardship based on skin color. Although her students were all minorities, they seemed to be oblivious to the environment and the world in which they live.

Teacher A recalled one lesson based on the movie "Skin." Set in South Africa during apartheid, the main character, Sandra Laing, is a Black child born to White Afrikaners during the 1950s. Sandra's complexion is the result of Black ancestry of which neither parent had knowledge. While Teacher A felt the content of the movie tied in well with their theme of racism and other "isms" that oppress, one student took issue and blatantly asked, "Why do we have to watch this? What does this have to do with English class?" When Teacher A reminded the student of the lesson objectives, the student replied, "Well, we're tired of hearing about your life. That has nothing to do with us."

Subtheme: Reducing prejudice in the classroom. In the interest of anti-racist education, awareness must be raised concerning the fact that the current educational system does not meet the "best interest of racially dominated groups" (Ng, Staten, & Scane, 1995, p. 6). From working in a school that educates two distinctly minority groups, Teacher B learned from experience that many misconceptions existed between the Hispanic students and African American students in the high school. In her capacity as the student services director, Teacher B found it necessary to call several meetings between small clusters of Hispanic students and African American students because of name calling, derogatory remarks, and subsequent retaliation. At least one physical altercation occurred and the school director immediately called a high school meeting to address the issue in a whole group environment.

During class discussions, Teacher B discovered the Hispanic girls had resentment toward the African American girls after being told to go back to Mexico, although most of the Hispanic

girls were not Mexican. Whenever the Hispanic girls would make suggestions for high school club activities or classroom projects, Teacher B noted some of the African American girls would reply, "No one wants to do that Mexican stuff" or make remarks about the "dumb idea." The African American girls felt as though the Hispanic girls were trying to "take over" and were suspicious whenever the Hispanic girls spoke in Spanish and snickered among themselves. Teacher B reported on one girl angrily stating, "I know they were talking about us. . . they were looking right at us." On the other hand, the Hispanic girls expressed exasperation at being disrespected. Teacher B reported one girl stated in the discussion, "My parents are from the Dominican Republic . . . we are not even Mexican."

Teacher B came up with a solution. The girls were assigned a project that required them to work in pairs: one Hispanic girl and one African American girl. Each pair chose a service project that was to be completed by the end of the quarter and turned in for a grade. Teacher B resolved any issues in which the paired girls could not reach an agreement. The purpose of the assignment was to give the girls access to one another and learn more about the other. The development of a friendship was not the goal as much as being cooperative learners. "Working together requires people to respect each other's individuality and focus more on those skills each has to get the job done," Teacher B theorized. In addition, she reiterated to the teachers the need to incorporate more multicultural projects into their lessons in order to bridge the gap between groups at the high school level. Interestingly enough, there was less evidence of prejudice and intolerance at the elementary and middle school levels, but it was extremely apparent in the high school.

The school leadership team reinforced their expectations for existing peacefully within the school. Classrooms were to represent the diversity that was the foundation of the school.

Students were to work together outside of cliques, even if the teacher had to force them to do so. Issues involving racial discord would be dealt with immediately.

Theme three: Home-school connection. The third research question explored the role of parents in the school context. More specifically it asked: How do parents perceive a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina? Three parents were interviewed for this study. Each parent was asked questions pertaining to the cultural climate of the school with emphasis placed on the connection between school and home. The emerging theme from this question centered primarily around the importance of infusing students' home lives, specifically aspects of culture, into the school environment in order to optimize student learning.

Based on the results from a school issued parent satisfaction survey in December of 2013,the CRC has made home-school connection a priority in an effort to share accountability and academic success with families whose children are in attendance. All of the parents in the focus group indicated they were satisfied or extremely satisfied with communication between home and school. The school regularly used some method of communication (e.g., phone tree, letters, conferences) to inform parents and caregivers of important events, issues/concerns, changes being made at the school, and progress/deficiencies in student performance.

Parent A stated she "found the communication between me and teachers to be a big turnaround compared to my experiences with public school." Any time she had questions she contacted the school's translator, who acted as a buffer between Parent A and the teacher. Furthermore, correspondence was sent home in English and Spanish so parents were kept informed.

Parent B felt she had an advantage because of her involvement with the PTA. However, she echoed her earlier sentiment that Hispanic parents seemed to shy away from certain events at the school. "I feel that the school does a great deal to include all parents regardless of their cultural background and I don't know why why there is a communication gap between parents and the school staff." The addition of the Spanish interpreter to the PTA was a wonderful way to draw more parents into the mix. A parent survey was sent to all parents, in English and Spanish, asking for their input about how to increase their participation in the school's PTA. Of the 350 surveys sent by the school, only 120 had been returned. Without meaningful feedback, Parent A stated matter-of-factly, "there is little hope that we will interest more parents to become involved."

Parent C stated, "I am not comfortable speaking to the school staff." Parent C spoke broken English and relied on her children to interpret much of the correspondence sent home from the school. This could be a problem because she felt her children might not always not tell her everything. Besides speaking broken English, she was not fluent in Spanish as she spent little time in school in Mexico because her family was poor. Her husband, however, spoke Spanish fluently but his work schedule kept him too busy to handle other matters. Parent C felt communication between the school and home was good, but her inability to take advantage of it caused her to miss out on a lot of valuable information.

Subtheme: Empowering school culture and climate. Banks (2010) defined an empowering school and social structure as one that creates equal opportunities for all students to experience academic success. It involves an examination of the latent and manifest culture and organization of the school to determine the extent to which it fosters or hinders educational equity.

Parent B stated culture was extremely important. Parent B saw the school leadership and staff incorporating the research read by various authors surrounding cultural responsiveness into their daily practices and believed they were on the right path toward creating an alliance with the Hispanic parents and the non-Hispanic staff. She saw empowerment of school culture through the school's deliberate attempts to engage all families in the education of their children. Activities and events, while in need of some "tweaking," were designed to bring aspects of the students' home lives into their educational environment. More than ever before, students were encouraged to embrace their individuality through written and oral expression and participation. Last year, for the first time, Hispanic students took part in the annual celebration of Dr. Carter G. Woodson's birthday by presenting a dance routine choreographed to Spanish-themed music. It was a far cry from years past when the celebrations were limited to music and choreography specific to the African American community. "The school culture is less segregated than when years past. The CRC community has made great strides in becoming more like a familial community."

Parent A saw the school culture and climate becoming less segregated, as students were seeking out friendships with members of groups unlike their own. African American and Hispanic students in the past would not integrate, preferring to do group work and other academic and social activities with people who shared similarities. Inter-group education refers to the process of bringing students together through desegregation and cooperation within schools (Banks, 2013; Banks & Banks, 2013). However, in recent years, the school leadership has been emphatic about creating more of a diverse group of learners. Teachers have been urged to create groups that are heterogeneous according to gender and ethnicity. As evidence of school culture empowerment, Parent B noted the school's unofficial policy about awarding students for

various accomplishments: "Black and Hispanic children need to be rewarded and feel a sense of accomplishment, pride and dignity within the school walls because we know they do not receive than on the outside." All students were given an award for something during the school-day ceremony, which was open for parents and friends to attend. In instances where a choice had to be narrowed down to two recipients per classroom, teachers were instructed to choose one Hispanic and one African American boy and girl. This practice was seen as an equalizer, recognizing achievement that represents the student population. In facilitating an empowering school and social structure, stakeholders created a school climate that spoke to the expectations for all students' high academic performance and the role of faculty in creating empowering learning environments.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Recommendations

Research on charter school leaders revealed the importance of leadership skills in maintaining the academic and operational functions of the school (Zimmer & Buddin, 2007). School leaders who create a home-school connection and place culture and cultural responsiveness at the forefront of their goals are in the best position to enhance the academic achievement of their students (Van der Westhuizen, Mosoge, Swanepoel, & Coetsee, 2005). With the increasing racial and ethnic diversity in charter schools it is important that the school leadership be culturally responsive and aware of the role culture plays in education. Charter school leaders must be able to model cultural responsiveness for their teaching staff and support cultural responsiveness by creating professional development opportunities that support the desire of the teaching staff to use teaching strategies that support the academic success for all students. The leadership team must offer teachers an avenue to practice what they believe.

This research was conducted in an effort to explore stakeholders' perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina in terms of how the school leadership meets the needs of the racially/ethnically diverse student population, their influence and development on curricula and teaching methods, and finally the relationship between the school leadership team, teachers, and parents. Similar studies should be conducted surrounding the phenomenon of culturally responsive leadership in charter schools but researchers should have no expectation of reaching the exact findings revealed in this study. All stakeholders in public charter schools do not live the same experiences.

The selection of the stakeholders was based on recommendations from the charter school's executive director and then selected from that participant pool based on purposeful

sampling (Creswell, 2013; Tongco, 2007). The final selection of participants was made according to the needs of the study. The three stakeholder groups participated in a range of two to three focus group interviews that contained open-ended questions that provided participants with "the advantage of allowing them more time to reflect and to recall experiences; not to talk for a specific period of time; and encouraged reconsideration of previously mentioned points" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 21). This reflective space encouraged "amplification, qualification, amendment, or contradiction," and led to rich interactive discussions addressing the stakeholders' differing viewpoints of the phenomenon (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p. 21). The interview discussions were allowed to evolve according to participants' interests and reactions.

The central research question in this study was: "How do stakeholders perceive culturally responsive leadership in the context of K-12 charter schools?" This study was further guided by the following sub questions: (a) How does the school leadership team perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina, (b) How do the teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching and learning leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina, and (c) How do parents perceive a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

Data collection and analysis are simultaneous activities (Merriam, 1998, p. 151). The data collection began immediately upon completing each focus group interview. Data analysis relied upon focus groups interviews and document analysis. Triangulation occurred through the analysis of relevant literature, school documents, and participant responses as expressed in the focus group interviews. The data were transcribed and emerging themes were uncovered from the focus group interviews and document analysis. Thick, rich description provided by the participants made it possible for the researcher to have a deeper understanding of their

perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 public charter school. The following sections includes conclusions from the research questions, a summary of findings, final recommendations, implications, and recommendations for future research.

Conclusions from Research Questions

"Culturally responsive leadership practices are those that help to empower diverse groups of parents and make the school curriculum more culturally responsive" (Johnson, 2007, p. 50). Because schools in the United States are largely congruent with middle-class, European values (Boykin, 1994; Nieto & Bode, 2012), the goal of culturally responsive leadership is to devise mechanisms and environments for others to experience the freedom to become their best selves (D. M. Davis, 2002).

> I am concerned that if researchers do not work more to analyze everyday struggles over race, and if we do not struggle more with talking about and analyzing race . . . we ourselves might continue to rush into dangerously familiar, too-easy analyses of race in education. (Pollack, 2004, p. 56)

Cultural responsiveness and social constructivism go beyond the "too-easy analysis of race in education" (Pollack, 2004, p. 56) by probing the points of view of the stakeholders who are in a better position to speak openly and are knowledgeable about the impact of culturally responsive leadership, pedagogy, and practices in the education of racially/ethnically diverse students. Results of this study indicated the CRC was culturally responsive. The staff consisted of mostly Black and Hispanic teachers who had the advantage of being a part of the same culture and community as their students. The following section provides general conclusions using stakeholders' responses for each question posed in this study.

Central research question. How does the school leadership team perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

Responses from the study questions yielded several key findings, all of which point favorably to the present and effectiveness of culturally responsive leadership at the CRC and a culturally competent school.

- School leadership understands the unique needs of the population and designs policies to support them. The diverse racial/ethnic background of the administration enables them to have greater insight into the everyday lives of students.

- Critical dialogues with school staff concerning race are highly proactive and encouraged. These conversations are considered productive in order for teaching staff to be more culturally responsive.

- School staff embraces administrative feedback, classroom observations, and collaborative teaching as a means of strengthening the school culture and student success.

- Collaboration among all school stakeholders is fostered. The school's open-door policy allows stakeholders to have greater accessibility to the school.

- Home to school connections are a high priority; however, students know that a lack of parent involvement is not a barrier to their success. Administrators see home-school communication as a means to increase student achievement.

Research question 1. How does the school leadership perceive culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

The school leadership was unanimous in their belief that a culturally responsive leader establishes a welcoming and supportive school culture through instructional leadership and

creates a sense of belonging for all stakeholders. School leaders must understand the current and historical events happening in the community and the world that may impact the emotional, social, and academic needs of their students (Cooper, 2009; Scribner & Reyes, 1999). The school leadership all felt their actions and implementation of a "no excuses" environment led to increased student achievement and a welcoming environment for all their stakeholders.

Research question 2. How do the teachers perceive culturally responsive teaching and learning in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

Ladson-Billings (1995) asserted that culturally responsive teaching is "just good teaching" and teachers must continuously ask themselves "what does good teaching look like?" Teacher B stated: "Good teaching is when racially/ethnically diverse students actively engage in learning and are successful with it because I've decided to do the morally and ethically correct thing and challenge the 'hidden curriculum' and make learning relevant to them." Teachers become culturally competent when they understand how race, ethnicity, language, socioeconomic status, gender, residential status, and cultural experience influence student behavior, performance, and climate (McKinley, 2010).

Achinstein and Ogawa (2011) stated there are three dimensions of culturally responsive teaching. First, it demonstrates cultural relevance and connects pedagogy and curriculum to students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Banks, 2010; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009, 1995, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1993; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b). Second, it engages communities of learners where students socially construct knowledge in classrooms that embrace all students (A. L. Brown & Campione, 1990; Nieto, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a, 2002b). Third, it reflects a social justice perspective that makes the ''hidden curriculum'' explicit, names instances of inequity, challenges assumptions, and supports students in questioning and

challenging the status quo (Anyon, 1994; Banks, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Nieto, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1993).

Collectively, the teachers at the CRC showed a consciousness about their own cultural perspectives and how through discourse and analysis of their own sociocultural experiences they could incorporate cultural ways of thinking and learning into their classrooms. This was especially evident in the focus group interview responses of Leader C, Amla, when she expressed the importance of understanding her own culture and that of her students: "I am from South Africa and my parents are from India. I am not used to teaching Black and Hispanic students nor seeing the lackadaisical manner in which some of them take education." While transitioning from her native country to the United States she had an admitted difficulty in connecting with American students. Building relationships among students became a priority, but had to be done in a manner that the students would not believe to be superficial. Developing knowledge about the cultures within the classroom was not simply a learning-based activity. It was important to explore their lifestyles, cultural beliefs, what they ate, and their language. Even an activity such as eating lunch together was used as an opportunity to engage students in culturally-based conversations. As a result, many of the misunderstandings among students and teacher disappeared. Leader C stated, "The students bring to school with them the stereotypes and misconceptions that their cultures portray onto each other. We cannot be color blind."

In creating an educational environment for all students, Teacher B discussed the importance of not relying on prior knowledge and experiences with the Black and Hispanic cultures because these experiences were not typically representative and did not necessarily match the lives and experiences of the students. The culturally responsive teacher helps students consider that they can maintain high standards of excellence without compromising their cultural

identity (Ladson-Billings, 2009; Weinstein, Curran, & Tomlinson-Clarke, 2003). Teacher C noted a major value that is shared by the teaching staff is that "in order to meet the educational needs of children, they must first be able to understand the social, cultural and political experiences of the child." Teacher A echoed the sentiments of Teacher C and stated:

> In traditional public schools, parents don't see this type of investment in their racially and ethnically diverse student. They feel that these experiences are absent or ignored. The creation of charter schools gave parents hope that in smaller learning environments, the school leadership and teachers would have the opportunity to really get to know their students by creating a culturally responsive learning environment.

Teachers need to know more about the home lives of the children they teach in order to offer the best opportunities for learning (Murrel, 2002; Nieto, 2001). Cultural responsiveness requires that teachers create a learning environment where all students feel welcomed and supported and are provided with the best opportunities to learn regardless of their racial and ethnic backgrounds (Barnes, 2006). Teacher A reflected on this and said:

> I want my students to be participants in their learning so if that means that I have to put in extra time to find content and materials that are relevant and engaging to my students, then that is what I do. School leadership wants and supports that and has given us all the necessary tools and resources to be able to do so, and we should. It is only right, it is the ethical thing to do. The first question on our lesson plan template is: "Will this lesson meet the expectations of cultural responsiveness?" Am I doing to my students what was done to me? Perpetuating the hidden curriculum and advancing the Eurocentric curriculum? At the end of the day I can say with a clear conscious that I am not! This is what teaching at charter school allows, the ability to just do good teaching!

Ladson-Billings (1995) stated teachers who are culturally responsive use "cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p. 32). They develop learning that is intellectual, social, emotional, and political and use teaching strategies to match the cultural needs of their students in the classroom (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2001). The teachers at the CRC stated they had a desire to be culturally responsive but they also discussed the support they received from the school leadership team:

> If the leadership isn't modeling what it means to be culturally responsive, having critical conversations with us or providing us with workshops and training so that we can understand it and implement it, some of us wouldn't do it. That's why I said earlier that it has to be a desire within you. (Teacher C)

The teachers saw the support of the leadership team as critical to their incorporation of culturally responsive practices. The data analysis showed each of the teacher participants accepted teaching positions at the CRC already having a certain amount of sociocultural consciousness that gave them insight into the ways in which constructions such as race could be used in the educational system. The teacher participants discussed how their own experiences with their own cultures, in terms of race and ethnicity, influenced their desire to practice cultural responsiveness.

Research question 3. How do parents perceive a culturally responsive home-school connection in a K-12 charter school in North Carolina?

> I would describe a culturally responsive home-school connection as one where the school actively engages with parents and supports the parents presence in the school. We all collaborate. I never experienced a home-school connection until I enrolled my students at the Culturally Responsive Charter School. The want us here! They go out of their way to make sure that we are comfortable there. They respect me enough where they don't use

my child to translate for me. They use interpreters and they also send all written and verbal communication in Spanish. They don't mind that I might sometimes bring my younger children with me to meetings. They accommodate me and find a space where my younger children can read or draw while I'm in the meeting. The school makes sure that I am able to assist my child with their work. We are partners. They have parent workshops to assist us with the work that our children are doing at the school so that we can all work together. They understand my situation. (Parent A)

How is the school leadership team creating policies that will bridge the gap between the home and school? This question was on the December 2013 CRC parent satisfaction survey and is an important question to ask because often times the perception of parents is they are not involved simply because they do not care.

This is not the case at the Culturally Responsive Charter School. They know us! We can't come because we work so the school works around the hours of us. I did not experience this when my children were enrolled in the other school. If I could not get to the meeting when they told me that I did not care about my children. I don't make much money. I have to work. The other school would not let me come to meet with them after I got out of work to bring my small children with me. They didn't connect with me, unlike the CRC School, the other schools wouldn't take the time get find a translator or send materials home in Spanish consistently. They would rely on my children to keep me informed. How disrespectful! (Parent C)

The sentiment expressed throughout the parent focus group interviews was that coming to a charter school meant becoming more connected with the school and moving away from the isolation felt at traditional public schools. Parents felt the CRC was the most responsive to

parents by building on cultural capital. Responses from the December 2013 CRC parent satisfaction survey showed the most important way the CRC built on this cultural capital was by valuing the home lives of students and welcoming parents into the school. The school did not prescribe specific ways in which parents could become involved in the school but encouraged parents to become involved in any way they felt comfortable. Parents were able to connect to the school through different opportunities that were sensitive to their work schedules. One specific activity the school holds each year is a cultural exchange day in which parents and the larger community are invited to the school to share stories, lessons, and experiences with each other as a way of community building. During ID, parents and the larger community move around the school visiting classrooms and engaging the students, teachers, and leadership in an open dialogue about each other's culture.

The perspectives of the parent stakeholders and their understanding of cultural responsiveness were shaped by social constructivism. During the focus group interviews, the following question arose, "What did you go through as a student in the educational system?" Parent B replied:

Because of my social, cultural and economic status, I was treated as if I could not learn. They told me that I was a dummy. That I was wasting their time and then placed me in the back of the classroom with the other Hispanic students who did not understand English and because of it had a difficult time doing the work. I was embarrassed and hurt. I began to really believe that something was wrong with me, that I had some type of issue. All the other students could learn except the Hispanic students and a few Black ones.

This narrative supports the statement that teachers' expectations become a student self-fulfilling prophecy as students rise to a level of expectations demanded or to a level of mediocrity" (Madsen & Mabokela, 2002a, 2002b). Overall, the parents felt the school's culturally responsive teachers created learning communities that advocated for parental and family involvement.

Summary of Findings

School leadership communicated high expectations consistently throughout the entire school, adhering to the belief that all students can meet achievement expectations based on a genuine respect for student culture and the belief that students do not rise to low expectations. In the classroom, teachers were expected to develop culturally relevant learning activities and teaching approaches to reach students in a range of culturally appropriate ways. School leaders encouraged teachers to learn more about the language and culture of their students as a means to advance academic learning success. Home-school partnerships were viewed as critically important to student engagement and success. Parents, especially those of diverse cultural backgrounds, need to be educated about how they can assist in the education process and be collaborative stakeholders in setting goals for their children's academic achievement.

Recommendations

With the increasing racial/ethnic minority student populations and the educational autonomy found in charter schools comes an opportunity to not only provide a different approach to education, but also to infuse a cultural perspective into the curriculum (Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, 2008). As the charter school movement continues to grow nationally, frustrated and angry parents of racial and ethnic minority students no longer have to wait for public schools to get on board with innovative curriculum strategies. Charter

schools afford these families an opportunity for students to leave traditional public schools in search of an educational environment that is more conducive to their learning.

Cultural responsiveness has become a trending topic in academic circles. Educational administrators, attempting to balance quality education with diversity (M. Lynch, 2011), may find this to be a complex, if not daunting, task. However, as Ylimaki and Jacobson (2013) pointed out, if culturally responsive school leaders are to be successful, they must find ways in which to infuse the diverse aspects of students' home lives and communities into the curriculum. It is more important than ever that schools be equipped with leaders who are culturally competent and aware of their role in the education of a racially and ethnically diverse student population and have a commitment to collaborative and instructional leadership that serves their student population in culturally responsive ways. Such a goal requires understanding how school leaders as instructional leaders receive, comprehend, and either reject or incorporate culturally responsive practices into their developing teacher identities. The insight into this process comes through studies like this, whereby researchers closely and carefully examine the perceptions, beliefs, understandings, experiences, and development of cultural responsiveness in schools.

Sleeter (2011a, 2011b) stated many studies illustrate culturally responsive pedagogy in practice, sometimes going under different terms such as multicultural teaching, equity pedagogy, sociocultural teaching, or social justice teaching. However, very few studies illustrate culturally responsive leadership as perceived by stakeholders in a charter school. Cultural responsiveness makes it important for school leadership to model and facilitate critical discussions on race, equity, privilege, and bias. Singleton and Linton (2006) and Cooper (2009) recommended leaders talk about this in staff meetings, parent meetings, leadership team meetings, and staff

development in order to provide support and encourgement to make curriculum, instruction, student engagement, and family partnerships culturally responsive.

Through an analysis of the literature and the data collected through focus group interviews and document analysis, it is suggested that school leadership continue following these approaches to promote a culturally responsive school culture:

- Match classroom instruction with cultural norms for social interaction.

- Use students' cultures to enhance classroom participation and the development of their critical thinking skills (Bazron et al., 2005).

- Be sensitive to the cultural shifts with immigrant students, or students with racial/ethnic minority families and community cultures (Bazron et al., 2005). For example, be aware of when they move because it affects the student's school and home life (Bazron et al., 2005; Rong & Preissle, 2009). The successful adaptation of immigrant children into the educational system is dependent upon the school's response to them (Rong & Preissle, 2009, p. 2).

- Help parents gain skills (i.e., cultural capital) to negotiate the education system and knowledge of the behavior norms that govern schools (Bazron et al., 2005).

- Use culturally responsive and respectful approaches in character education, socializing, instruction, and discipline (Bazron et al., 2005).

- Create genuine opportunities for public school staff, parents, students, college faculty, and professional organizations to work together (Bazron et al., 2005).

School leadership and teachers in the current study felt their semester-long reading of scholars such as James A. Banks and Sonia Nieto was beneficial in helping them continue to be culturally responsive. Through the focus group interviews the teachers demonstrated they were

using strategies that successful teachers use in a culturally responsive classroom. The CRC should continue to seek out professional development opportunities that will allow the teachers to continually grow in the process of creating a sustainable culturally responsive school.

Banks (1996, 2013) developed five dimensions that school leadership should use in order to create a culturally responsive school environment: content integration, equity pedagogy, an empowering school and social structure, knowledge construction, and prejudice reduction. Content integration involves the merging of cultural perspectives into teaching practices as a means of bringing relevancy and appreciation to all cultures. Ideally, teachers would use examples from a variety of cultures and to clarify terms and give insight within the learning environment. Students gain knowledge through their own lived experiences (Banks, 1996; 2013). However, teachers have the power to construct knowledge by exploring content from multiple perspectives in terms of how we view other cultures and how our own cultural experiences determine our perceptions about people who are different. Teachers need to fit their teaching styles to meet the academic needs of all students (Banks, 1996, 2013). Students will benefit more when teachers are responsive and in tune with who they are and what they need in order to succeed in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2001). Teaching techniques should ideally be congruent with various cultural and ethnic learning styles and emphasis must be placed on student attitudes about race and how teaching can be used as a way to change these attitudes (Banks, 1996). Banks (1997) stated that early studies by Lasker (1929) and Milnard (1931) concluded racial attitudes are formed early in the lives of young children. That is why the interaction of the staff and students across racial and ethnic lines is deemed an important aspect to examine in order to create a school culture that empowers students from diverse backgrounds. It was Banks' recommendation that the entire school environment must change in order for

multicultural education to be meaningful and for students to have equal opportunities for academic success.

Implications

The researcher acknowledges that there were limitations related to conducting a study that involved only one case and understands the findings may not be generalizable. Many racially and ethnically diverse parents who are dissatisfied with the traditional public school methodology of instruction choose charters as a means of providing an alternative to learning for their children. This increases the number of racial/ethnic minorities that are educated in charter schools (Angrist et al., 2011; Zimmer et al., 2009). The importance of culturally responsive leadership in the context of charter schools leads me to provide implications for policy, practice, and future research.

The findings of this research study do not provide an educational model or program for public, charter, or private schools to generate culturally relevant or culturally responsive practices. Leading in a culturally responsive way is a moral and ethical issue. The way in which an individual leads is constructed and influenced by what he or she brings to the organization, such as life history, beliefs, assumptions, and experiences. School leaders must acknowledge their increasing racial and ethnic student population. School leaders must support teachers in their desire to enact cultural responsiveness with students and provide the teaching staff with professional development opportunities and engage them in meaningful, critically conscious dialogue about its implementation. School leaders cannot shy away from this. Schools that work with families and focus on culture and a culturally relevant curriculum are in the best position to enhance the academic achievement of their students (Van der Westhuizen et al., 2005).

Future Research

This work adds to the limited research base on culturally responsive leadership in charter schools and racial/ethnic parents' concerns regarding the curriculum practices and pedagogical practices of traditional public schools that helped propel the flight of their children from traditional public schools into charter schools. Further research is indicated in the area of identifying and dismantling the hidden curriculum in all school settings. This study was only a small step toward progression that would hopefully encourage more in-depth studies. More studies are needed to inform the practices of school leadership in charter schools, political leaders, policy makers, social reformers, and the families of charter school students.

In order to develop further understanding of culturally responsive leadership in charter schools, the recommendations for further research are as follows:

- Replicate the study with a larger and more representative sample of charter schools. Using a larger sample may provide greater generalizability of the culturally responsive practices of charter school leadership.

- Include some of the variables cited in prior research as being barriers to the academic achievement of racial/ethnic minority students. For example, a study could be designed to explore whether the social interactions and relationship dynamics of Black and Hispanic students have an effect on student performance.

- A study specifically examining the culturally responsive home-school connections of culturally responsive leaders in charter schools could demonstrate a greater need for collaborative relationships between school and home. The research could examine ways in which stakeholders, such as the school leadership, teachers, and parents, can increase student achievement through fostering collaboration.

- While data trends show culturally and linguistically diverse student populations in schools are on the rise, not all teacher education programs thoroughly cover multicultural education or culturally responsive leadership (Kea et al., 2006). School leaders feel unprepared to lead now more than ever with the increasing population of racially and ethnically diverse students (Hughes, 2005). As my study indicated, school leadership has a great impact on the teaching and learning within the school. Leaders who do not have the confidence and prior training required to lead in a culturally responsive way will continue to perpetuate the Eurocentric management style of leading they were prepared to adopt in educational leadership programs and are then ill-equipped to lead students and teachers from racially and ethnically diverse backgrounds. Educational leadership programs are now recognizing the need to offer a course on multicultural education, though one course alone does not adequately prepare school leadership to be culturally responsive. There is a need to explore educational leadership preparation programs' focus on culturally responsive leadership and meeting the needs of racially and ethnically diverse students and staff. Further research could explore how educational leadership programs perpetuate the Eurocentric management style of leadership and pedagogical teaching styles that perpetuate the inequalities found within racially and ethnically diverse schools. Knowing that cultural responsiveness in leadership preparation is lacking and often times missing, one component of the study could explore intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors of school leadership who lead in a culturally responsive way despite not having the formal training in culturally responsive leadership, cultural background, or frame of reference.

- A further study should measure leadership efficacy and its impact on the academic achievement of racially and ethnically diverse students and what would be the measures of success of culturally responsive teaching and learning.

- The most important measure of success of culturally responsive leadership and teaching are the students. A mixed methods study could examine student perceptions of cultural responsiveness and its impact on their academic success.

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Appendix A

Leader Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Culturally Responsive Leadership: A case study to describe stakeholders' perception
of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 public charter school

Principal Investigator: Kimberly M. Jones

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Comfort Okpala

My name is Kimberly M. Jones and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies
Department at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. I am carrying
out a research study to describe stakeholder perceptions of culturally responsive
leadership in a culturally diverse K-12 Public Charter School. To achieve this, you have
been nominated by the school director to help describe culturally responsive leadership in
your school. I believe that as a participant, you possess knowledge about the culturally
responsive leadership practices in your school, which will help me to understand and
describe culturally responsive leadership in a diverse K-12 Public Charter School.

The study being conducted relates to stakeholders' perception of culturally responsive leadership
in a diverse K-12 Public Charter School. The researcher will carry out two focus group
interviews that will last for about one hour each, one individual interview that will last for
about one hour. I do not anticipate any risks from your participation in this research.
During focus group interviews, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not
wish to answer.

I may use an audio recorder in order to accurately capture what is said. The recordings will be
transcribed, but your name will not be included in the transcription. The audio recordings
and transcription will be kept on a password-protected computer. I will transcribe the
recordings as soon as possible and destroy the audio to minimize a breach of
confidentiality since voices are potentially identifiable to anyone who hears the
recording. Transcriptions must be kept at least three years after the close of the study.
Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information.

Some excerpts from written transcripts may be quoted in future papers and/or journal articles that
will be written by the researcher; however, your name or other identifying information
will not be disclosed or referenced in any way in any written or verbal context. Upon
completion of the study, a summary of the findings will be provided to participants, if
requested.

There are no direct benefits to participants in this research. Participants may experience
satisfaction in providing information that will contribute to the body of research of
culturally responsive leadership. This research will provide guidelines for what a
culturally responsive school and leadership looks like. Students would benefit as they
would be in a school environemtn that validates their racial and ethnic diversity.

All information collected in this study will be kept completely confidential to the extent
permitted by law. Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected
computer.

If you have any questions about your involvement in this project, you may contact me at 336-
528-7845 or by email at kmjones3@aggies.ncat.edu. If you have any study-related
concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may
contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State
University at 336-285-2961.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have read the above information, have received
answers to any questions you had, are at least 18 years of age or older, and voluntarily
consent to take part in this research study.

Thank you,
Sincerely

Kimberly M. Jones

Participant's Name (Printed):

Participant's Signature: Date:

Researcher's Signature: Date:

Appendix B

Teacher Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Culturally Responsive Leadership: A case study to describe stakeholders' perception
of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 public charter school

Principal Investigator: Kimberly M. Jones

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Comfort Okpala

My name is Kimberly M. Jones and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies
Department at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. I am carrying
out a research study to describe stakeholder perceptions of culturally responsive
leadership in a culturally diverse K-12 Public Charter School. To achieve this, you have
been nominated by the school director to help describe culturally responsive leadership in
your school. I believe that as a participant, you possess knowledge about the culturally
responsive leadership practices in your school, which will help me to understand and
describe culturally responsive leadership in a diverse K-12 Public Charter School.

The study being conducted relates to stakeholders' perception of culturally responsive leadership
in a diverse K-12 Public Charter School. The researcher will carry out two focus group
interviews that will last for about one hour each, one individual interview that will last for
about one hour. I do not anticipate any risks from your participation in this research.
During focus group interviews, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not
wish to answer.

I may use an audio recorder in order to accurately capture what is said. The recordings will be
transcribed, but your name will not be included in the transcription. The audio recordings
and transcription will be kept on a password-protected computer. I will transcribe the
recordings as soon as possible and destroy the audio to minimize a breach of
confidentiality since voices are potentially identifiable to anyone who hears the
recording. Transcriptions must be kept at least three years after the close of the study.
Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information.

Some excerpts from written transcripts may be quoted in future papers and/or journal articles that
will be written by the researcher; however, your name or other identifying information
will not be disclosed or referenced in any way in any written or verbal context. Upon
completion of the study, a summary of the findings will be provided to participants, if
requested.

There are no direct benefits to participants in this research. Participants may experience
satisfaction in providing information that will contribute to the body of research of
culturally responsive leadership. This research will provide guidelines for what a
culturally responsive school and leadership looks like. Students would benefit as they
would be in a school environemtn that validates their racial and ethnic diversity.

All information collected in this study will be kept completely confidential to the extent permitted by law. Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected computer.

If you have any questions about your involvement in this project, you may contact me at 336-528-7845 or by email at kmjones3@aggies.ncat.edu. If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at 336-285-2961.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have read the above information, have received answers to any questions you had, are at least 18 years of age or older, and voluntarily consent to take part in this research study.

Thank you,
Sincerely

Kimberly M. Jones

Participant's Name (Printed):

Participant's Signature: Date:

Researcher's Signature: Date:

Appendix C

Parent Informed Consent Form

Study Title: Culturally Responsive Leadership: A case study to describe stakeholders' perception of culturally responsive leadership in a K-12 public charter school

Principal Investigator: Kimberly M. Jones

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Comfort Okpala

My name is Kimberly M. Jones and I am a doctoral student in the Leadership Studies Department at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University. I am carrying out a research study to describe stakeholder perceptions of culturally responsive leadership in a culturally diverse K-12 Public Charter School. To achieve this, you have been nominated by the school director to help describe culturally responsive leadership in your school. I believe that as a participant, you possess knowledge about the culturally responsive leadership practices in your school, which will help me to understand and describe culturally responsive leadership in a diverse K-12 Public Charter School.

You have been selected to participate because you are a parent with a child in the school to be studied. If you choose to participate, you will take part in two focus group interviews with three to six other parents. All the questions that the researcher will ask you will be open-ended questions. The first focus group interview is expected to last 1 hour. The length of the second interview will depend on modification to the interview guide that will be informed by the first interview.

I do not anticipate any risks from your participation in this research. During focus group interviews, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

I may use an audio recorder in order to accurately capture what is said. The recordings will be transcribed, but your name will not be included in the transcription. The audio recordings and transcription will be kept on a password-protected computer. I will transcribe the recordings as soon as possible and destroy the audio to minimize a breach of confidentiality since voices are potentially identifiable to anyone who hears the recording. Transcriptions must be kept at least three years after the close of the study. Reports of study findings will not include any identifying information.

Some excerpts from written transcripts may be quoted in future papers and/or journal articles that will be written by the researcher; however, your name or other identifying information will not be disclosed or referenced in any way in any written or verbal context. Upon completion of the study, a summary of the findings will be provided to participants, if requested.

There are no direct benefits to participants in this research. Participants may experience satisfaction in providing information that will contribute to the body of research of

culturally responsive leadership. This research will provide guidelines for what a culturally responsive school and leadership looks like. Students would benefit as they would be in a school environemtn that validates their racial and ethnic diversity.

All information collected in this study will be kept completely confidential to the extent permitted by law. Data will be stored in a locked file cabinet or on a password-protected computer.

If you have any questions about your involvement in this project, you may contact me at 336-528-7845 or by email at kmjones3@aggies.ncat.edu. If you have any study-related concerns or any questions about your rights as a research study participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance and Ethics at North Carolina A&T State University at 336 285-2961.

Your participation is voluntary, and you may end your participation at any time. Not participating or withdrawing from participation will not result in any negative consequences to you or your child.

By signing below, you are indicating that you have read the above information, have received answers to any questions you had, you are at least 18 years of age or older, and you voluntarily consent to take part in this research study.

Thank you,
Sincerely

Kimberly M. Jones

Participant's Name (Printed):

Participant's Signature: Date:

Researcher's Signature: Date:

Appendix D

Leader Focus Group Interview Guide

First Focus Group Interview Guide for the School Leadership Team

1. Describe how you promote/model relationship building as a tool for cultural responsiveness
a. When dealing with students (Please give specific examples)
b. When dealing with teachers (Please give specific examples)
c. When dealing with parents (Please give specific examples)

2.How does relationship building promote cultural responsiveness in this school?

3. Describe the approaches that you use when handling disciplinary problems related to the diverse groups in your school:
a. African American students (Please give specific examples)
b. Hispanic students (Please give specific examples)
c. White students (Please give specific examples)
d. Other students (Please give specific examples)

4. In what ways, if any, do you involve parents/family in school business

5.Teaching (Please give specific examples)
a. Selecting curriculum materials
b. Behavior monitoring (Please give specific examples)

6. Describe your relationship with the community the school serves, including diverse cultural groups within the community. (Please give specific examples).

7. Discuss how the economic diversity in your school and community influences your leadership style (Give specific examples).

8. Explain how gender related issues in this school influence the way you perform your leadership duties
a. when dealing with students (Please give specific examples)
b. When dealing with parents (Please give specific examples)
c. When dealing with teachers

9. Describe how students who come from single parent family influence the way you perform your leadership roles. (Use specific examples)

10. How do you handle conflict that may include students from diverse socio economic classes?

11. Describe how you are helping to make the school more responsive to diverse cultural groups through
a. Professional development (Please give specific examples)
b. Curriculum changes (Please give specific examples)
c. Changes in school instructional program (Please give specific examples)
d. School staffing (Please give specific examples)
e. Faculty and other meetings (Please give specific examples)

Second Focus Group Interview Guide for the School Leadership Team

Part I
Verification of conclusions from first interview

Part II
New Questions

1. Discuss how the racial, ethnic and economic diversity in your school and community influences your leadership style (Give specific examples).

2. Describe how you promote/model relationship building as a tool for cultural responsiveness
a. When dealing with students (Please give specific examples)
b. When dealing with teachers (Please give specific examples)
c. When dealing with parents (Please give specific examples)

3. How does relationship building promote cultural responsiveness in this school?

4. Do you use different approaches when handling disciplinary problems related to different racial and ethnic groups? If so, how does your approach differ with:
a. African American students (Please give specific examples)
b. Hispanic students (Please give specific examples)
c. White students (Please give specific examples)
d. Other students (Please give specific examples)

5. In what ways, if any, do you involve parents/family in school matters?
a. Teaching (Please give specific examples)
b. Selecting curriculum materials
c. Behavior monitoring (Please give specific examples)
d. School leadership
e. Other types of involvement

6. Describe your relationship with the community the school serves, including diverse cultural groups within the community. (Please give specific examples).

7. Describe how students who come from single parent family influence the way you perform your leadership roles. (Use specific examples)

8. How do you handle conflict that may include students from different racial, ethnic, or socio economic groups?

9. Describe how you are helping to make the school more responsive to diverse cultural groups through
a. Professional development (Please give specific examples)
b. Curriculum changes (Please give specific examples)
c. Changes in how students are grouped
d. Changes in school instructional program (Please give specific examples)
e. School staffing (Please give specific examples)
f. Faculty and other meetings (Please give specific examples)

10. What else can we talk about that will help me understand your role as a leader within a school with so much diversity?

Third Focus Group Interview Guide for the School Leadership Team

Part I
Verification of conclusions from first interview

1. Both teachers and parents agree that you are persistent and persuasive. I also observed the same traits. How do you demonstrate persistence and persuasiveness with
a. Teachers (give examples)
b. Students (give examples)
c. Parents (give examples)

2. Why are both persistence and persuasiveness important in leading and teaching in this culturally and linguistically diverse school?

3. How do you encourage content integration as a tool for cultural responsive teaching? Why is it important for teachers to implement content integration?

4. Describe situations when you have demonstrated/modeled flexibility when dealing with teachers and then with students. How do your teachers demonstrate flexibility with their students?

5. Define empathy for me and describe how you model empathy with
a. Teachers
b. Students
c. Parents

6. How does empathy help this school to be culturally responsive?

7. Both teachers and I have observed that you are highly visible in the hallways, classrooms and other places in the building. Why do you do that? How does high visibility help the school to be responsive?

8. Describe some of the external staff development programs that you have helped your teachers to attend. How does each of the programs help
a. teachers to be inclusive (give examples)
b. your leadership (give examples)

9.Say how the programs help the school to be culturally responsive? Describe the forms of support that you get from
a. your principals
b. the district
c. universities and experts from universities
d. other

10. Say how the support helps the school to be culturally responsive?

11. Language: This school is linguistically and culturally diverse. We know that language in the main tool that people use to communicate. If students are not very proficient in English, such students will have problems in the classrooms.
a. How do teachers deal with the problem of language diversity in the classroom?
b. What role do you see language

12. Language: If students do not understand the language used by the teacher in their classroom, they will find it difficult to learn. How do you help teachers in this school to teach students who have a limited level of proficiency in English?

13. Culture: culture can be defined as those values or norms, and traditions that affect how individuals or groups perceive situations, interact, behave, think, and understand the world. How do you ensure that your own cultural ways of thinking and acting do not affect the cultural ways of others?

14. Are there any other areas of your leadership that you think need help to improve? How did the diversity in this school help you to recognize them? How would that help to make this school to be culturally responsive?

Appendix E

Teacher Focus Group Interview Guide

First Focus Group Interview Guide for the Teachers

1. Will you each tell me about yourself (one teacher at a time)
a. Personal history
b. Experience as a teacher
c. Experience with the school leadership

2. Describe the community this school serves, including different cultural groups within the community.

3. Describe the students in this school.

4. Describe the teachers this school serves.

5. Describe the educational philosophy of the school.

6. Describe the vision for this school espoused by the leadership team

7. How do you define cultural responsiveness?
a. Culturally responsive teaching?
b. Culturally responsive leadership?
c. A culturally responsive school?

8. In what ways, if any, has the school leadership team modeled cultural responsiveness?
a. When interacting with students. (Please give specific examples)
b. When interacting with teachers (Please give specific examples)
c. When interacting with staff members. (Please give specific examples)
d. When interacting with parents. (Please give specific examples)

9. Discuss the school leadership teams' relationship with the community the school serves, including diverse cultural groups within the community. (Please give specific examples)

10. What has the school leadership team done to make the school more responsive to diverse cultural groups?
a. Professional development (Please give specific examples)
b. Curriculum changes (Please give specific examples)
c. Changes in school instructional program (Please give specific examples)
d. School-parent or school-community programs (Please give specific examples)
e. Faculty and other meetings (Please give specific examples)
f. Other school wide efforts (Please give specific examples)

11. How do you demonstrate cultural understanding and cultural responsiveness in the classroom? (Please give specific examples)

12. How, if at all, has the school leadership team helped you to be more culturally responsive in your classroom? (One teacher at a time. Please give specific examples)

13. Are there any questions that you believe I need to ask in order to describe the leadership as a culturally responsive leader?

Second Focus Group Interview Guide for the Teachers

Part I
Verification of common conclusions from first interview
1. In which ways do you demonstrate embracing students' culture, in terms of language, values, behavior and teacher-student and teacher-parent relationships?

2. Describe a teaching aid or method that you use with your groups and say how it was culturally neutral?

Part II
New Questions
1. Discuss how the racial, ethnic and economic diversity in your school and community influences the leader's style (Give specific examples).

2. Describe how you promote/model relationship building as a tool for cultural responsiveness when you deal with:
a. students (Please give specific examples)
b. other teachers (Please give specific examples)
c. parents (Please give specific examples)

3. How does relationship building promote cultural responsiveness in this school?

4. In what ways, if any, has the leader helped you to promote/model cultural responsiveness?

5. Describe the school leadership teams' approaches when handling disciplinary problems related to different racial and ethnic groups. Say how her approaches differ, if at all, with:
a. African American students (Please give specific examples)
b. Hispanic students (Please give specific examples)
c. White students (Please give specific examples)
d. Other students (Please give specific examples)

6. In what ways, if any, does the leader involve parents/family in school matters?
a. Assisting student learning (Please give specific examples)
b. Selecting curriculum materials
c. Behavior monitoring (Please give specific examples)
d. Please name any other types of involvement

7. Describe how you as teachers demonstrate each of the following
a. Content integration
b. Celebrating multicultural events with students
c. Using teaching aids that try to reach all students
d. Using stories to model cultural responsiveness
e. Embracing students' cultures
8. Describe the leader's relationship with the community the school serves, including diverse cultural groups within the community. (Please give specific examples).

9. Describe how you respond to special needs of students from single-parent families in your teaching.

10. How does the school leadership team address conflict that includes students from different racial, ethnic, or socio economic groups? (Please give specific examples)

11. Describe how the school leadership team is helping to make the school more responsive to diverse cultural groups through
a. Professional development (Please give specific examples)
b. Curriculum changes (Please give specific examples)
c. Changes in how students are grouped
d. Changes in school instructional program (Please give specific examples)
e. School staffing (Please give specific examples)
f. Faculty and other meetings (Please give specific examples)

12. What else can we talk about that will help me understand your role as within a school with so much diversity?

Third Focus Group Interview Guide for the Teachers

Part I
Verification of common conclusions from first interview

Part II
1. Describe how the leader shows persistence and persuasiveness with
a. Teachers (give examples)
b. Students (give examples)

2. Why are both persistence and persuasiveness important for leadership in a culturally and linguistically diverse school?

3. How does the school leadership team encourage content integration or cross-curricular teaching as a tool for cultural responsive teaching? Why is it important for you teachers to implement content integration?

4. Describe situations when the leader has demonstrated/modeled flexibility when dealing with you teachers and then with students. How do you as teachers demonstrate flexibility with your students?

5. Define empathy for me and describe how the school leadership team models empathy with
a. Teachers
b. Students

6. How does empathy help this school to be culturally responsive?

7. I have observed that the school leadership team is highly visible in the hallways, classrooms and other places in the building. How does high visibility help the school to be culturally responsive?

8. Describe some of the external staff development programs that the school leadership team has helped you to attend. How did each program help you to be inclusive?

9. Describe other forms of support that you get from the leader and experts from universities

10. Say how the support helps the school to be culturally responsive?

11. Language: This school is linguistically and culturally diverse. We know that language in the main tool that people use to communicate. If students are not very proficient in English, such students will have problems in the classrooms. How do you teachers deal with the problem of language diversity in the classroom?

12. Culture: culture can be defined as those values or norms, and traditions that affect how individuals or groups perceive situations, interact, behave, think, and understand the world.

13. How do you ensure that your own cultural ways of thinking and acting do not affect the cultural ways of others?

14. The administration would like this school to be recognized (School Improvement). How do some of their leadership qualities related to culturally responsiveness help to make this goal a reality?

Appendix F

Parent Focus Group Interview Guide

First Focus Group Interview Guide for the Parents

1. Will each one of you tell me a little about yourselves and your families?
a. Your race and ethnicity
b. Your personal history
c. Your family
d. Your child/children who attend this school?
e. Your experiences with the school leadership team?

2. Describe the community this school serves.

3. Describe the students who go to this school.

4. Describe the teachers and staff at this school.

5. Describe your beliefs about education and your expectations for this school.

6. Describe the school leadership team.

7. In what ways, if any do the school leadership teams respond to families and students from different cultures? (Please name specific examples.)

8. Describe the school leadership teams' relationship with your child or children who attend—or have attended—this school. (Please give specific examples).

9. Describe the relationship of the school leadership team with the community that the school serves. What are the school leadership teams' connections to the community? (Please give specific examples)

10. Discuss the quality of education your child or children who attend this school receive. (Please give specific examples).

11. To what extent, if any, do the teachers and staff at this school understand and respond to the students from diverse cultures? (Please give specific examples)

12. In what ways, if any, do the school leadership team help the teachers and staff members to understand and respond to students from diverse cultures? (Please give specific examples)

13. Are there any other questions you believe I should ask in order to describe the school leadership team as a culturally responsive leader?

Second Focus Group Interview Guide for the Parents

Part I
Verification of conclusions from first interview

Part II
New Questions

1. Discuss how the racial, ethnic and economic diversity in the school and community influences
   the leader's style (Give specific examples).

2. Describe how the school leadership team promotes/models relationship building as a tool for
   cultural responsiveness
a. When dealing with students (Please give specific examples)
b. When dealing with parents (Please give specific examples)

3. How does relationship building help to make this school responsive to the needs of your child?

4. Does the leader use different approaches when handling disciplinary problems related to
   different racial and ethnic groups? If so, how does her approach differ with:
a. African American students (Please give specific examples)
b. Hispanic students (Please give specific examples)
c. White students (Please give specific examples)
d. Other students (Please give specific examples)

5. In what ways, if any, does the school leadership team involve parents/family in school
   matters?
a. Teaching (Please give specific examples)
b. Selecting curriculum materials
c. Behavior monitoring (Please give specific examples)
d. School leadership
e. Other types of involvement

6. Describe how teachers demonstrate each of the following in their classrooms (Please give
   specific examples for each)
a. Content integration
b. Celebrating multicultural events with students
c. Embracing students' cultures

7. Describe the school leadership teams' relationship with the community the school serves,
   including diverse cultural groups within the community. (Please give specific examples).

8. Describe how students who come from single parent family influence the way the (a) leader
   performs her leadership roles (b) teachers perform their duties. (Use specific examples)

9. What else can we talk about that will help me understand your school's leadership within a school with so much diversity?

Part II
1. Describe how the school leadership team shows persistence and persuasiveness with
a. Teachers (give examples)
b. Students (give examples)

2. Why are both persistence and persuasiveness important for leadership in a culturally and linguistically diverse school?

3. Describe situations when the school leadership team has demonstrated/modeled flexibility when dealing with you and then with your child. How do you as teachers demonstrate flexibility with your students?

4. Define empathy for me and describe how the school leadership team models empathy with
a. parents
b. Students

5. How does empathy help this school to be culturally responsive?

6. I have observed that the school leadership team is highly visible in the hallways, classrooms and other places in the building. How does high visibility help the school to be culturally responsive?

7. Culture: culture can be defined as those values or norms, and traditions that affect how individuals or groups perceive situations, interact, behave, think, and understand the world. How do you ensure that your own cultural ways of thinking and acting do not affect the cultural ways of others?

Appendix G

Permission to Use Instrument

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To whom it may Concern:
I recently carried out a research for my dissertation titled "*Culturally responsive leadership in a Diverse School: A Case Study of a High School Leader.*" I give Ms. Kimberly M. Jones a doctoral candidate at North Carolina A&T State University permission to adapt my research instruments and the definitions used there-in for her current research.
Her contact details are

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Sincerely

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