BECOMING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE:
A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL LEVEL SENSEMAKING

By

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ABSTRACT

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For the last several decades, many educational theorists have advocated for culturally responsive practices within K-12 school contexts, particularly as it relates to teaching and learning (Emdin, 2016; Gay, 1994, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris, 2012). More recently, scholars have begun to call for a broadening of culturally responsive practices beyond the classroom in ways that consider how school leaders can create entire school environments that are culturally responsive to the needs of historically marginalized student populations and communities. However, what has not been given much consideration in the literature, is how individuals who are tasked with implementing culturally responsive initiatives at the school and district level, such as principals, teachers, and staff, understand and make sense of this task.

This mini-ethnographic case study utilized sensemaking both broadly within organizations (Weick, 1995) and more specifically to K-12 contexts (Spillane, Reimer, Reiser, 2002), as well as culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016) as frameworks for understanding this phenomenon. Participants included individuals in district and school level leadership positions, as well as teachers and staff within a school district that had adopted cultural responsiveness as a district goal. Findings from this study revealed the importance of crafting and supporting a clear message regarding cultural responsiveness at both the district and school levels. Findings also revealed the role that individuals' attitudes, beliefs, and values can play in the implementation of culturally responsive initiatives at the district and school levels.

This dissertation is dedicated to my two children, Langston Miles and Zora Simone. May you harness the power of education to transform not only your own lives, but to critique and challenge oppressive systems that inequitably impact the lives of others

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In today's ever-changing reality it is the role of the school community (school leaders and the educational staff) to navigate complexity and uncertainty through sensemaking processes (Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2017, p. 686).

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The nation is currently experiencing and witnessing a resurgence of overt racism, xenophobia, sexism, and other forms of systemic and individual acts of oppression toward marginalized communities. This resurgence has been stoked, in large part, by the election of the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump—a president who openly espouses White supremacist rhetoric. Prior to his election, a report titled *The Trump Effect: The Impact of the Presidential Campaign on Our Nation's Schools* found that 67% of the teachers surveyed reported that students from historically marginalized communities (e.g., Muslims, communities of Color, immigrants, etc.) were fearful about what would happen to them and their families if Trump were elected President of the United States (Costello, 2016). Since being elected, he has continued to engage in and condone divisive rhetoric, evident in his speeches and tweets, as well as through his unwillingness to intervene in sociopolitical issues that affect historically marginalized communities. At the same time, there has been an increase in the number of hate groups (Hughes, 2018), hate crimes (Rushin & Edwards, 2018), and policies (Harden, 2017) that target marginalized communities within society.

Trumpian rhetoric has also reached the halls and classrooms of American schools. Since his election, the number of racist, homophobic, and xenophobic school-related incidents have dramatically increased in P-20 settings. From the cafeteria chants by White middle school students of "Build the wall" (Larimer, 2016) and a White high school teacher pulling off a Muslim student's hijab (Blumberg, 2017), to a White second grade teacher suggesting on social

media that Blacks move back to Africa (Gater, 2017) and neo-Nazis recruiting and rallying on college campuses (Smith, 2017), schools during the era of Trump have become spaces of intimidation and cultural irresponsivity for historically marginalized student populations.

Educational policy organizations and school districts across the country are beginning to implement policies and practices that promote culturally responsive leadership, teaching, and learning. For example, the National Policy Board for Education Administration's Professional Standards of Educational Leadership (PSEL) centers cultural responsiveness by acknowledging that school leaders must "confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status" (PSEL, 2015, p. 11).

STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

However, despite such policy statements that center the role of sociopolitical context in the teaching and learning of marginalized student populations and decades of research on culturally responsive pedagogy and leadership that emphasize the importance of considering sociopolitical context, many initiatives, policies, and practices meant to address cultural responsiveness in schools are often taken up by districts, school administrators, and teachers in uncritical ways (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Khalifa, Gooden, & Davis, 2016; Ladson-Billings, 2014). These ways avoid the historical and contemporary sociopolitical realities of marginalized student populations and their communities, especially around issues of race, inequality, and privilege in American society.

Educational policy theorists have found that although school districts often mandate an adherence to initiatives, policies, and practices, how these initiatives, policies, and practices are implemented depends on how school level actors (e.g., principals, teachers, and staff) interpret

and make sense of them (Coburn 2001, 2006; Seashore Louis et al., 2005; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). The sensemaking of educational policies and practices at the school level is an under-researched area of inquiry (Spillane et al., 2002). Previous research on sensemaking in K-12 contexts has focused on the implementation of instructional policies that seek to address technical educational challenges, such as raising math, science, and reading achievement (Coburn, 2001; Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). Technical challenges are challenges that can be resolved quickly by applying expertise and strategies based on previous knowledge (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). However, adopting culturally responsive policies and practices has its own set of adaptive challenges—challenges that require individuals within organizations to undergo paradigm shifts in their thinking and to engage in new learning (Heifetz et al., 2009).

In the case of implementing culturally responsive school policies and practices, this includes a shift in thinking about issues such as race, privilege, and inequality, and requires school leaders, teachers, and staff to build their capacity to engage in critical conversation and action that improves the teaching and learning of marginalized student populations. Yet, efforts to address issues of cultural responsiveness in schools often solely focus on technical solutions such as professional development and instructional strategies in ways that do not consider the adaptive challenge of shifting the mindsets of school level implementers. Therefore, there is a need for research that examines how school leaders, teachers, and staff interpret and make sense of culturally responsive policies and initiatives. Sensemaking theory (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995) offers a useful framework to consider how factors such as beliefs and values, experiences, and attitudes impact how school level implementers make sense of and respond to culturally responsive policies and practices that necessitate a shift in mindset.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this mini-ethnographic case study is twofold: 1) to understand how a principal, teachers, and her staff make sense of cultural responsiveness, and 2) to understand how teachers and staff make sense of their principal's leadership practices and vision that seek to promote a more culturally responsive school environment. The context for this study is an urban elementary school where the principal has made intentional efforts to engage in critical leadership practices to make the school more culturally responsive for students of color. These efforts include, but are not limited to, creating opportunities for community engagement and outreach, soliciting student and parent perspectives about school culture and climate, addressing exclusionary disciplinary policies through restorative practice, and engaging teachers and staff in conversations about the role of race, privilege, and inequality in teaching and learning. Oftentimes, these issues prove to be difficult to confront, discuss, and grapple with for teachers and staff who work with students and communities of color (Castagno, 2008; Pollock, 2004). This study provides an opportunity to understand how the sensemaking process operates when attempting to create culturally responsive school environments.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions guiding this study are:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the district level messages that the principal, teachers, and staff receive about cultural responsiveness?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How does the principal make sense of cultural responsiveness?

a) What factors inform her sensemaking?
b) How does her sensemaking inform the leadership practices she enacts?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How do teachers and staff make sense of cultural responsiveness?

a) What factors inform their sensemaking about cultural responsiveness?
b) How does their sensemaking inform the ways they interpret and respond to the principal's leadership practices?

In the following section, I introduce the conceptual and theoretical framework of culturally responsive school leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016) and sensemaking (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995) that will be used to frame this study.

CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Culturally responsive school leadership. Rooted in the ideas and values of culturally responsive pedagogy, culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) provides a conceptual framework that envisions being culturally responsive in ways that move beyond isolated classrooms to encompassing entire school environments that meet the needs of minoritized communities and their stakeholders. For the purposes of this study, CRSL functions as a lens by which to frame and analyze the behaviors and actions of a principal who has been identified within her district as a leader who is actively working to make her school more culturally responsive. CRSL centers a consideration of how school leaders can ensure improved student outcomes, as well as "promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting" of all students, especially minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1275). Khalifa and colleagues have identified four behavioral strands of CRSL that are useful for this analysis: 1) *Critically self-aware and self-reflective of leadership behaviors*, 2) *Develops culturally responsive teachers*, 3) *Promotes* c*ulturally responsive and inclusive school environments*, and 4) *Engages students, parents, and community contexts*.

Critically self-aware and self-reflective of leadership behaviors. The first strand addresses the intersection and influence of a principal's identity on the context in which they lead. The authors asserted:

> The principal's critical consciousness of culture and race really serves as a foundation to establish beliefs that undergird her practice […] Similarly, leaders must have an awareness

> of self and an understanding of the context in which they lead. Additionally, leaders must use their understanding to envision and create a new environment of learning for children in their building who have been marginalized by race and class. (p. 1281)

As the leader of the school, the principal is often the lynchpin that holds together any school reform policies and practices. Therefore, what the principal values and believes plays a significant role in the type of leadership practices they enact. Specifically, as it relates to CRSL, a principal must be critically self-reflective and critically conscious of the realities of minoritized students and communities. They must also be comfortable and capable of leading in ways that engage teachers and staff to do the same. Khalifa (2018) stated, "Culturally responsive principals promote schooling practices that ask educators to engage in critical self-reflection and to constantly ask how they have been oppressive to students or communities" (p. 192). Khalifa et al. (2016) described critical consciousness as an "awareness of self and his/her values, beliefs, and/or dispositions when it comes to serving poor children of color" (p. 1280). This strand is potentially useful for understanding how the principal in this study conceptualizes critical consciousness and perceives that this awareness informs her values, beliefs, and her enactment of leadership practices that promote a culturally responsive school environment.

Develops culturally responsive teachers. The second strand explains the importance of school leaders taking the initiative to ensure a culturally responsive school environment through the in-house preparation of culturally responsive teachers. Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that "principals must play a leading role in maintaining cultural responsiveness in their schools" (p. 1281) and that school principals can do this by "recruiting and retaining culturally responsive teachers, securing culturally responsive resources and curriculum, mentoring and modeling culturally responsive teaching" or offering culturally responsive professional development (p.

1281). This strand is useful for framing and analyzing evidence of the principal's intentionality in developing culturally responsive teachers and staff.

Promotes culturally responsive and inclusive school environments. The third strand advocates for the active promotion of a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment. Beyond teacher preparation and curricula choices, developing and sustaining a culturally responsive and inclusive school culture means that school leaders challenge teachers, students, and parents to interrogate the status quo, especially as it relates to practices that further marginalize minoritized students (e.g., exclusionary discipline policies, linguistic hegemony, etc.). This strand is useful for evidencing the ways in which, if at all, that the principal challenges and supports teachers and staff in interrogating the status quo as it relates to their minoritized students and their communities.

Engages students, parents, and community contexts. The fourth and final stand of CRSL acknowledges that being a culturally responsive school leader goes beyond the walls of the school and includes understanding, addressing, and advocating for issues that are important to students, their parents, and their communities (Khalifa et al., 2016). Examples of this include, but are not limited to, efforts to "promote overlapping school-community contexts, speaking (or at least honoring) native students' languages/lexicons, creating structures that accommodate the lives of parents, or even creating school spaces for marginalized students' identities and behaviors" (p. 1282). This strand will be useful in understanding how, if at all, this principal promotes cultural responsiveness through the engagement of students, parents, and the community outside of the walls of her school.

Sensemaking. Broadly, the process of sensemaking refers to the "cognitive act of taking in information, framing it, and using it to determine actions and behaviors in a way that manages meaning for individuals" (Evans, 2007, p. 161).

Describing sensemaking. Sensemaking has been theorized in several different fields (Dervin, 2003; Klein, Moon, & Hoffman, 2006) and the definition of sensemaking varies depending on the context in which it is being used. This dissertation study utilizes the theoretical foundations of sensemaking within organizations (Vaughan, 1996; Weick, 1995). Within organization studies, sensemaking describes the collective and individual processes by which individuals make sense of, and negotiate, messages and meaning, especially during times of organizational change, reform, and uncertainty.

Most studies of sensemaking in school contexts have focused on the sensemaking of teachers and principals independently of each other. However, individuals within organizations make sense of information and occurrences on both the individual and the collective, social level. This study provides the opportunity to examine the interplay of sensemaking among a principal and her teachers and staff as they make sense of the disruption and change created by her culturally responsive school practices and expectations. The following figure is a succinct model of how the disruption of the status quo or organizational change sets in motion individual and social (collective) sensemaking within organizations, and it also provides an overall model for conceptualizing sensemaking within the context of this research study.

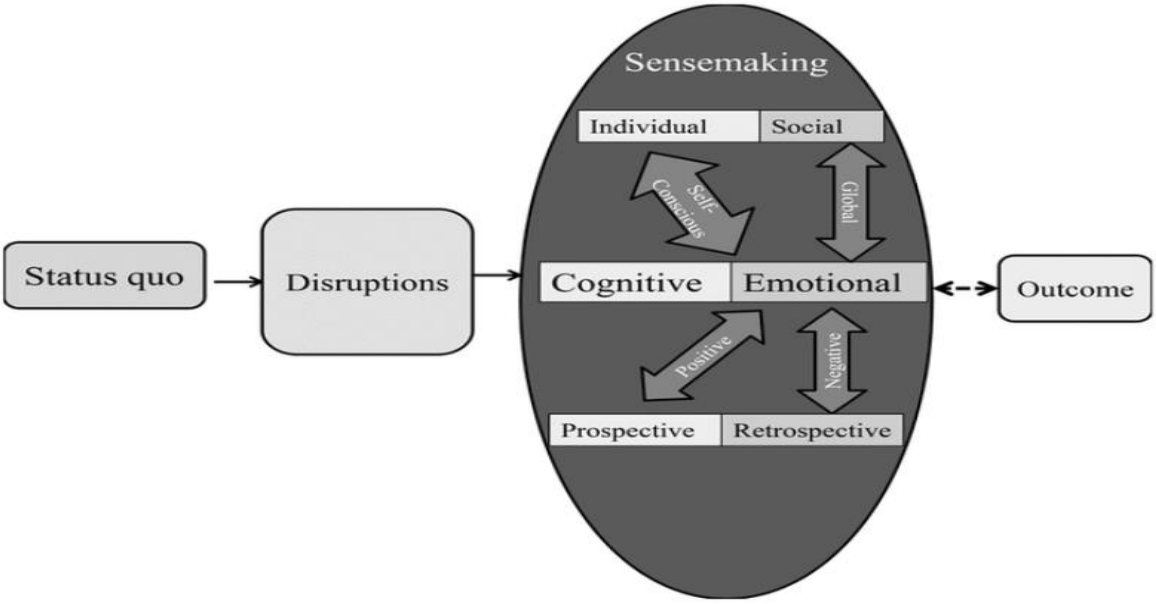

Figure 1: A New Framework for Sensemaking. Adapted from "Sensemaking and School Failure: Lessons from Two Cases," by J. Walls, 2017, *Journal of Organizational Theory in Education,* Vol. 2, pp. 1-26. Copyright 2017 by Jeff Walls.

According to sensemaking theory, the process of sensemaking is triggered when there are disruptions or changes to the status quo within an organization, and individuals within that organization begin to make sense of the new reality caused by the disruptions (Giola & Thomas, 1996; Isabella, 1992). In Figure 1, Walls (2017) illustrated that sensemaking is both individual and social, cognitive and emotional, retrospective (considering the past events/actions) and prospective (considering future events/actions). Walls made clear that this graphic was not meant to fully explain the interaction of each aspect of sensemaking. He stated, "Because different aspects of sensemaking proceed contemporaneously, it is difficult to fully model the ways they interact. Rather I have sought to identify some important distinctions between each aspect of sensemaking" (Walls, 2017, p. 10). Similarly, for the purposes of this dissertation study, this figure provides a visual of the various levels of sensemaking that are potentially at play as the principal, teachers, and staff make sense of the implementation of a culturally responsive vision

and practices. Weick (1995) and Spillane et al. (2002) provided further explanation of the inner workings of sensemaking. A discussion of the potential application of these elements as a lens to analyze findings follows.

Properties of organizational sensemaking. What is happening here and what should be done about it (Kudesia, 2017; Weick, 1995)? These are the question that individuals and organizations seek to answer when they try to make sense of events and actions that disrupt their usual way of doing and understanding things. According to Weick (1995), seven properties shape the sensemaking of organizational actors as they seek to answer these questions and engage in the process of making sense of the uncertainty of their new reality. These properties are defined as follows: I*dentity Construction, Retrospection, Enactment, Social and Collaborative, Ongoing, Cue Extraction,* and *Plausibility*.

Identity construction. Sensemaking theorists assert that, when sensemaking occurs, information is often interpreted and filtered through the sensemakers' personal experiences and ways of knowing (Kennedy, 1982; Porac et al., 1989). Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld (2005) stated, "Who we think we are (identity) […] shapes what we enact and how we interpret, which affects what outsiders think we are (image) and how they treat us, which stabilizes or destabilizes our identity" (p. 416), meaning that how individuals act and respond to stimuli within organizations is determined by who they think they are as informed by aspects of their identity. These actions also inform the notions of others about what they think we are, what we believe, and what we value (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Weick et al., 2005). However, a single individual brings various identities and ways of knowing that influence the way they make sense of and interpret phenomenon and events (Weick, 1995).

Retrospection. Individuals make sense of disruptions (new situations and events) by mapping new knowledge, understanding, and messages onto existing experiences and ways of knowing. This is what Weick referred to as the retrospective nature of sensemaking (Weick, 1995): "The basic idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs" (p. 635). Particularly within environments that have experienced a disruption to the status quo, sensemakers try to understand what is happening by relying on their prior experiences to decide how they should respond and behave under current circumstances.

Enactment. Enactment is the idea that organizations create their environment and reality through collective dialogue or "talking into existence" and subsequent actions based on these conversations (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). Within organizations, the enactment process around particular concepts or events is often initiated by those in leadership positions, and those individuals bring with them their own identities and preconceptions about particular ideas. Jennings and Greenwood (2003) stated, "Someone must make sense and enact the environment. This actor has preconceptions, values, mental maps, and emotions—sufficient to create some variation from the prevailing patterns. The actor often enacts environments (acts and understands) in ways that reinforce understanding" (p. 202). The process of enactment is evident in previous studies of the sensemaking of school leaders around concepts such as reading policies (Coburn, 2005), accountability (Gawlik, 2015), and racial demographic shifts (Evans, 2007).

Social and collaborative. Collaborative sensemaking is a sociocultural process in which meaning around concepts and beliefs is conveyed and reinforced through conversation regarding the expectations, shared norms, and routines of an organization (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Gawlik,

2015). Some theorists assert that sensemaking occurs among individuals as they engage in these conversations that help them better understand and make sense of the new realities and expectations within their organization (Maitlis, 2005; Weick, 2005). These social interactions include any means of "talking into existence," including group discussions, meetings, and personal conversations (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413). Collaborative conversations and social interactions also influence individuals' sensemaking by functioning as a means for individuals to develop a common language, shared understandings, norms, and routines that mitigate the uncertainty caused by a disruption to the status quo (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Gawlik, 2015).

Ongoing. Sensemaking is an ongoing, continuous process. Weick (1995) stated that "sensemaking never stops" because "people are always in the middle of things" (p. 43). Being in the "middle of things" refers to the ongoing flow of significant and insignificant events and information that people process daily (Chia, 2000).

Cue extraction. Sensemaking begins when something has been identified as being out of order in some way and in need of future attention. This is what Weick referred to as *noticing and bracketing of cues* (Weick, 1995). In organizations and environments where there is constant change or flux, or where there has been a disruption to the status quo, individuals try to order and make sense of this flux by extracting cues from the environment. Maitlis and Christianson (2014) offered a succinct definition and description of what Weick referred to as cues. They stated, "Sensemaking is triggered by cues—such as issues, events, or situations—for which meaning is ambiguous and/or outcomes uncertain. Such occurrences, when noticed, interrupt people's ongoing flow, disrupting their understanding of the world and creating uncertainty about how to act" (p. 70). Cues that are extracted from the environment are often occurrences, situations, and actions that conflict with one's frames of reference, "mental models" and "operating models"—

models that structure understandings of how things should be done or how things have been done in the past (Abolafia, 2010; Weick et al., 2005).

According to Weick (1995), "Sensemaking starts with three elements – a frame, a cue, and a connection – with frames tending to be past moments of socialization and cues tending to be present moments of experience" (p. 110). Weick continued:

> The combination of a past moment + connection + present moment of experience creates a meaningful definition of the present situation…If a person can construct a relation between these two moments, meaning is created…the content of sensemaking is to be found in the frames and categories that summarize past experience, in the cues and labels that snare specifics of present experience, and in the ways these two settings of experience are connected. (p. 111)

Therefore, as one makes sense of their current experience, aspects of identity such as frames and models (beliefs, values, worldviews, and experience) influence what is *noticed and bracketed* as something in need of attention or what is ignored. Frames and models influence the cues that are selected from an environment, as well as the ways in which an individual makes sense of these cues and the subsequent action or inaction (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Evans, 2007) they take in addressing these issues.

*Plausibility***.** Due to the uncertainty and confusion caused by experiences that misalign with one's frames and models of understanding, sensemakers attempt to rationalize these experiences by developing plausible and reasonable explanations for what is happening (Brown, 2000; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014; Weick, 1995). What constitutes a plausible and reasonable explanation is filtered through aspects of identity and the understandings of the sensemaker. These explanations do not need to be accurate but plausible and reasonable enough to justify the

sensemakers' feelings and beliefs and to allow them to take action regarding the cues they extract from the environment (Weick, 1995).

Policy sensemaking in K-12 school contexts. Weick's (1995) properties of sensemaking can be useful for providing a lens for examining and understanding how a principal makes sense of their own leadership practices and decisions, as well as how the teachers and staff who are tasked with implementing these practices make sense of those practices and decisions. Whereas Weick's sensemaking properties apply to organizational sensemaking broadly, Spillane and colleagues (2002) built upon these properties to theorize about organizational sensemaking specifically within K-12 school contexts. This includes a consideration of issues of individual cognition, such as interpretations of message, superficial and misunderstanding of new ideas, bias of prior beliefs and values, and affective cost of self-image, as well as the role that factors such as social interactions, organization and historical contexts, and values and emotions play in situated cognition and sensemaking. The potential for Spillane et al.'s (2002) framework to complement Weick's organizational framework in understanding the sensemaking of cultural responsiveness and CRSL within this study is discussed below.

Individual cognition. Sensemaking in organizations occurs both individually and collaboratively (Coburn, 2001, 2005; Spillane et al., 2002; Walls, 2017). Spillane et al.'s (2002) cognitive sensemaking framework is unique in that it acknowledges that sensemaking is not only a collaborative, social process, but that principals, teachers and staff bring their own individual beliefs, emotions, values, and attitudes to bear on the sensemaking of education policies and practices. Spillane et al. (2002) stated, "What a policy means for implementing agents is constituted in the interaction of their existing cognitive structures (including knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes), their situation, and policy signals" (p. 388). Here, Spillane et al. (2002) included

the role of less tangible aspects of sensemaking, such as beliefs and attitudes, that have not been explicitly addressed in the sensemaking literature (Maitlis, Vogus, & Lawrence, 2013; Walls, 2017).

Given that addressing issues of cultural responsiveness in school contexts has the potential to extend to topics such as race, privilege, and power dynamics (topics that many school principals, teachers, and staff might find controversial), the inclusion of the role that individual beliefs and attitudes play in sensemaking is a useful addition to examine how a principal, teachers, and staff make sense of CRSL practices and policies.

Interpretations of policy messages. Scholars have found that even when teachers are offered the same professional learning opportunities that are meant to convey specific policy messages, such as workshops and professional development, how these messages are interpreted and understood varies widely from teacher to teacher based on their own prior knowledge and experiences (Coburn, 2001; Smith, 2000). For example, in a study about how teachers interpret reading policy, Spillane et al. (2002) explained:

> Some differences were due to the teachers' varying opportunities to learn about the policy, including the policy texts available, professional development workshops, and guidance and support from the district or school. Yet teachers who encountered the policy message from the same policy texts or professional development experiences constructed different understandings of the policy's message about revising reading instruction. (p. 397)

The possibility that the principal, teachers, and staff might have various interpretations of district and school level policy messages about cultural responsiveness is potentially relevant to this study as school level implementers bring their own beliefs and understandings to the school and classroom. Spillane et al.'s (2002) findings were an example of how teachers interpret policy

messages that they can implement through technical means, such as developing the requisite pedagogical content knowledge (Heifetz et al., 2009; Shulman, 1986). However, a consideration of the ways teachers interpret policy messages in various ways might be an especially pertinent means of analysis for culturally responsive sensemaking, given that such policy messages might include a consideration of issues of race and privilege, among other topics.

Superficial misunderstanding of new ideas. Spillane et al. (2002) noted that, when making sense of new concepts and ideas, school level implementers are likely to believe that these concepts and ideas are "more familiar than they actually are" (p. 397), resulting in minimal change toward the intended goal. In a study that examined how local school districts responded to state and national mathematics policies they found that sensemaking agents focused on more surface level components of the policy message than the "underlying structural ideas" (p. 401). They stated, "Drawing surface analogies and failing to access the deeper structural relations between the reform proposals and their experiences, district leaders interpreted the reform in ways that missed its core intent, contributing to superficial implementation of state and national mathematics policies" (p. 401). This consideration may also prove useful for understanding school level sensemaking of cultural responsiveness and efforts to promote more culturally responsive school environments. Previous research shows that discussions of culture and multiculturalism in schools are often taken up in superficial ways (Banks, 1996; Lee, Menkart, & Okazawa-Rey, 2006; Meyer & Rhoades, 2006) that misunderstand the "underlying structural ideas" (Spillane et al., 2002) of the concepts. When making sense of a topic such as cultural responsiveness in schools, school level implementers may also believe that they already know enough about these issues and that they are more familiar with the aims and goals of cultural responsiveness (Khalifa, 2018) than they actually are.

Bias of prior beliefs and values. Spillane et al. (2002) stated, "There are a number of ways that goals, affect, and biases can affect reasoning about complex judgments. Existing structures can be very resistant to change, and an individual's own experiences are more heavily counted in reasoning about debates than those from external experts" (p. 402). To illustrate this point, the authors provided an example in which teachers are told that changes need to be made in the ways they teach science. According to the authors, if teachers have a bias for the status quo and believe that "things are working fine as they are," they are likely to rationalize and "focus on information from experience consistent with that point of view" (p. 402). Because efforts to become more culturally responsive often challenge school level implementers to alter their practices, structures, and dispositions (Khalifa, 2018), they might also rationalize more palatable interpretations of cultural responsiveness and CRSL in ways that conform to their own understandings and experiences, in lieu of how these concepts are conceptualized in the research literature (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Affective cost of self-image. Spillane and colleagues (2002) also noted the potential for school reform expectations to affect the self-esteem and self-image of teachers, potentially leading to pushback against implementing reform ideas. They stated:

> Often, reform movements have the appearance of saying that what we were doing before in schools was "wrong" or at least less effective than what we could be doing. To accept reform and become its advocates could cost teachers some loss in positive self-image. Teachers might become advocates by deciding that they were "ahead of the curve" and already teaching in ways consistent with the reform. Or they might be motivated to discount the reform idea, seeing it as inconsistent with "the reality" that they "know best". (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 402-403)

As stated earlier, those who seek to be culturally responsive must begin by developing critically self-reflective habits that interrogate their own positionalities, beliefs, values, and self-perceptions and the role that they potentially play in perpetuating oppressive schooling conditions for minoritized students. Given this personal dimension of becoming culturally responsive, some teachers and staff might perceive efforts to develop their culturally responsive capacities as a suggestion that they are ineffective or negligent in their work as teachers, causing them to push back and be resistant to these efforts.

Situated cognition. In a discussion of Coburn's (2001) study of teacher sensemaking and implementation of reading policy, Spillane et al. (2002) summarized that Coburn "described how teachers' sensemaking even within the same school could be situated in different formal and informal groups.

Social interactions. Coburn observed that these situations mattered because teachers in different groups made different sense of the same policy" (p. 406). The authors argued that although teachers are often placed in formal groups, such as grade level teams, leadership teams, and equity teams among others, teachers also create "informal networks with similar worldviews" (p. 406). Formal groups are created to aid in the successful school level implementation of district level policy messages and practices. For the purposes of this study, such groups potentially provide the opportunity to understand how formal groups and social interactions influence the sensemaking of teachers and staff, specifically as it relates to becoming culturally responsive. Policies and practices that seek to promote cultural responsiveness in schools often engender resistance among school level implementers (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Khalifa, 2018), so a consideration of the potential presence of informal groups of teachers who hold opposing worldviews is warranted and relevant to this study.

Organizational context. Spillane et al. (2002) also described how organizational context influences school level sensemaking:

> Human interaction patterns in schools and other delivery agencies are in part a function of organizational structure. Organizational arrangements can hamper or enable interactions among implementation about policy practice. In schools, the prevailing "egg-carton" structure, in which teachers work chiefly as isolates with little interaction with colleagues, undermines opportunities for teachers to test or be exposed to alternative understanding of policy proposals. (p. 408)

In schools, teachers and staff often work in silos. Given this reality and lack of connectedness, a consideration of the traditional organizational context of school could evidence potential implications for how teachers and staff understand and implement policy messages and practices that aim to promote cultural responsiveness in schools. For example, in what ways, if at all, are teachers and staff given the opportunity to discuss and make sense of issues associated with creating a more culturally responsive school environment?

Historical context. Regarding the role that individual and organizational context affects sensemaking, Spillane et al. (2002) stated:

> A historical perspective, at both the individual and organizational levels, is also important. As is the case with individually held beliefs, most of what people know about the cultures that they inhabit is tacit—learned primarily through experience and the unconscious integration of contextual cues from being immersed as a member of the community. It is this tacit knowledge—actively acquired through participation in a culture—that forms the basis of an individual's beliefs and expectations about how to act in certain situations. (p. 410)

With many organizations, the axiom "We've always done it this way" seems to be the standard by which to measure past, present, and future organizational behavior. In regard to creating a more culturally responsive school environment, a consideration of the historical context of the research site may provide insight into how that historical context influences how teachers and staff make sense of, and respond to, practices that disrupt the established status quo and tacit expectations.

Values and emotions. Spillane et al. (2002) and other scholars have noted that the role of emotions and personal values has been under-researched in the sensemaking literature (Maitlis et al., 2013; Walls, 2017). Creating a more culturally responsive school environment requires that school level implementers grapple with issues and topics that are often thought to be controversial. Therefore, a consideration of the role of personal values and emotions may also prove valuable in understanding how individuals make sense of what it means to be culturally responsive, as well as how they make sense of practices to create a culturally responsive school environment.

Framing *big P* vs. *little p* policy and practices .In developing a theoretical framework for education policy sensemaking within K-12 school contexts, Spillane and colleagues have explored how teachers make sense of *big P* instructional policies focused on the teaching and learning of mathematics and science (Spillane & Callahan, 2000; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane & Zeuli, 1999). *Big P* policies refer to policies that are implemented at the national, state, and local (school district) level (Karpyn, 2016). Conversely, *little p* policy refers to "smaller institutional policies or practices" (Karpyn, 2016) such as school level policies and practices. Within a school district that has adopted culturally responsive initiatives and practices, this study seeks to utilize Spillane et al.'s (2002) sensemaking framework to explore how teachers and staff made sense of *little p* school level practices of a principal as they worked to promote a culturally responsive school environment.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Considering the ever-increasing diversity found among U.S. K-12 students, as well as the current political climate in the United States, the effective implementation of culturally responsive teaching, learning, and leadership is crucial. Scholars have acknowledged that there is limited literature on the role that school leaders play in the development of the culturally responsive competencies of their teaching staff (Hoover & Erickson, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Turner, 2015). This study is potentially significant because although there is literature about the characteristics and practices of culturally responsive school leaders, as well as how practitioners can implement culturally responsive leadership practices, there is not much literature about how individuals at the school level make sense of the expectations of creating a culturally responsive school environment for marginalized student populations.

Specifically, with regard to the role of principal leadership at the school level, Khalifa et al. (2016) stated, "Research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school; and conversely, district level mandates are only effective to the extent they are locally enforced" (p. 1274). Examining school level sensemaking provides an opportunity to consider the organizational factors that affect the implementation of culturally responsive practices within urban school environments. Given that the research site is situated within a school district that purports to have a commitment to cultural responsiveness, this study is also significant for its potential to contribute to the understanding of sensemaking across different layers of a school organization.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I provide a review of three bodies of relevant literature to contextualize the phenomena under study for the reader. The bodies of literature reviewed are 1) Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in K-12 Contexts, 2) Culturally Responsive School Leadership in K-12 Contexts, and 3) Sensemaking in K-12 Contexts. First, I briefly discuss the continuum of culturally responsive pedagogies, as well as the specific challenges experienced by teachers when implementing culturally responsive pedagogies in the classroom. This is followed by a review of literature that highlights principals' unique position and ability to function as change agents in K-12 contexts, as well as the leadership characteristics needed for school leaders to promote culturally responsive school environments. The chapter ends with a review of literature on sensemaking in K-12 contexts and a rationale for the relevance of sensemaking to this study.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY IN K-12 CONTEXTS

The continuum of culturally responsive pedagogies. Critical theorists have asserted that schools have historically been sites of power struggles between dominant and subordinate groups (Demarrais & LeCompte, 1999). From the Common School movement and beyond, power struggles predicated on race, ethnicity, religion, culture, and other identity markers have privileged, and continue to privilege, some groups while marginalizing others. Particularly, the historical privileging of White middle-class norms, and its adverse effects on the academic achievement and socioemotional well-being of minoritized student groups, led scholars to theorize notions of culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP). Within the context of this study, the term *culturally responsive pedagogy* denotes a broad range of practices that aim to meet the academic and socioemotional needs of diverse student learners. These include but are not limited to terms such as *culturally compatible* (Vogt, Jordan, & Tharp, 1987), *culturally responsive*

(Gay, 2000; Pewewardy, 1994; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a), *culturally relevant* (Ladson-Billings, 1994), *cultural synchronism* (Irvine, 2002), *cultural collusion* (Beachum & Mccray, 2008), *culturally proficient* (Lindsey, Robert, & CampbellJones, 2005; Terrell & Lindsey, 2009), *culturally sustaining* (Paris, 2012), and more recently, *reality pedagogy* (Emdin, 2016).

As early as the late 1970s (Cazden & Leggett, 1976), scholars began to consider how the epistemologies of diverse student populations could be used to "teach to and through" (Gay, 2000) students' academic strength. Gay defined CRP as a pedagogy that uses "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. It teaches to and *through* the strength of these students. It is culturally validating and affirming" (p. 9). In order to accomplish these objectives, Ladson-Billings (1995a) outlined three guiding principles for what was referred to at the time as culturally relevant pedagogy.

According to these principles, culturally relevant pedagogy should ensure that students are academically successful, culturally competent, and critically conscious. The first principle of academic success acknowledges that, at minimum, culturally relevant pedagogy should work to ensure that students are academically successful in order to participate in a democratic society. According to Ladson-Billings (1995a), culturally relevant pedagogy should accomplish this through teaching and learning that is relevant in that it incorporates students' cultural ways of knowing the world, as well as their everyday lived experiences (p. 161). The second principle of cultural competency acknowledges that culturally relevant pedagogy should view and honor students' indigenous cultural practices in ways that cause students to feel and believe that their cultural ways of being are valued and not seen as outside the realm of the culture of school (p. 162). The third principle of critical consciousness acknowledges that although academic success

and cultural competency are important, students must move beyond academic success and cultural competency to "develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities" (p. 162).

The centering of epistemological pluralism (Biermann, 2011) and the development of the sociopolitical consciousness of minoritized students continues to be a core belief of scholars who advocated for CRP. However, recent extensions of CRP have become more nuanced in order to address the wide range of cultural complexity that minoritized students and their communities bring to schooling environments, as well as to broaden the ways in which educators and scholars discuss and theorize culture—ways that acknowledge its ever-evolving and fluid nature (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012). This nuancing is a response to years of educators misunderstanding and misapplying the intentions of earlier theories of culturally relevant teaching and learning (Gay, 1994, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 1995b).

In response to the emergence of *culturally sustaining pedagogy*—one of the latest culturally responsive extensions—Nieto (2013) stated,

> Django Paris has developed the notion of culturally sustaining pedagogy, arguing that this term more directly supports the value of ensuring our multicultural, multiracial, and multiethnic future. Paris finds this particularly important given the contradiction that characterizes our society: a growing diversity but increasingly restrictive linguistic and cultural attitudes, practices, and legislation. (p. 138)

Nieto's explanation of *culturally sustaining pedagogy* showed that although iterations of culturally responsive pedagogies address various aspects of cultural responsiveness, they are constantly adapted to represent the range of cultural complexity among diverse student learners. Although

terminology periodically shifts to represent the development of nuanced understandings of culturally responsive pedagogies, what remains constant is the need for school environments to evolve their pedagogical practices and understandings to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. It is again with this in mind that the term *culturally responsive* is defined and used within this study.

CRP and challenges of implementation. Years of research on culturally responsive pedagogical practices substantiate the benefits that a diverse and culturally competent teaching force can have on the overall academic achievement and schooling experiences of students, especially students of color (Emdin, 2016; Gay, 1994, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Paris, 2012). However, despite the wealth of research on the theoretical concepts of culturally responsive pedagogy, the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogical practices by teachers remains a daunting task (Aronson, 2016; Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Scherff & Spector, 2011). The following studies highlight various challenges to implementing CRP.

Scholars and previous studies have provided insight into the challenges of teaching in culturally responsive ways. One challenge to the implementation of CRP is that teachers often do not understand the theoretical concepts of cultural responsiveness, and instead take up CRP in simplistic ways that do not address issues of power, privilege, and equity (Sleeter, 2011a). Sleeter categorized these actions into three categories: trivialization, essentializing, and substituting cultural analysis for political analysis (pp. 13-16). Trivializing CRP "involves reducing what is actually a paradigm for connecting teaching and learning with students' community-based culture, to steps to follow" (p. 13). She argued that practices such as the use of checklists by teachers and administrators to measure the implementation of CRP are problematic for the objectives of CRP because they reduce CRP to a specific set of actions that can be

codified in order to be culturally responsive. While there are steps and practices that teachers and administrators can implement to create more culturally responsive school environments, the reduction of this process to specific actions, practices, and curricula at one particular moment in time has the potential to "greatly reduce attention to cultural complexity" (Sleeter, 2011a), as well as reduce attention to the ongoing nature of becoming culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Sleeter (2011a) also argue that common practices such as cultural celebrations in isolation work to trivialize the larger objectives of CRP by avoiding the deeper work that requires teacher self-reflection and an awareness of the unique cultural processes and experiences that minoritized students bring to the classroom. Sleeter (2011a) stated:

> Viewing culturally responsive pedagogy as cultural celebration seems to be fairly common among educators who have not examined their own expectations for minoritized students, and whose attention has become focused on learning about other cultural traditions as an end itself. Learning "about" culture then substitutes for learning to teach challenging academic knowledge and skills through the cultural processes and knowledge students bring to school with them. (p. 13)

Sleeter (2011a) also identified essentialization as a byproduct of teachers' and administrators' lack of understanding of the theoretical concepts of cultural responsiveness. Essentialization means "assuming a fairly fixed and homogeneous conception of the culture of a minoritized group, with an assumption that students who are members of that group identify with that conception of who they are" (p. 14). Other scholars have documented how educators have projected essentialist views onto various cultural and ethnic groups through their practices.

In his ethnographic study of the implementation of an Afrocentric curriculum and reform initiative for urban Black high school students, Ginwright (2004) found that although educators enlisted the assistance of local experts and scholars to help design and implement a new Afrocentric curriculum, the scholars and some educators did so based on their own conceptualization of what Black students needed to be academically successful. This was a point of contention for the implementation of the program. Ginwright (2004) explained:

> The central item of contention was whether or not Africa and African themes and philosophy should be the central force in designing the curriculum. While most agreed that black history and African contributions was [sic] needed and should be included within the proposal, the "experts believed that African precepts, axioms, philosophy, and themes should guide, direct, and inform the content of the proposed changes. For other members, these items were merely peripheral to the need to engage students in higher order learning, critical thinking and more college preparation. (p. 80)

Participants disagreed about making African philosophy and epistemology the central focus of the curriculum. The scholars' and experts' approach was based on their essentialized notions of what Black students needed. Furthermore, Ginwright (2004) found that Black students believed that the program did not address real-life issues that affected their daily lives, such as "violence, poverty, teen pregnancy, and drugs" (p. 102).

Conversely, in her study of three high school mathematics teachers who were successful in teaching Latinx students, Gutiérrez (2002) found that these teachers were successful because they did not project their own essentialist views onto students, particularly regarding students' language ability. Instead, these three teachers developed genuine relationships with students that

helped the teachers understand how to better address students' mathematical and linguistic needs through their teaching. Gutiérrez (2002) observed:

> Not only did teachers not discount the role that language should or could play (they did not take a "language blind" view), but they also seemed to possess a keen knowledge of their students' linguistic and mathematical needs in a way that positively informed their teaching practices and respected the identity of their students. Their attention to detail and to individuals suggested a valuing of Latina/o diversity in the classroom and ownership of the mathematics on students' own terms. (p. 1066)

Lastly, Sleeter (2011a) identified the practice of substituting cultural analysis for political analysis as a result of teachers' and administrators' misunderstandings about the theoretical concepts of CRP. She explained that this practice "involves assuming that working with culture will, by itself, solve problems of equity and justice, thereby ignoring conditions of racism and other forms of oppression that underlie disparities in education outcomes" (p. 15). As Sleeter (2011a) stated, a political analysis and not just a cultural analysis is necessary to engage in CRP. This attention to the importance of sociopolitical consciousness and awareness has been a major component of culturally responsive approaches to teaching and learning since the early inception of these theories (Banks, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). However, while scholars agree and argue that a political analysis is required in efforts to become culturally responsive (Beauboeuf-Lafontant, 1999; Khalifa, 2018), many school-level stakeholders bring their own perceptions and biases to bear on their decisions to address or not address the sociopolitical issues that affect the lives of minoritized students and communities.

For example, in her action research and critical case study with urban teachers and administrators, Young (2010) found that there were "deep structural issues related to teachers'

cultural biases" (p. 248) and that these cultural biases were revealed through what teachers "expected the students to know and what knowledge was considered important" (p. 257). Throughout her study, Young observed that the only teacher who was willing to engage in conversations with students about sociopolitical issues like race was the study's only non-White participant. Lopez (2010) also found that White participants were less willing to engage in conversations about sociopolitical issues in her case study of a high school English teacher's use of critical literacy practices. These instances are examples of how the nation's current disproportionate representation of White teachers, particularly White females, within the teaching profession (Dunn, Dotson, Cross, Kesner, & Lundahl, 2014) has the potential to affect how the sociopolitical components of CRP are taken up. As Young's (2010) study suggested, White teachers are likely to hold unchecked biases regarding diverse student populations and their communities when teaching in diverse classrooms (Fasching-Varner, 2012; Milner, 2006; Shields, Bishop, & Mazawi, 2005). However, White teachers are not the only educators capable of holding biases about diverse student populations, nor are they incapable of being culturally responsive (Nieto, 2013).

Some scholars have provided examples of how teacher education programs can address pre-service teachers' biases and their perceptions of sociopolitical issues by developing their culturally responsive dispositions before they enter classrooms (Ladson-Billings, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Zuniga-Hills & Barnes, 1995). However, sustaining culturally responsive practices and dispositions can still prove difficult once teachers enter diverse schooling environments, even for those teachers who consider themselves to be open to notions of culturally responsive teaching. Sleeter (2001) aptly noted that "research in teacher education needs to follow graduates into the classroom, and our work needs to extend beyond preservice education, linking preservice

education with community-based learning and with ongoing professional development and school reform" (pp. 102-103).

Another challenge to the implementation of CRP is the pressure that is put on teachers to adhere to neoliberal reform efforts, such as high-stakes testing and accountability mandates (Comber & Nixon, 2009; Flores, 2007; Sleeter & Stillman, 2007). These mandates often pressure teachers to strictly conform to teaching that prepares students for standardized testing (Crocco & Costigan, 2006). Gutiérrez, Asato, and Gotanda (2002) stated that such neoliberal reforms often contribute to schooling environments that make it "professionally and, in some cases legally risky" to engage in culturally responsive practices (p. 345). Under these types of professional pressures, teachers may choose to conform to the status quo and protect their livelihoods, rather than engage in culturally responsive practices that may be beneficial for the teaching and learning of diverse students.

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP IN K-12 CONTEXTS

Principals as change agents. The literature on principal leadership is replete with studies that position principals as key stakeholders and change agents in localized school reform efforts. School reform in this context means small-scale, localized efforts of school administrators and teachers to improve socioemotional and academic outcomes for all students by strengthening professional capacity, school learning climate, and school-community ties (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, & Eaton, 2010; Green, 2015) within their specific school contexts. Viewing principals as catalytic change agents assumes that these school leaders are one of the driving forces in engendering agency and mobilizing action toward sustainable school reform among various stakeholders within their school community (Neumerski, 2013). Within the literature on principal leadership, several studies support the notion that effective principals exhibit

certain leadership characteristics that are conducive to effecting localized school reform efforts. These characteristics are often framed and focused on the goal of promoting overall student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008; Witzers, Boskers, & Kruger, 2003).

For example, in a study of twenty-six principals, Cotton (2003) found that positive student achievement was informed by leadership practices and characteristics, such as having visions and goals focused on increasing student learning, maintaining a positive school climate, engaging in rituals and ceremonies that support school culture, and fostering community and parent involvement. Research has suggested that principals promote and model attitudes and dispositions that reinforce their reform vision (Cotton, 2003). Leithwood and Riehl (2003) described the influence that school leaders have on their teaching staff this way: "Leaders sometimes do things, through words or actions, that have a direct effect on the primary goals of the collective, but more often their agency consists of influencing the thoughts and actions of other persons" (p. 8). The power to leverage certain leadership characteristics to democratically influence and promote routines and organizational ways of being is essential if a school leader is to maximize the effective implementation of their school reform vision by stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, and other members of the school community (Deal & Peterson, 1999; Leithwood, 1995; Riehl, 2000).

Given the increasing diversity of U.S. K-12 students, the pedagogical suggestions put forth by culturally responsive pedagogies, and the problems with teacher implementation of such pedagogies, school leaders have an even greater impetus to develop characteristics and models of principal leadership in order to lead in ways that intentionally develop cultural responsiveness within their school environments (Khalifa et al., 2016; Riehl, 2000). Khalifa et al. (2016) provided a synthesis of the research literature on CRSL. They also identified four behavioral strands and

characteristics of school leaders who are change agents for creating culturally responsive school environments. According to Khalifa and colleagues (2016), culturally responsive school leaders are critically self-aware and self-reflective, develop culturally responsive teachers, promote culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engage students and parents in community contexts. The following studies are examples of these behavioral strands and characteristics. Because these behavioral strands and characteristics are used as a conceptual framework for this study, a more detailed description of these strands and characteristics can be found in Chapter 1.

School leaders as critically self-aware and self-reflective. In their qualitative and autoethnographic students of six principals, Theoharis and Haddix (2011) found that many principals in the study had done their own "emotional and intellectual work around race, institutional racism, and Whiteness" prior to becoming school principals (p. 1338). Principals in the study revealed that the "emotional and intellectual work" around issues of race and racism were prompted by both personal and professional experiences that encouraged them to develop their critical consciousness. However, Gardiner and Enomoto (2006) found that principal preparation programs had not prepared the principal participants in their study to engage in the "emotional and intellectual work" needed to be culturally responsive leaders. In fact, the authors state, "In this study, the role of the principals as multicultural leaders was evolving as principals learned on the job. Generally, principals learn in actual situations and glean information from other principals" (p. 577). This is consistent with research that argues teacher and principal preparation programs often offer little exposure to issues of CRP and CRSL (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007; Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006; Jackson & Kelley, 2002).

Although quality leadership programs are necessary and can potentially play a significant role in the development of culturally responsive leadership characteristics, Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that a good leadership preparation program alone is not enough to develop culturally responsive school leaders. They claimed:

> A good leadership preparation program that addresses race, culture, language, national identity, and other areas of difference is necessary but not sufficient in developing a critical consciousness. The principal's critical consciousness of culture and race really serves as a foundation to establish beliefs that undergird her practice. (p. 1281)

Here, the authors highlighted that knowledge, awareness, and critical consciousness are not enough, but that these must translate into beliefs that inform the enactment of leadership practices.

School leaders and culturally responsive teacher development. Khalifa and colleagues (2016) argued that one way school leaders can create culturally responsive school environments is by developing culturally responsive teachers and staff. Generally, within K-12 school contexts, teachers and staff are exposed to new learning, content, and materials through professional development. In their study of a teacher-led professional development program, Voltz, Brazil, and Scott (2003) found professional development to be a potentially beneficial means of increasing the culturally responsive capacities of teachers and staff, specifically in regard to culturally responsive instruction and the disproportionality of students of color in education. The purpose of the program was to "foster teachers' knowledge and skills related to understanding and addressing culturally influenced learning and behavioral differences" (p. 64). The authors found that professional development contributed to the conceptual growth of teachers and staff around the issues of culturally responsive instruction and disproportionality of students of color in special education. More importantly, they found that special education educators have

significant decision-making power regarding the issuing of student referrals, and therefore, school leaders should intentionally provide professional development opportunities for special education educators and general education educators to increase their capacity to enact more culturally responsive practices in the classroom. These findings are relevant to this dissertation study because they provide insight into how a principal seeking to develop culturally responsive teachers and staff might utilize professional development opportunities.

School leaders as promoters of culturally responsive and inclusive school environments. In his two-year ethnographic study of teachers' and principals' practices at an alternative high school, Khalifa (2011) found that principals create more culturally responsive school environments by setting high expectations for both teachers and students. In this study, it was found that White teachers were more likely than Black teachers to lower their expectations for Black students by engaging in deal-making. According to Khalifa (2011), deal-making is the "phenomenon of teachers allowing students to disengage from academic and/or social expectations resulting in temporary teacher comfort or classroom harmony" (p. 703). However, the principal in this study "was able to recognize Black student disengagement, and the White teachers' responses […] and he resisted any attempts of teachers to exclude students from their classroom or school, or to allow teachers to lower expectations for students" (p. 717). In this study, White teachers' acquiescence through deal-making, although well-intentioned, had the potential to perpetuate students' academic disengagement and contribute to their exclusion from the learning process. By intervening in the practice of deal-making, the principal modeled his expectations for teacher and student interactions in ways that promoted a more culturally responsive and inclusive school environment for Black students.

School leaders and the engagement of students and parents. In his recent book on the subject, Khalifa (2018) discussed how culturally responsive school leaders should work to engage students and parents in ways that honors their indigenous (community based) knowledge, practices, and characteristics. He argued that the *funds of knowledge* (Moll et al., 2005) that marginalized students bring to school are often disregarded and labeled as being outside the realm of traditional school culture, and that it is the role and responsibility of school principals and other leaders to utilize students' indigenous assets to "shape policy and the humanization of minoritized students throughout the school" (p. 110). He described this process as *identity confluence*—a process in which "students' academic identities are developed alongside local Indigenous identities that typically are pushed out of school" (p. 110). To illustrate this process, Khalifa (2018) provided examples of contemporary student behaviors such as a student dancing to hip-hop in the classroom or wearing a Black Lives Matter t-shirt in class. In today's political climate, actions such as wearing a Black Lives Matter teacher might elicit criticism from principals and teachers. However, a culturally responsive school principal who seeks to engage all students and their students would use this opportunity to model to students, teachers, staff, and parents that their voices, perspectives, and realities matter.

While these previous studies are examples of CRSL in K-12 school contexts, few to no studies have applied the four CRSL behavioral strands as a conceptual framework to examine the leadership practices of urban principals, as well as their sensemaking of those practices within K-12 contexts. The next section will review literature about sensemaking in K-12 contexts and its relevance to this dissertation study.

SENSEMAKING IN K-12 SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Studies of sensemaking in K-12 contexts have examined how teachers and school leaders understand, interpret, and negotiate the meaning of instructional practices and school policies (Coburn, 2001; Jennings, 1996; Spillane and Jennings, 1997), as well as school culture, routines, and structures (Porac et al., 1989; Weick, 1995). Centering the sensemaking of principals is vital to developing the culturally responsive capacities of teachers because principals often have the positional authority to function as change agents who shape school culture, routines, and structures. The following studies are examples of how principals and teachers make sense of various policies and practices within K-12 contexts.

In her study of two elementary school principals and their teachers and staff, Coburn (2005) employed sensemaking to investigate how principals influenced the ways teachers adapted and interpreted reading policy. She found that principals influenced teachers' enactment of reading policy by "shaping access to policy ideas, participating in the social process of interpretation and adaptation, and creating substantively different conditions for teacher learning in schools" (p. 476). For example, the study highlighted the example of one principal who, upon arriving at her new school, found teachers and staff grappling with a new state policy that mandated a focus on literature-based instruction. However, this approach did not seem logical to the principal based on what she knew from her experiences as a former teacher. As a result, the principal began to spend "funds to purchase packaged phonics approaches and train teachers on them to supplement what she saw as a lack of attention to phonics in the state-adopted reading series" (p. 489). In doing so, she shaped her teachers' and staff's access to policy ideas based on what she believed to be reasonable or what Weick (2005) would refer to as plausible.

Coburn (2005) also found that principals played a significant role in how teachers made sense of policy messages. She stated, “Both principals played an important role in this social process of meaning making and interpretation. They were active participants with teachers in the sensemaking process during formal meetings and informal conversations. Principals’ interpretations were often influential in shaping how teachers came to understand and enact messages” (p. 491). Principals not only influenced how teachers and staff made sense and meaning of policy, but Coburn (2005) also found that principals “influenced how teachers responded to policy ideas by shaping the social, structural, and cultural conditions for teacher learning in the school” (p. 496).

Similarly, in a qualitative case study of two elementary charter schools, Gawlik (2015) found that charter school leaders’ interpretation and mediation of messages of state and federal accountability mandates within their schooling context shaped the leadership practices they enacted, as well as the way teachers made sense of the meaning of accountability. She stated:

> Charter school leaders’ knowledge of the accountability mandates dictated under NCLB influenced key leadership practices which, in turn, shaped both their sensemaking and delivery of messages to teachers. Specifically, charter school leaders drew on their own understandings of accountability on a daily basis as they interpreted policy messages about the social construction of meaning. (p. 402)

Gawlik (2015) found that the ways accountability was implemented in the school contexts were directly related to the ways that school leaders understood accountability legislation. She also found that school leaders would convey their messages and understandings of accountability through formal and informal meetings, such as staff meetings and professional development. Specifically, regarding the influence school leaders’ understanding of accountability had on

teachers' classroom practices, Gawlik (2015) stated, "Charter school leaders influenced the direction of the conversation and set parameters through which teachers exercised their own construction of meaning" (p. 403). Gawlik (2015) concluded that "the leader of a school is one of the most important individuals to influence common educational goals, and the importance of school leader's [sic] sensemaking lies in the assumption that the meaning they make of situations determine how they define and respond to them via actions on school programs, policies, and practices" (p. 397). The findings in both the Coburn (2005) and Gawlik (2015) studies are useful for the current dissertation study of principal and teacher sensemaking of cultural responsiveness because they provide a basis for comparing how the principal in this case study influences the sensemaking of her teachers and staff around this concept.

In the previous studies, principals played a significant role in shaping how teachers and staff made sense of policy ideas and messages. In her study of three suburban high schools that were experiencing an increase in African American students., Evans (2007) found that the prevailing organizational ideology of the local school context was closely related to how the school leader made sense of issues of race. She stated, "School leaders in this study defined and made sense of situations and issues in ways they believed reflected organizational ideology, values, or other key features of the school environment" (p.183). At one of the schools, Evans (2007) found that teachers and staff were inflexible "regarding demographic change and specifically African American students" (p. 170). Teachers and administrators were found to hold deficit views of African American students. For example, one administrator stated that African American students were louder and talked differently from their White counterparts, and this was the case because "it's the culture where they are taught this behavior" and that is "just how they are" (p. 170). However, when a district-wide committee formed a multicultural

professional development committee, teachers and administrators resisted these efforts because they believed that "kids are kids" and that they treated all students equally (p. 170). Within this organizational context (Spillane et al., 2002), Evans (2007) found that the principal responded to many school issues in ways that took a similar colorblind approach.

Evans' (2007) findings are relevant to this dissertation study because they offer insight into the degree in which school leaders' sensemaking influences how they lead, as well as how organizational context (Spillane et al., 2002) potentially influences principal, teacher, and staff sensemaking as well. Although Evans used sensemaking to examine how school leaders made sense of race, few scholars have used a sensemaking framework to examine the individual and collective sensemaking that occurs among principals, teachers, and staff as they attempt to create a more culturally responsive school environment for historically minoritized students.

In a more recent study of sensemaking in K-12 contexts, Holmlund, Lesseig, and Slavit (2018) examined educators' various conceptualizations of STEM education. They found that even though educators received the same professional development and learning opportunities regarding STEM education, how they made sense of this concept varied. They attributed these various conceptions to a lack of clear vision and message about what STEM education means and should look like. They suggested that educators:

> working in the same system, be it a department, school, or district, explore the common elements that are being attributed to STEM education and co-construct a vision that provides opportunities for all their students to attain STEM-related goals. Visioning, however, is insufficient, as what is envisioned and what is implemented are often very different. Educators must push on the status quo in areas of instruction, curriculum, learning opportunities, assessment, and school structures. (p. 17)

Holmlund et al. (2018) suggested that in order to lessen the occurrence of various conceptualizations of STEM education among educators, stakeholders from different contexts and positions should engage in ongoing and collective sensemaking through professional dialogue to ensure that diverse perspectives about the attributes for STEM teaching, learning, and curricula can be raised and discussed (p. 17). The findings for this study are potentially useful for this dissertation study because they show how educators can have different conceptualizations of the same concept and how the lack of a clear vision and message about concepts contribute to differing understandings.

All three of the bodies of literature above provide examples and perspectives that will prove useful for an examination of principal and teacher sensemaking around cultural responsiveness and CRSL. The following chapter outlines the qualitative methods that were used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

In this chapter, I provide an outline of and rationale for the methodological choices that frame this study. I begin with an explanation of the relevance of qualitative methodology to this dissertation study, specifically mini-ethnographic case study. This will be followed by a description of the research context and the process for data collection and analysis. The chapter ends with a consideration of the insights and challenges posed by my researcher positionality and the steps that were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the research design.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Maxwell (2013) asserted that the selection of a research methodology depends on the types of questions and goals one seeks to answer and understand through their research. The research questions that guide this dissertation study align with the process-oriented goals of qualitative research and inquiry (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 1998). These goals seek to understand the "world in terms of people, situations, events, and the processes that connect these; explanation is based on analysis of how some situations and events influence others" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 29). Thus, the goal of understanding the perspectives and factors that contribute to the process of principal and teacher sensemaking of cultural responsiveness and culturally responsive leadership practices is an appropriate one for qualitative inquiry.

MINI-ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDY

This dissertation utilized a mini-ethnographic case study approach (Fusch, Fusch & Ness, 2017) to meet the objectives and explore the aforementioned research questions. Mini-ethnographic case study is a blended methodological approach that allows for the study of a "contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (Yin, 2014, p. 2) using ethnographic methods. Typically, ethnographic case study research occurs over an extended period of time;

however, a mini-ethnographic case study approach is unique in that it allows for the use of ethnographic methods, such as participant observations and recording field notes, within a shorter period of time (Alfonso, 2012; Fusch et al., 2017). This study fit the criteria for a mini-ethnography because it was a case study that lasted for six months and included elements of ethnography such as participant observations.

RESEARCH CONTEXT

Miller Creek City demographics. Located in the Midwest United States, Miller Creek has a population of approximately 120,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2018). The racial and ethnic demographics for Miller Creek can be found below in Figure 2. Prior to 2005, the automobile industry was a major source of industry and financial stability for many Miller Creek residents. However, in 2005, many of the automobile plants in the area shut down, contributing to a rise in unemployment rates. According to the most recent census, the median income is approximately $39,000 and the estimated poverty rate of 27% is over double the national average. The comparable national averages are $57,652 and 12.3% respectively.

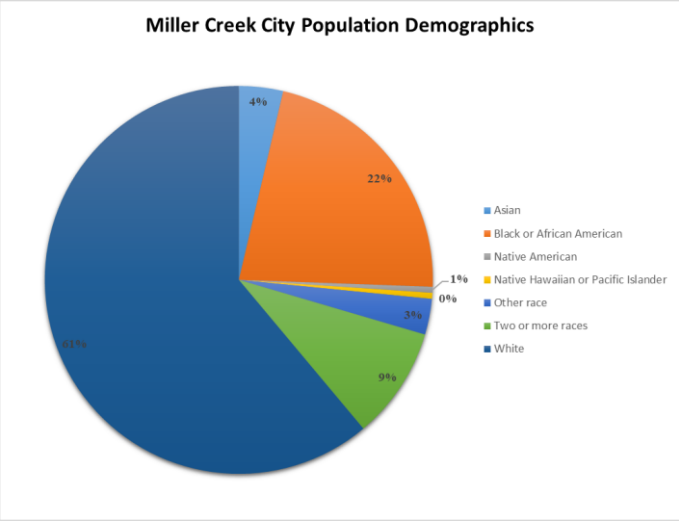

Figure 2: Miller Creek City Population Demographics. The pie graph displays percentages for the demographics in the city of Miller Creek.

Miller Creek School District background. Miller Creek School District (MCSD) is a large urban district and the only public school district that serves the city of Miller Creek. MCSD has a student population of approximately 11,000 students, with more than 70% of those students classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged. MCSD has over 2,500 teachers and staff who work with a diverse student population in more than 20 schools and vocational training programs across the district. The racial and ethnic demographic of the MCSD student population consists of approximately 40% African American, 25% white, 20% Hispanic, 10% multiracial, and 10% other racial minorities.

Applegate Elementary School demographics. Applegate Elementary School is a PK-3 school located within MCSD. Applegate teachers and staff demographics are similar to teacher demographics across the nation in that the teaching staff is majority White and female. Below is a breakdown of Applegate student demographics during the 2017-2019 school years.

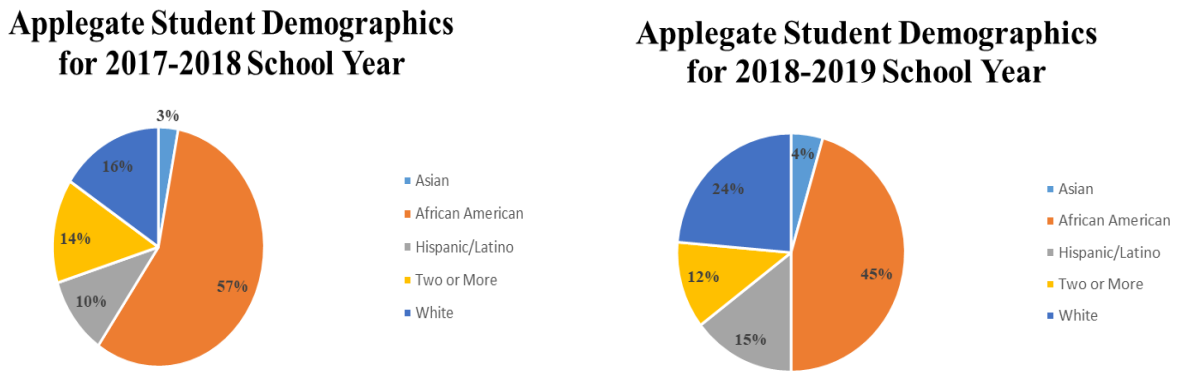

Figure 3: Applegate Student Demographics. The pie graphs display the percentages for the demographics of the students at Applegate for the 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 school years.

Although Applegate student demographics shifted slightly over the course of my pilot and dissertation study, the majority of the student population identified as students of color.

Applegate is a low-income Title 1 school. During the 2017-2018 school year, 89% of students were eligible for free and reduced lunch, and 81% were eligible during the 2018-2019 school year. Tanya Schwartz, principal of Applegate, detailed the general demographic shift that has occurred both within the school and the surrounding community over the past several years:

> This community has transitioned significantly over the years. The teachers that are vets that have been here will tell you that it used to be much more Caucasian. It's interesting, because this is the elementary school that my mother attended, and her siblings, and it was much different then. I believe through the '90s it was predominantly Hispanic. Then it moved to primarily African American. We are situated between two low-income housing complexes. Unfortunately, one is primarily African American, one is primarily Lithuanian, and there are drugs in the community. I don't want to call it a war, but they are at odds and don't get along. We are right in the middle of this mess. My teaching population is the opposite. I have predominantly Caucasian teachers servicing my African American students. When you walk into the building, from the principal to the secretary to most of my teachers, my staff is not predominantly African American. I think that it makes a difference to parents. I just have to be much more intentional with my relationship-building that they feel comfortable with me. Until this week, I only had one African American teacher. Now I have three out of a staff of twenty-seven. We're working on that. There's a disconnect.

DATA COLLECTION

Participant selection and recruitment. Prior to this dissertation study, I conducted a pilot case study (Yin, 2014) in which I examined how principals made sense of culturally responsive school leadership. Through formal and informal interviews and interactions, I found

that only one of the research participants understood and sought to practice culturally responsive leadership in ways that were more closely aligned to the current research literature (Khalifa et al., 2016), that is, in ways that attempt to "create a new environment of learning for children in their building who have been marginalized by race and class" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1281). As part of the local university's school leadership and administration program, I had the opportunity to work with this former research participant, Principal Tanya Schwartz, as a principal intern at Applegate. As a principal intern, I often shadowed Principal Schwartz as she attended district level principal meetings, school-level staff meetings, grade-level instructional meetings, and classroom and teacher observations. I also had the opportunity to elicit Applegate teachers', parents', and students' perspectives about issues of school climate and organizational culture through surveys and focus groups. The administration internship experience introduced me to the daily work and challenges of the principalship, and it also allowed me to learn more about Principal Schwartz's vision for cultural responsiveness and some of the challenges she faced as she attempted to articulate this vision within her school context.

My previous background within Applegate made this school a *realistic site* for more in-depth dissertation research. Marshall and Rossman (2006) described a *realistic site* as a research context in which:

> (a) entry is possible; (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present; (c) the researcher is likely to be able to build trusting relations with the participants in the study; (d) the study can be conducted and reported ethically; and (e) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured. (p. 62)

CRSL and other forms of social justice-oriented leadership are unique in that they require school leaders and educators to have an intentional commitment to issues of social justice (Khalifa et al., 2016; Theoharis, 2007). Principal Schwartz had been recognized by Miller Creek School District (MCSD) for her efforts to create a culturally responsive school environment for historically marginalized students. MCSD had also taken up district-wide initiatives around culturally responsiveness in schools. Therefore, Applegate, led by Principal Schwartz, represented a *purposive sample* (Creswell, 2012; Patton, 2002) to study school-level sensemaking of culturally responsive policies and practices.

Establishing rapport. I believed that Applegate was a purposive and realistic site for this dissertation study because it was one of few schools, if not the only school in MCSD, where a school principal was identified as attempting to take up cultural responsiveness in critical ways. While I was aware of the benefits of this context—benefits such as the relative familiarity shared between the principal, teachers, staff and I and the alignment of the purpose of this dissertation with the practices and beliefs found within the school context— I was also aware of the potential challenges of building rapport and trust among research participants. Maxwell (2013) addressed the complex nature of rapport building in qualitative research. He stated, "It's the kind of rapport, as well as the amount, that is critical [...] the research relationships that you establish can facilitate or hinder other aspects of the research design, such as participant selection and data collection" (p. 91). Identifying participants for qualitative research can be challenging in any case; however, this challenge may be compounded when the research has the potential to address issues of race and privilege.

I anticipated that potential research participants might be hesitant or reluctant to fully reveal certain aspects of their individual sensemaking around cultural responsiveness and their

principal's leadership practices, even though they were relatively familiar with me. Therefore, in an effort to build deeper rapport between myself and potential research participants, I reintroduced myself into the research context for 12 weeks by becoming more visible and active within the school community prior to collecting interview data. I helped Applegate teachers and staff in various ways, such as volunteering with lunch duty, recess, school social functions, and academic programs. I also regularly assisted school staff in preparing and delivering emergency weekend food packages to students and their families during the school year. These experiences were beneficial for Applegate teachers and staff because they helped to fill the gap when human resources were limited, but they also gave me the chance as a researcher to build deeper rapport with teachers and staff by getting to know more about them and the students and community they serve.

School-level recruitment and selection. Participant selection and recruitment were open to any teacher or staff member who was interested in participating in this study. The purpose of this approach was to make sure that the perspectives of not only the principal and teachers, but of other staff members such as the school secretary and student support staff, were considered in this study. This approach is consistent with the role that researchers believe support staff can play in promoting culturally responsive school environments. Khalifa (2018) noted that, although support staff are usually not trained in how to be culturally responsive, "they have power and often significantly contribute to a culturally responsive school environment" (p. 154). There were also selection criteria and preferences that were considered for school-level selection and recruitment. For example, I wanted a range of grade levels represented from Pre-K to third grade. I also wanted to include teachers with various years of teaching experience. The social identities of participants were also a factor in selection and recruitment, as these identities might inform

the way participants make sense of particular concepts and the principal's leadership decisions and practices. Therefore, I wanted to include teachers from various racial, ethnic, and gender identities.

In an effort to facilitate the participant recruitment process, Principal Schwartz extended the opportunity for me to observe and learn more about the work of the Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS) team. Members of this team included PK-3 teachers, as well as support staff who were selected by the principal to work on ways to create a more equitable school environment, including engaging in practices thought to be culturally responsive. Given the purpose of this group and my dissertation research, this seemed like the most logical place to begin participant recruitment. After observing two CRPBIS team meetings, I introduced and explained the purpose of the study and the consent process to the group. Those interested were given a Research Participant Information and Consent Form (Appendix A).

In order to increase the probability of including a variety of perspectives in this study, I knew I needed to branch out to other potential participants who were not a part of the CRPBIS team. After discussing this with Principal Schwartz, I was granted permission to introduce the study during a schoolwide staff meeting. I followed the same procedure for introducing the study and the consent process to the full staff that that I used for the smaller CRPBIS team. Additional consent forms for potential participants were left with the school secretary in the front office.

I did not anticipate that participant recruitment would also be facilitated by teachers and staff. However, when teachers and staff would see me in the school context, many would refer others who they believed would be a good fit for this study. People referred would often be those who were known to have strong beliefs about cultural responsiveness or those who might have

interesting perspectives about the subject matter because of their identities and backgrounds. Initially, I planned to recruit one to two school-level participants. The rationale behind this sample size was to be able to recruit half of the participants from the CRPBIS team and half of the participants from outside of that group. At the end of the school-level recruitment phase, eight participants, including Principal Schwartz, agreed to participate in the study. This group included five participants from the CRPBIS team and three participants who were not members of the CRPBIS team. One of those three, Applegate's only White male teacher, was initially part of the CRPBIS team but chose to leave and no longer be a member of the group. Another of the three, a White female who taught for over 30 years at Applegate and who was not a member of the CRPBIS team, exhibited hesitancy during our discussions about cultural responsiveness in schools. She chose not to continue with the second half of the study after the first interview.

District-level recruitment and selection. As I worked to build rapport with Applegate teachers and staff, I sought out potential district-level participants who would be able to help me answer my research question regarding the district-level messages that were received by principals, teachers, and staff about cultural responsiveness. Since district-level leaders such as superintendents and program directors are likely to have a deeper knowledge of the organizational goals of a district, I initially planned to recruit two to three district-level leadership team members to understand what messages, if any, were conveyed to principals, teachers, and staff around cultural responsiveness as an organizational goal. Recruiting a district-level participant was relatively straightforward as MCSD had an Office of School Climate and Culture that was responsible for supporting schools across the district in implementing CRPBIS and other initiatives to meet the socioemotional needs of MCSD students. Superintendent Anthony Williams headed this office and was the district leader who many in MCSD referred to

as being directly involved in the discussions and implementation of the district's culturally responsive initiatives and goals. I sent an email to Mr. Williams explaining that he had been identified as the person who could assist me in understanding messages about cultural responsiveness from the district level. I also briefly explained the purpose of the study in the email. Mr. Williams agreed to be a part of the study. So although I initially planned to have a variety of voices from the district-level regarding the district's goals and initiatives for promoting cultural responsiveness in schools, the organizational and hierarchical structure within the district, as well as time constraints, limited district-level participants to one individual.

Participant profiles. Although school principals play a significant role in promoting school policies and practices, the extent to which those policies and practices are taken up depends in large part on the beliefs and attitudes that teachers and staff have about those policies and practices (Spillane et al., 2002). The goal of this study was to not only understand what informs an urban school principal's leadership decision for creating a more culturally responsive school, but to also understand what informs how teachers and staff make sense of those decisions. Therefore, participants in this study brought their unique perspectives from both the district and the school levels. Nine individuals participated in this study. These include one district-level leader, one elementary school principal, and seven PK-3 teachers and staff members. The following are brief profiles that highlight each participant's current position, how they identify, the number of years they have taught at Applegate, and their previous experiences in education prior to arriving at Applegate. The profiles are followed by quotes that provide snapshots regarding aspects of each participant's personal and professional identities, such as their upbringing, schooling experiences, and perspectives about teaching and learning. Aspects

of participants' identities and their effect on school-level sensemaking will be discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Anthony. Anthony Williams is the Assistant Superintendent of School Climate and Culture for MCSD. He identifies as an African American male, and he has worked with MCSD for approximately ten years. Prior to his role as Assistant Superintendent of School Climate and Culture, Anthony worked with various community-based programs that focused on addressing the opportunity gap for minoritized student populations. When asked about the district's efforts to promote and implement a district-wide vision around creating more culturally responsive school environments, Assistant Superintendent Williams stated:

> I would not say that we have identified best practices because it really comes from a philosophy of thought around readiness and whether or not people are ready to have this conversation versus just forcing the conversation.

Tanya. Tanya Schwartz is the principal of Applegate Elementary School. She identifies as a White, middle class female and has been the principal of Applegate for the past three years. Prior to leading Applegate, she worked in both suburban and urban school districts for nine years as a middle school social studies teacher and a reading intervention specialist. Tanya described herself as an advocate for social justice and equity and makes efforts to intentionally create spaces for teachers and staff to have conversations about issues such as race and privilege:

> I was very intentional about building a relationship with each teacher, but yet starting to bring up concepts of race and privilege and bias in a small way. It would begin in my newsletters and it would begin with me conducting small book clubs, and not throwing it in the face of staff at meetings right away, and having smaller groups discuss it and feel comfortable.

Amanda. Amanda is a first-grade teacher at Applegate. She identifies as a White, middle-class female. This is Amanda's first year teaching at the school, and she has been an educator for seventeen years. Prior to coming to Applegate, Amanda was an elementary teacher in suburban districts. When asked about her upbringing, Amanda described her experiences growing up in her hometown:

> It's supposedly the KKK capital of the world and I am very, you know, blonde, blue-eyed. So it's kind of interesting, you know, being in this school district and talking about what we're talking about [cultural responsiveness]. It's just an interesting background considering where I grew up. I grew up dealing with a lot of racial issues and not being exposed to a lot of things[...]and then I always think that people are going to think I'm racist.

Tiffany. Tiffany is a kindergarten teacher at Applegate and is in her fifth year of teaching. She has taught at Applegate for the past year and a half. Prior to teaching at Applegate, Tiffany was an elementary teacher. She identifies as a Black female but did not claim to have any particular ethnicity:

> I identify with...I'm an American. I'm, you know, like I say Black American because in a lot of other countries and a lot of other cultures, Black and White is a color or race versus a culture. And I feel like in America, we talk about black as being a culture or African American as a culture. But most people can't properly trace back their ancestry.

Lauren. Lauren is a Pre-K teacher at Applegate. She identifies as a White, upper middle-class female. She has taught at Applegate for the past five years, and she has been an educator for about fifteen years. Prior to coming to Applegate, she taught Pre-K and kindergarten in several rural school districts:

> So I taught in the Pre-K program at my last school, which made me fall in love with the Pre-K. I fell in love with being able to help kids that aren't normally getting that help and services they need at home. So even though where I worked before was very, very rural with a different kind of poverty and different culturally, I think it just made me enjoy working with children that weren't getting their needs met at home. And so when we moved down here, I was just really looking for another program that I could fit into. And so this is my first experience in any kind of urban school district.

Linda. Linda is a member of the student support team at Applegate. She identifies as an African American, middle-class female. Among other responsibilities, she serves as the school's restorative justice facilitator. She was has worked at Applegate for the past four years and has been an educator for more than fifteen years. Prior to working at Applegate, Linda taught a range of grades and levels from PreK to college. She described her schooling experiences growing up in the segregated South:

> I grew up in the segregated South my whole life really. I went to an all-Black school because desegregation had not yet affected us. I loved school. I used to play school all the time. We didn't have a lot of toys, you know. We had to use our imagination because we didn't have all these electronic things that kids have now. And I used to play school and I knew that's what I wanted to do and be when I grew up. And also because of the teachers, the black teachers that I had that really pushed me and influenced me and I liked how they talked, how they treated me. I wanted to be like that. Like that teacher.

Jeff. Jeff is a third-grade teacher at Applegate. He identifies as a White, middle-class male. Jeff is the only White male teacher in the school. He has taught at Applegate for the last

five years. Prior to teaching at Applegate, Jeff taught a variety of subjects in grades K-4. He has been an educator for fourteen years. Jeff explained his philosophy for teaching diverse students:

> I don't care if you're green, purple, black, white, blue, brown, gray. You are a human being. I'm looking at you as a human being. And in this thing called life that we go through, we have our ups and downs. We all do. No matter what ethnic background you are, and I'm going to care for you as a human.

Derrick. Derrick is a second-grade teacher at Applegate. He identifies as an African American, middle-class male. He is the only African American male teacher at Applegate and one of three African American teachers in a school of twenty-seven teachers. This was Derrick's first year teaching at Applegate. Prior to coming to Applegate, Derrick was an elementary and middle school teacher. He has been an educator for twelve years:

> Well, I like kids who want to come in and learn. That's my thing. I know all children don't like school, but for me if you want to be here, you more likely want to learn. The driving force for me, as I look at society, we as African Americans are always getting closed out and shot down. There's always something negative that we have to fight through. I keep stressing if you have an education, they can't take it from you and my thing is to give you the skills, the tools to go and get an education and do something with it. I don't care what you're going to do. At least if you got it, you've earned something to where a door could open. Whereas without an education and being an African American, especially an African American male, it's not going to be pretty.

Christine. Christine is a first-grade teacher at Applegate. She identifies as a White, Italian middle-class female. She is Applegate's most veteran teacher, having taught at Applegate for

over thirty years. Christine's entire elementary teaching career has been at Applegate. Christine explained her schooling experiences of struggling to fit into White American society:

> My parents speak in Italian most of the time. From my experiences with my family, I felt like I was that kid that wanted to be the all-American kid. I did not feel like I fit in. I wanted to be the Susie, the Mary. I did not want to be that little girl who had Italian blood. Although recently I learned that my heritage is more complicated than that. But I didn't feel like I fit in 100% in this society.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Participants	Position	Race	Gender	Number of Years in Education	Number of Years at Applegate
Assistant Superintendent Williams	Asst. Superintendent of School Climate and Culture	Black	Male	10	NA
Principal Tanya Schwartz	Principal	White	Female	12	3
Amanda	Teacher	White	Female	17	1
Lauren	Teacher	White	Female	15	5
Linda	Student Support Spec.	Black	Female	15+	4
Derrick	Teacher	Black	Male	12	1
Jeff	Teacher	White	Male	14	5
Tiffany	Teacher	Black	Female	5	1.5
Christine	Teacher	White	Female	30+	30+

Interviews. Yin (2014) referred to interviews as "one of the most important sources of case study information" (p. 110). In an effort to understand sensemaking within school contexts, interviews function as the main means by which principals, teachers, and staff can begin to make sense of "new ideas and existing understanding" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 392) through conversation (Weick et al., 2005). Therefore, a flexible, semi-structured interview approach (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002) was used for this study. After observing the school context and reintroducing myself to the Applegate school community from September through December 2018, interviews were conducted from December 2018 until March 2019. Four interviews were

conducted with Principal Schwartz. As Principal Schwartz is the catalyst for the sensemaking occurring at Applegate, more interviews were conducted with her to get a deeper understanding of what informed her own sensemaking and her decisions to take up leadership practices in particular ways. Two interviews each were conducted with teachers and staff. A combined total of 18 individual district-level and school-level interviews lasting approximately 45-60 minutes each were conducted. Interviews were recorded using both a laptop with Garageband software and a backup portable audio recorder. All interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

District-level leadership interviews. One interview was conducted with MCSD's Assistant Superintendent of School Climate and Culture. The purpose of this interview was to gather context in understanding how messages around culturally responsive initiatives are framed and disseminated at the district level. These messages are significant due to their potential to influence school-level sensemaking of culturally responsive policies and practices. Questions posed (See Appendix B) sought to understand how, if at all, cultural responsiveness was defined at the district level. (*How does the district define cultural responsiveness? How do you personally define cultural responsiveness?*). Questions also sought to understand why MCSD decided to make cultural responsiveness a district goal (*From your understanding, why has the district decided to implement culturally responsive initiatives and practices?*) and how the district believes that it is implementing culturally responsive practice and supporting principals, teachers, and students in understanding cultural responsiveness (*What materials, professional development, and/or opportunities are principals, teachers, etc. given to understand and implement the district's vision of cultural responsiveness?*).

School-level interviews. School-level interviews focused more on understanding how Applegate's principal, teachers, and staff made sense of the messages, initiatives, and practices

that emanate both from the district level and the school level (via the school principal). The initial school-level interview protocols (See Appendices C and D) consisted of four individual interviews with Principal Schwartz and two interviews each with teachers and staff. The purpose of individual interviews with Principal Schwartz was to understand how she made sense of the task of creating a more culturally responsive school environment. The first interview was used to develop rapport with Principal Schwartz. Questions from the first interview focused on understanding Principal Schwartz's upbringing and school experiences *(What were your own schooling experiences like?),* her motivations for becoming an educator *(What motivated you to become an educator?),* her previous teaching experiences, and the demographics *(Can you tell me a little bit about the school that you lead now, such as the demographics, culture, and climate?),* challenges, and successes of Applegate. The second and third interviews sought to understand Principal Schwartz's conceptualization of cultural responsiveness and the specific leadership practices and decisions she enacted as a result of her understanding. The fourth interview was reserved for follow-up and clarifying questions about previous interviews and addressing any other concerns before concluding the study.

The two individual interviews with teachers and staff sought to understand how individual teachers and staff made sense of the principal's visions and efforts to create a more culturally responsive environment. This is an important consideration because teacher and staff sensemaking influences the implementation of policies and practices (Spillane et al., 2002). Similar to the principal interviews, the first teacher and staff interview was used to build rapport with teachers and gather demographic data, such as racial identity, socioeconomic status, and professional experience, as well as to understand aspects of their personal and professional identities and perspectives, such as early school experiences, teaching philosophies, and beliefs

about school leadership. All interviews were structured to address issues and themes found in the literature of organizational sensemaking theories and culturally responsive school leadership. These themes and issues included understanding how Principal Schwartz and her teachers and staff defined and understood cultural responsiveness and their attitudes and beliefs about cultural responsiveness.

> Given the generative nature of semi-structured interviews, the questions for the second round of teacher and staff interviews were developed from observations and notes taken while observing the CRPBIS team meetings, as well as from questions that emerged from an ongoing analysis of the interview data (Merriam, 1998). In the first round of teacher and staff interviews, participants were given the opportunity to share their own definitions of what it means to be culturally responsive, among other sensemaking topics. I began the second round of interviews by following up on questions I had that were unique to each participant, as well as to give participants an opportunity to clarify previous statements and address any concerns before concluding the study. For the remainder of the second interview, I provided participants with an excerpt (Hammond, 2015) that described the characteristics of a culturally responsive teacher identity that emphasized the importance of developing a sociopolitical consciousness. The following is the excerpt that was provided:
>
> Successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—especially from historically marginalized groups—involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques. It means placing instruction within the larger sociopolitical context […] Every culturally responsive teacher develops a sociopolitical consciousness, an understanding that we live in a racialized society that gives unearned

> privilege to some while others experience unearned disadvantage because of race, gender, class, or language. They are aware of the role that schools play in both perpetuating and challenging those inequities. They are also aware of the impact of their own cultural lens on interpreting and evaluating students' individual or collective behavior that might lead to low expectations or undervaluing the knowledge and skills they bring to school. (p. 18)

Participants were given the opportunity to read this excerpt and to express their thoughts and opinions about cultural responsiveness as framed from this lens. After expressing their thoughts and opinions, participants were also given visual elicitation artifacts (Crilly, Blackwell, & Clarkson, 2006) of a teacher exemplar and kindergarten student work samples from an assignment that asked students to create a visual illustration of what schooling would look like "in a school where Black lives matter". The purpose of these artifacts was to provide an example of what a culturally responsive lesson that takes into consideration the sociopolitical realities of marginalized student populations and communities might look like. The artifacts were also used to further elicit participant sensemaking about the possibility of a prospective practice in which Applegate teachers teach using this type of culturally responsive pedagogy. The artifacts are displayed in Figure 4 below.

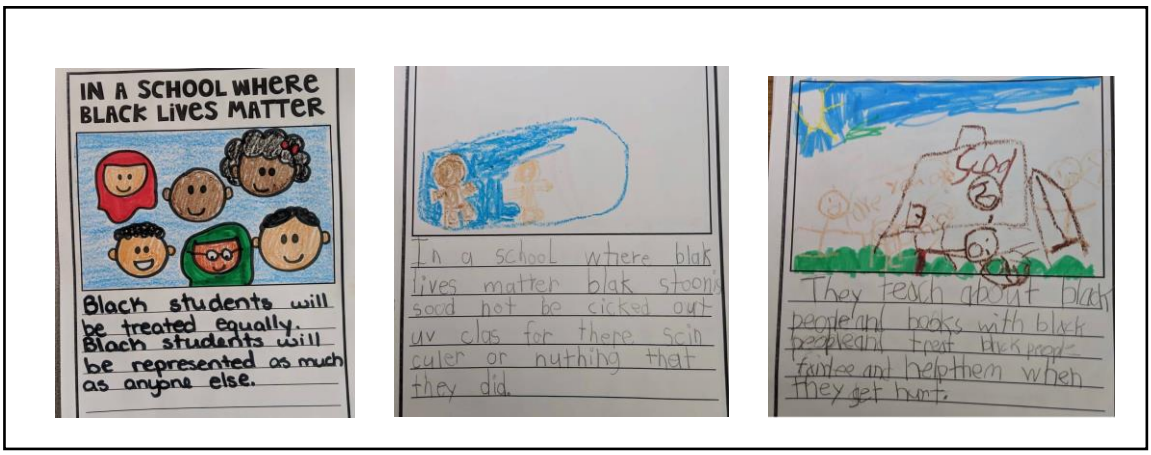

Figure 4: Blacks Lives Matter Assignment Artifacts. The figure displays an example of a first-grade writing assignment "In a School Where Black Lives Matter."

Direct observations and field notes. Yin (2014) stated that direct observations "add new dimensions for understanding either the context or the phenomenon being studied" (p. 114). Direct observations included observing aspects of the school context such as staff meetings and activities that were more specific to creating culturally responsive school environments, such as the CRPBIS team meetings and Applegate's annual "back to school" home visits and bus trip. In addition to general school observations, three school-wide staff meetings and four CRPBIS and School Equity team meetings were observed. Permission was granted to record the smaller CRPBIS and School Equity team meetings. This allowed me to revisit the CRPBIS and School Equity team audio to better understand how this group functioned as a sensemaking space for teachers and staff around how to make Applegate a more culturally responsive school.

To ensure the probability of capturing rich data that could potentially inform my understanding of sensemaking within the research context, field notes were also collected before, during, and/or after direct observations. These field notes were audio recorded and were classified into three categories: 1) observational, 2) theoretical, and 3) methodological (Richardson & Adams St. Pierre, 2008). Observational notes include general notes and descriptions of what is seen and heard to paint a picture of participants and happenings within the

school context. For example, during the recorded CRPBIS and School Equity team meetings, I also jotted down noticings about members as they engaged in conversations about race and privilege. Theoretical and methodological notes were used to record my "conceptual thoughts, hypotheses, and ideas" (Fusch et al., 2017, p. 929) that emerged during the research process.

Also, although it is not a part of the data collection per se, personal notes and analytic memos served as an "intellectual workplace" (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014, p. 163) where I proactively began to reflect on my thinking and interpretations of data and interactions within the school context. Personal notes helped me to process and think about what I was hearing during interview data collection. For example, Jeff, a third-grade teacher and the only White male teacher at Applegate, believed strongly in meeting students' individual needs. However, his views on contemporary sociopolitical issues, particularly police brutality, were problematic as a teacher of students of color. One of my notes stated:

> Meeting students' individual needs can be interpreted in a different way than how Jeff is framing it. For example, since each student is an individual with unique experiences and needs, then that means teachers must be open and in tune to those needs and concerns including the sociopolitical, not just in terms of differentiating academic instruction. Why doesn't Jeff include this framing in his talk about addressing students' direct concerns about police brutality and Black Lives Matter?

Saldaña (2015) also described analytic memos as a metacognitive approach in which the researcher reflects on "coding processes and code choices, how the process of inquiry is taking shape, categories and subcategories, and themes and concepts in your data" (p. 44). Analytic memoing provided the opportunity to think critically and reflectively, as well as to revisit previous thoughts, interpretations, and assumptions throughout the iterative research process.

Analytic memos were useful for understanding how collected data confirmed or challenged existing sensemaking theories.

Documents. Yin (2014) noted the utility of documents to corroborate evidence among various sources within a case study (p. 107). Documents that were useful for corroborating evidence of a culturally responsive leadership practice at the school level include the CRPBIS and School Equity team meeting agendas, staff newsletters, leadership meeting agendas, and imagery within the school context. Documents at the district level included materials from district-wide professional development sessions on CRPBIS, as well as the district's CRPBIS implementation plan. These documents were analyzed to understand the messages that teacher and staff received regarding cultural responsiveness from both the district and school levels. Document analysis also provided the opportunity to raise clarifying questions related to the focus and goals of the study. These questions were audio recorded and transcribed and transferred to a Microsoft Word document.

DATA ANALYSIS

Theory-based coding. As the goal of this study was to understand how teachers and staff made sense of their principal's leadership practices and decisions, particularly around cultural responsiveness, I began coding all interviews and documents by focusing on theory-based and closed codes derived from the literature on CRSL characteristics and sensemaking processes. I coded data before, during, and after data collection, depending on when it was received. All interviews, observation notes, and documents were coded using the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. Specifically, Dedoose was useful in generating an initial code list. In order to categorize what constituted evidence of CRSL practices and sensemaking processes, I developed literature-based codes and operational definitions to guide my coding. Examples of codes for

CRSL practices include critical self-reflection, culturally responsive teacher development, culturally responsive school environment, and culturally responsive student, parent, and teacher engagement. Examples of codes for organizational sensemaking are based on elements of general organizational sensemaking (Weick, 1995) and the more specific characteristics of policy and practice sensemaking in K-12 contexts (Spillane et al., 2002). These codes include identity, noticing and bracketing, and cue extraction (Weick, 1995), as well as interpretation of message, bias of beliefs and values, and social interactions (Spillane et al., 2002). A full listing of codes and organizational definitions are provided in Appendix E.

Open coding. I also used open coding to analyze the data in the event that codes emerged that were not previously connected to existing frameworks but that might be useful to further understand how teachers and staff made sense of their principal's leadership practices and decisions. Whereas more etic, theory-based coding highlighted evidence of culturally responsive practices and sensemaking processes, emic, open coding was useful in highlighting the unique particularities of those practices and processes, such as participants' specific beliefs and attitudes that informed how they made sense of specific leadership practices and decisions. Several codes emerged from the open coding of the data. Example of these codes include sociopolitical awareness, colorblindness, multiculturalism, inclusivity, school experiences, and family history. These and other codes were collapsed into the three major themes of beliefs and values, experiences, and attitudes.

RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

My interest in culturally responsive pedagogy and leadership originated from a few different experiences and perspectives. First, as an elementary teacher in Atlanta and Chicago, I read the works of Ladson-Billings (1994), Gay (2002), and other educational theorists to get a

sense of how I could more effectively engage a predominantly African American student population in culturally responsive ways. As an African American male educator, I held my students to the same high expectations and *warm demands* (Ware, 2006) that many of my teachers of color required of me. In this way, I was already implementing socioemotional elements of cultural responsiveness. I tried to integrate my students' cultural ways of knowing into the classroom, often writing and receiving grants for resources to support projects that engaged my students through technology and culturally relevant texts.

I am also a critical social justice teacher educator (Sensöy & DiAngelo, 2017). As a critical social justice teacher educator, I teach courses that challenge pre-service teacher candidates to consider how issues of power, privilege, and oppression affect students, especially minoritized students. Through these courses, pre-service teacher candidates also examine how their own socialized dispositions and presuppositions influence their perception of, and ultimately their ability to effectively teach, diverse student populations. Critical social justice teacher educators often have an inherent commitment to disrupt problematic teaching practices and dispositions that are harmful to students, especially marginalized student populations. As an African American male who is a critical social justice teacher educator, not only do I share these commitments, but the issues discussed and beliefs expressed by participants, such as race, race privilege, and systemic oppression, are not merely academic for me; they have had real life consequences for communities of color and others who look like me. For this reason, some participants' views and perspective could possibly be emotionally triggering.

For example, participant Jeff's opinions about race, police brutality against people of color, and students and families experiencing poverty countered my personal beliefs and values about these issues; and I would often leave the interview sessions disturbed and concerned about some

of Jeff's views, especially since many of Applegate's students and families were people of color and people experiencing poverty. However, as a researcher, even though Jeff expressed problematic views about marginalized groups, I made intentional efforts to not express my position too much or in such a way that would alter the information that participants were providing regarding their sensemaking of their principal's practices and the students and communities they serve. Throughout my interviews with teachers and staff, I conducted my research in an ethical and professional manner, but I was always conscious of my own subjectivities and identities, as well as how these subjectivities and identities might impact my own sensemaking of participant responses throughout the study.

Although more positivistic research traditions would require that I make attempts to suppress the subjectivities that result from my research positionality and identities, Peshkin (1988) asserted that qualitative researchers should make attempts to consciously notice their subjectivities. These conscious noticings, according to Peshkin, can improve the trustworthiness of the research design. The following section explains the rationale of trustworthiness in qualitative research, as well as how I worked to ensure the trustworthiness of this study's research design in light of my positionality and subjectivities.

TRUSTWORTHINESS

For decades, researchers have debated the rigor of qualitative research methods (Firestone, 1987; Lazarsfeld, 1944; Reichardt & Cook, 1979). Many quantitative researchers have confined qualitative research to narrow measures that are grounded in positivist philosophical assumptions. Measures such as internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity guide the determination of credibility and accuracy in positivistic research. Both quantitative and qualitative research traditions acknowledge that there must be some way to

ensure that data collection and analysis is credible and accurate; however, Lincoln and Guba (1985) offer the alternative terminology of *trustworthiness* to addresses these concerns, as well as to account for the nature and particularities that are unique to qualitative research. Trustworthiness is established through the following conditions: credibility (internal validity), transferability (external validity/generalizability), dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) (Guba, 1981, p. 80). These conditions are parallel, yet distinct from measures used in positivistic research.

To ensure trustworthiness in this study, the following considerations were made to address the following:

Credibility (Internal validity): In the positivist paradigm, internal validity refers to whether a researcher's instrument/protocol actually measures what is intended to be studied. In this research, the intended focus of study is a principal's leadership practices that are intended to create a more culturally responsive school environment and the teachers and staff sensemaking of these practices. Guba (1981) acknowledged both the social and methodological aspects of establishing credibility. For example, Guba described the role of rapport-building in establishing credibility as follows: "Spending an extended period at a site allows locals to adjust to the presence of researchers and to satisfy themselves that they do not constitute a threat. Researchers are given time to check their own developing perceptions" (p. 84). What Guba (1981) referred to as *prolonged engagement* (p. 84) has already been incorporated into my methodology. As stated previously, I spent one school year at Applegate as a principal intern prior to this research study. Before conducting this study, I reintroduced myself to the school environment by volunteering my time to assist teachers and staff in order to continue building rapport among participants in the research site.

In terms of methodological considerations, Guba (1981) recommended triangulation across all data sources (p. 85). Mini-ethnographic case study allows for the collection of interviews, direct observations, field notes, and documents, which I used to verify the grounds of my assertions and assumptions through triangulation. I also used member checking, another strategy recommended by Guba to established trustworthiness, to give participants the opportunity to review data sources, such as interview transcripts, to clarify information when necessary. Due to time restraints placed on teachers, administrators, and staff, the participants were not able to spend extra time looking through pages of interviews. However, member checking was accomplished in the follow up interviews. At the beginning of these interviews, I reviewed the salient points of the previous interviews with participants. This included rereading direct quotations and giving participants the opportunity to hear what was recorded and to clarify and/or amend their thoughts.

In regard to interview structure, Shenton (2004) advised that "the specific procedures employed, such as the line of questioning pursued in the data gathering sessions and the methods of data analysis, should be derived, where possible, from those that have been successfully utilized in previous comparable projects" (p. 64). When drafting the interview protocols for this study, I reviewed the interview questions of previous studies of sensemaking in K-12 school contexts. This, I believe, helped to ensure credibility in terms of the use of "operational measures" (Yin, 2014, p. 46) consistent with previous studies in the field.

Transferability (external validity/generalizability): For this case study, a purposive sample was needed to examine the sensemaking of a principal who would be more likely to exhibit the characteristics of culturally responsive school leadership. Therefore, given the important role that context plays in interpreting qualitative research findings, the goal of this case

study was not to produce an example that was readily generalizable, but to understand how teachers and staff take up and make sense of messages and practices around cultural responsiveness within the specific context of Applegate. Guba (1981) noted qualitative researchers' distinction between transferability and the positivist notion of generalizability: "It is not possible, they believe, to develop 'truth' statements that have general applicability; rather, one must be content with statements descriptive or interpretative of a given context—idiographic or context-relevant statements" (p. 86). Therefore, as qualitative scholars have suggested (Bassey, 1981; Firestone, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I gave enough description of the research context so that readers can determine if the findings of this case are applicable and transferable to other school environments and populations.

Dependability (reliability): In the positivist paradigm, reliability refers to the ability of research and research findings to be replicated by future researchers. However, this particular study was bounded within a particular space and time. In dynamic environments such as schools, conditions change over time, but in an effort to promote dependability, structured protocols were used to collect and analyze data. The purpose and methodological plan are also made transparent in the methods section of this study so that readers may understand how data was obtained.

Confirmability (objectivity): Similar to credibility, confirmability aims to mitigate researcher bias and subjectivity in research findings. However, as previously stated, Peshkin (1988) posited that subjectivity and potential bias based on a researcher's positionality are unavoidable. Instead, he suggests that rather than suppressing their subjective realities, researchers should seek them out in order to be conscious of how these subjectivities influence the research process. In an effort to do this, I kept a reflective journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to record any methodological decisions I made as the study evolved and the reasons for these

decisions. Reflective journaling was also useful to record my personal thoughts, perceptions, and biases that might have influenced how I perceived the phenomena of study. Also, techniques stated above, such as triangulation and member checking, also played a role in establishing confirmability.

CHAPTER 4: DISTRICT LEVEL MESSAGING

INTRODUCTION

Sensemaking occurs as a result of individuals attempting to understand the many messages that they receive within an organization. Spillane and colleagues (2002) stated, "Although policies cannot construct understanding for implementing agents, the message and design of policies influence implementing agents' sensemaking efforts" (p. 414). Policy messages play an important role in organizational sensemaking because they "communicate to implementers the substance and intent" (Ellis, 2016) of policies and practices. However, many Applegate teachers and staff were confused and frustrated because they believed that the district did not provide a clear policy message and framework regarding what it meant to be culturally responsive.

In this chapter, historical context is provided to explain MCSD's decision to adopt cultural responsiveness as a district value and goal, efforts the district took to convey this value and goal, the district's response to resistance toward these culturally responsive goals, and the subsequent confusion and frustration about the meaning of cultural responsiveness caused by the district's actions. The sequence of events that contributed to the confusion and frustration of teachers and staff will be contextualized within existing sensemaking literature. Specifically, the chapter will discuss the ways the district created a situation in which the meaning of cultural

responsiveness was ambiguous and open to the multiple interpretations of principals, teachers, and staff.

GAINING CONTEXT

As a former public school teacher, I was aware of the role that individuals at the district level play in crafting and conveying messages regarding policies and practices. Therefore, to better understand how teachers and staff made sense of cultural responsiveness, I began with the messages they received from the district level. Specifically, Assistant Superintendent Anthony Williams provided background information about the district's adoption of cultural responsiveness as a core value, and the challenges the district encountered in implementing cultural responsiveness as a core value district-wide. As Superintendent of School Climate and Culture, Williams oversees the district's efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting more culturally responsive school environments. MCSD's motivation to become a more culturally responsive district was in response to the district's growing number of linguistically and culturally diverse students and families. According to Williams:

> The district, the board, and our executive team all felt that it was important for us to really focus more on how we teach, the way we teach, and the lens by which we teach. And the reason was also just the recognition of our diversity within our school district, specifically at the student and the family level. We really wanted to make sure that there was an intention around supporting that and celebrating that rather than trying to be myopic or specific to one demographic. But recognizing that we all have a lot of diversity and really helping all of us to be better equipped to respond to the diversity within our schools.

The decision to implement culturally responsive practices was also a response to address and reduce the district's disproportionality in-school discipline practices among various subgroups within the district, especially boys of color. Williams explained:

> I think we are consistent with the state norm and the national norms specific to ethnic and racial minorities and boys of color in particular. As far as the discipline, we're overwhelmingly disproportionate compared to other groups. Um, and I think that's one reason we have board members and executive team members who are really passionate about reducing this disproportionality.

The racial disparity in school discipline among students of color has been consistent for decades, especially for African American students (Gregory, 1997; Skiba et al., 2011; Wu et al., 1982). William acknowledged that this was also a current reality in MCSD. However, the district was aware of this disproportionality and sought to reduce discipline disparities among students of color through culturally responsive practices.

Before learning more about how the district disseminated messages to individuals at the school level about cultural responsiveness, it was important for the purposes of this study to understand how individuals in the position to craft and convey district-level policy messages defined cultural responsiveness. Therefore, all study participants, including Williams, were asked, *What does cultural responsiveness mean to you?* Prior to beginning this study, the assumption that guided this study was that the ways policies, practices, and messages aimed at creating more culturally responsive school environments are interpreted and taken up depends on how one defines and understands what it means to be culturally responsive. How policy messages are framed by those in district-level leadership positions is especially important since these individuals craft messages and policies that potentially set the tone for an entire school

district (Ellis, 2016; Spillane et al., 2002). In response, Williams provided both a personal and organizational definition appropriate for a large, complex system such as MCSD. Personally, Williams defined cultural responsiveness as:

> The ability to understand and recognize and appreciate and support and celebrate the reality of our students and our families and our staff. That is, culturally, ethnically in values, beliefs, capacities, and understanding of histories. That's how I define it and it's not written anywhere.

Williams also provided an organizational definition:

> I would say the district defines it similarly, but because we're an educational institution, we have to be clearer and more concise. So, I would say cultural responsiveness is an appreciation for values, beliefs and practices of all students, all staff, all families and finding a way to integrate those into the context of the school experience to create a safe environment for students to learn. And when I say safe, I mean psychologically, emotionally, physically. All three.

Williams' district definition of cultural responsiveness placed an emphasis on inclusion through the use of the word "all". This is understandable given that many urban school districts serve large and diverse student populations and must ensure stakeholders that they can meet the academic and socioemotional needs of individuals from various cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. However, I wanted to know the extent to which Williams envisioned this inclusive language as also encapsulating an understanding of the lived experiences and realities of student populations and communities that are often marginalized in school settings, or if he understood this definition in ways that use inclusive, yet uncritical, multicultural language (May & Sleeter, 2010) to create an organizational image of the

acceptance of all but disregards the historical and contemporary sociopolitical realities of students and their communities. So, I questioned him further about the role he believed students' and families' collective "histories" and "realities" played in creating more culturally responsive school environments. To illustrate his point, he recounted a recent scenario in which a teacher was teaching a lesson on immigration and Ellis Island:

> One of our schools and our teachers wanted to have this conversation with students, but they wanted to focus on immigrant and refugee populations, not recognizing that the immigrant and refugee populations in that school were primarily made of African descendants. There was no sensitivity given to the reality of history. So what we have to do is recognize our history and begin to include our histories, all histories, into our conversations in the context of school.

As a district level school leader, Williams' personal definition showed that he was conscious of how an awareness of the collective histories of diverse student populations should inform teachers' pedagogical decisions in classrooms and schools that seek to be more culturally responsive. As a teacher, being aware of and making intentional pedagogical decisions to incorporate the historical and contemporary political issues of marginalized student populations works to prevent the erasure of their sociopolitical realities. Williams exhibited a critical awareness and consciousness (Khalifa, 2018) about the role that schools have played in perpetuating systemic inequity through the exclusion of diverse histories and perspectives, as well as an understanding of the challenges that the current teacher demographics pose to becoming culturally responsive:

> Fact is though, the system of education has always privileged one type of history, one group's history over another and I mean, White people in this case. And so, we haven't

> really been able to identify books to really tell the stories of all people's histories. So, then we have to rely on teachers to do their own history digging. Well, primarily White teachers. White female teachers are going to go after material that they have heard of, have read themselves, have been exposed to. And in most cases, many of us have not been exposed to the histories of other people. And so, we're not necessarily able to privilege the histories of everyone else.

Williams was aware of the ways schools have privileged the histories and ways of knowing of majority groups through their pedagogy and instructional practices. He believed that a potential barrier to developing culturally responsive teachers in the district was the lack of access that teachers had to culturally responsive resources and materials, especially White teachers who he believed might rely more on the materials and resources they know rather than those that are culturally responsive. Securing culturally responsive resources, materials, and curricula is important for the development of culturally responsive teachers (Khalifa et al., 2016). However, Williams explained that this was a challenge for the district. Although implementing culturally responsive curricula was a challenge, Williams and the district believed that they could develop culturally responsive teachers by introducing them to strategies that could potentially reduce the district's racial disparity in discipline practices.

Implementation of CRPBIS. To reduce the disproportionality in discipline among boys of color and other groups, Williams and MCSD district-level leaders collaborated with the local independent school district to implement Culturally Responsive Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (CRPBIS). For MCSD, CRPBIS was a way to expose teachers to culturally responsive resources and practices, while advancing the district's espoused values and goals (Argyris & Schön, 1978) of taking a more critical approach to developing a culturally responsive

school district. CRPBIS expands upon the original PBIS model "by opening up schools' decision-making and problem-solving processes to those from nondominant groups historically that have been excluded and marginalized" (Bal, 2018, p. 168). Specifically, scholars have examined the positive impact CRPBIS can have for African American students (Johnson, Anhalt, & Cowan, 2018). To acclimate principals, teachers, and staff to CRPBIS, the district sent a series of PowerPoint presentations on the topic to the various student support staff members in each school. Support staff were tasked with presenting these PowerPoint presentations to all teachers and staff. The district also offered additional, optional professional development sessions about CRPBIS throughout the school year.

Getting to the "why": the district-level conversation. As a prerequisite for engaging in CRPBIS is understanding the nature of the historical marginalization of diverse students and communities, adequately implementing CRPBIS entails more than the implementation of behavior management strategies; it necessitates an ongoing conversation with principals, teachers, and staff about the role that race and bias play in the contemporary perpetuation of disproportionate discipline outcomes and consequences for diverse student populations. To help MSCD principals, teachers, and staff understand the rationale for the district's adoption of CRPBIS, a district-wide conversation was convened. The purpose of this conversation was to make MSCD employees aware of the disproportionality in school discipline through an examination of district-wide data. The district brought in an African American female educational consultant who specializes in issues of race and equity, as well as in PBIS and CRPBIS implementation. Williams explained the presenter's approach of presenting district-wide data and contextualizing the data within a larger conversation about bias:

> Her presentation was really focused on our data. Specifically, highlighting our discipline data or academic data in a way that allowed us to see it differently than I think we have seen it before. Having a general conversation across the district rather than school specific data. And so she presented our own data that was public information. But the staff had not experienced a public discussion around our data before. And so she talked about our data and she talked about it from a place of personal experience. She talked about the importance of having champions and people who believed in her, as well as recognizing that we all still have biases that comes across in our day to day operations. She shared her own personal experience as a person who is biased toward others. For me, it connected to the real reality of what we are experiencing as a district, but also helped people to see that minorities even have biases. I thought that would have disarmed people.

Williams believed that presenter's personal and self-incriminating approach would make participants more comfortable with having a conversation about the role that bias plays in the disproportionate consequences marginalized students receive. Instead, this conversation became a watershed moment in the district that both divided principals, teachers, and staff into ideological factions and affected how the district leaders decided to proceed in their attempts to become a more culturally responsive district:

> What that did was really splintered the district in a lot of ways on that day because people were reacting to the data and the presuppositions that the presenter appeared to be making. They appeared to react to that. And so that created some reactions that were consequential.

Although there were principals, teachers, and staff who were interested and excited about learning about how bias affects school discipline consequences, Williams described the different ways some participants exhibited resistance to the presentation:

> So, some of the reactions were that she seemed to be arrogant. Somehow, some perceived her as believing her story was more important than the data. They felt she was telling her story to promote all of the benefits that she's received over the course of her life. For me, this feels like implicit bias and racism to think of her that way. Some criticized her more than they criticized the data. And then some of the other ones were more reactive to the data and essentially allowed themselves to disconnect from the data by saying it "wasn't their data" or it "wasn't accurate data." And then others, lastly, I think experienced White guilt and so they would not hold students accountable because they felt more sympathy than empathy and lowered their expectations as a result.

Teacher and staff reactions to the presentation included ad hominem attacks against the presenter, disengagement and denial of the discipline data, and feelings of White guilt about the data results. These responses are common when engaging in conversations that implicate controversial issues such as race and racial bias (Singleton, 2015). Williams continued:

> I would say there was an age group difference. The more senior individuals were more reactive to the data. I would say also that they were primarily White individuals who were more reactive to the data. Suburban based White individuals. So, not all of our teachers, as you might imagine, live in our community. And many of the ones that were reactive do not live in the community as well. And so, coming across that data was more charged than if they were familiar with the community a little bit more directly outside of just providing instruction to them day to day.

Williams' observations of teachers and staff during this conversation are interesting because they revealed that those who were the most resistant to the idea that their bias may be contributing to the district's racial disparity in discipline practices represented a particular demographic profile:

older suburban and middle-class White teachers and staff. He felt that these individuals' resistance was due to their lack of familiarity and understanding of the communities where they taught, as well as an understanding of the issues that affect these students and communities.

Capitulating to resistance. In response to the adverse reactions of some teachers and staff, MCSD district leaders decided to back away from having district-wide conversations around issues that supported their goal of becoming a more culturally responsive district. This was mainly because many individuals at the school level found engaging in conversations about issues such as race and bias to be uncomfortable. After the conversation, district leaders began to focus more on implementing other district goals, such as trauma-informed practices, rather than focusing on goals that engaged administrators, teachers, and staff in thinking about what it means to be culturally responsive in "overt" ways. Williams gave the rationale for the district's decision:

> We've been training staff on trauma-informed practices. Not overt cultural responsiveness, but trauma-informed practices. The more you become trauma informed, the more you're sensitive to the reality of others, not from the lens of race and ethnicity, but from the lens of their experiences, both socioeconomically or behaviorally and things that they might have been exposed to. We thought that that was the best approach to really begin this conversation because it's not necessarily overly reactive, and if people are more trauma informed, they are less likely to engage in behaviors that are offensive to others racially.

The district capitulated to the resistance of principals, teachers, and staff by adopting trauma-informed practices as a new initiative. In doing so, the values that the district initially espoused regarding cultural responsiveness differed from the actions they took and the values they enacted. Espoused values are the values that an organization says it believes and enacted values are the values that are conveyed through an organization's actions (Argyris & Schön, 1978;

Gopinath, Nair, & Thangaraj, 2018). MCSD district leaders made intentional efforts to avoid direct and "overt" discussions about issues like race and bias that made some principals, teachers, and staff uncomfortable in exchange for discussion about trauma-informed practices—an approach they believed to be more race neutral. They made this decision even though it prevented the critical conversations they knew were necessary to promote a more culturally responsive school district.

Adoption of trauma-informed practices. Williams and the district assumed that, by educating principals, teachers, and staff about trauma-informed practices, they would, in effect, become more culturally responsive. Using trauma-informed practices as a means to develop the culturally responsive capacities of teachers and staff is not problematic in and of itself. An understanding of trauma has the potential to help teachers and staff meet the socioemotional needs of diverse student populations in culturally responsive ways (Blitz, Anderson, & Saastamoinen, 2016). However, the district's use of trauma-informed practices as a proxy in lieu of engaging in the work of directly developing culturally responsive was problematic. This approach privileged the comfort of principals, teachers, and staff at the risk of erasing the unique identities and experiences students bring to the classroom. For historically marginalized students and communities, the intersectional dynamics of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, and other factors shape their experiences and realities (Crenshaw, 1989) and should therefore not be parsed out for the convenience and comfort of those charged with educating them. The decision to focus on trauma-informed practices also potentially played a role in delegitimizing the culturally responsive goals that the district claimed to be invested in by sending mixed and competing policy signals to individuals at the school level. Spillane et al. (2002) warned that mixed and competing policy signals run the risk of undermining "the authority and power of

policy", as well as making it unclear to which "policy signals implementing agents should attend" (p. 390).

Putting the onus of CRSL on principals. In tandem with the district's decision to focus on trauma-informed practices, district leaders began to rely on their school principals to build the culturally responsive capacity of their teachers and staff in their own buildings, instead of in district-wide, large group settings. Williams explained:

> And so, although we had to sort of back off from intense culturally responsive conversations as a district, we began to ask our principals to do so in the context of their schools based on the readiness of their staff. And then we provided them with technical assistance and some intellectual support around how to do that. Unfortunately, though, I think we have not moved in a significant direction to really accomplish that.

The district's decision to delegate the responsibility of leading these conversations to principals is supported by school leadership literature (Khalifa, 2018; Leithwood, 1995; Riehl, 2000). In general, the principal is seen as the person uniquely positioned to convey district-level messages and facilitate local school reform efforts. However, attempting to create more culturally responsive school environments can prove difficult for district and school-level leadership due to the adaptive challenges (Heifetz et al., 2009) associated with having individuals change their mindsets about issues the larger society deems controversial. Williams explained his understanding of this adaptive challenge:

> School districts like this district, and any other district, is a microcosm of the world. And we have not created a space where we, and I mean we as a society, have not created a supportive space to actually make this change happen societally. So, then schools would not necessarily know how to do that.

Williams believed that the larger society does not offer supportive spaces for open communication about issues such as race and privilege, and as a "microcosm of the world", schools and districts also find it difficult to engage in these conversations. These conversations can also be difficult to have because principals, teachers, and staff bring their personal worldviews, beliefs, and attitudes about issues such as race, privilege, and bias into their work in school settings. Research has shown that individuals' beliefs and attitudes about these issues are often calcified from years of socialization (Harro, 2000; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017), contributing to the challenge of shifting mindsets.

Williams and other MCSD district leaders experienced these adaptive challenges firsthand when they began having district-wide conversations with school principals about leading the work of creating more culturally responsive school environments. In one of these meetings, district leaders showed principals a short film titled *The Lunch Date* (1989). This film follows a White woman as she goes about her day, highlighting the interactions and assumptions she makes about the Black men she encounters along the way. Williams and other leaders used this film to preface a conversation about their recent district-wide teacher and student perception data. The purpose of the film was to show principals that sometimes the negative perceptions that people have about others are not true. Williams explained the survey findings as well as the principals' reactions to the findings:

> We began a conversation around where there was a mismatch of teacher and student perception in our data. And it's not surprising to me, but unfortunately our data suggested that kids, especially minority kids, have better perceptions of themselves than the teachers who teach them have of them. So, we talked about what that means and how to really get at hearts and minds.

Williams' reference to "hearts and minds" showed that he and the district understood that in order to work toward becoming a more culturally responsive school district, individuals at the school level needed to be engaged in the adaptive work of addressing and acknowledging beliefs, biases, and attitudes that might be counterproductive to the district's culturally responsive goals. He explained his observations of the level of engagement among principals during this discussion:

> The folks that were speaking were primarily African American principals. And those that were of the majority group quote unquote, were not as open to the conversation. They did not speak […] When they did speak, they talked about their cautious reactions and how they did not want to say the wrong thing. They thought the conversation was important, but they didn't know how to have it. The thing that became very clear when we started to talk about how to translate this into the school environment was that many folks were resistant because of discomfort with how to have that conversation at the school level.

As previously mentioned, district leaders decided to delegate the responsibility of having critical conversations with teachers and staff to principals at the school level. Although some principals thought it was important to engage in these conversations, many of them felt uncomfortable and unprepared to lead these conversations in schools with their teachers and staff. Many principals felt this way, even though the district planned to provide them with support in having these conversations when they felt that their teachers and staff were ready. Williams and the district believed that this strategy was a way to engage teachers and staff in conversations that promoted culturally responsive school environments without dealing with the consequences and pushback that were experienced in the district-wide conversation. In theory, district-level leaders seemed to understand that being culturally responsive for historically marginalized students and communities required that teachers and principals develop a critical consciousness and awareness of issues that

affect students in and out of school. However, in practice, the discomfort of principals, teachers, and staff led the district to intentionally frame and implement practices in ways that avoided addressing issues that many found uncomfortable, as well as putting the onus on principals to promote cultural responsiveness in their schools.

SCHOOL LEVEL PERCEPTIONS OF AN UNCLEAR MESSAGE

Sensemaking scholars argue that sensemaking occurs when individuals try to make sense of confusing issues (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). According to Kudesia (2017), "Sensemaking is especially evident when equivocal events cause breakdowns in meaning. Such breakdowns render organizations incapable of answering two key questions: 'What's going on here?' and 'What should we do about it?' (p. 2). However, by not setting a clear district-level vision and message about their espoused values and beliefs regarding cultural responsiveness, MCSD left many Applegate teachers and staff unsure what was happening in terms of cultural responsiveness and what the district thought should be done about it. For example, first-grade teacher Amanda explained:

> We are a culturally responsive school district. What exactly that means, I'm not exactly sure. I mean, I'm slowly learning in CRPBIS, but I honestly couldn't say. Yeah, I need to learn a lot. For example, we had an email yesterday. It was just an email. It was sent and it said, "Some tips for you on being culturally responsive."

Similarly, veteran teacher Christine, who was exasperated about the lack of a clear message, explained:

> I know the district has like a newsletter or something comes out every once in a while. There's just too much to keep up with to read those emails. If maybe someone wants to spell it out more. Like what does it mean? What is it? What is it you want us to do? Every

> teacher? Because I just don't think that anybody really understands it. It would just make so much more sense if someone created a document or something and had a workshop and said this is what it is. Maybe this is what it isn't, and this is what you need to do. If maybe it was clearer. Is it not possible to be clear?

Christine sought a clearer understanding of cultural responsiveness, but she also seemed to think that becoming culturally responsive is something that can be readily accomplished through a checklist or workshop. This type of approach is what Sleeter (2011a) referred to as the trivialization of cultural responsiveness, and she argued that such an approach lacks an awareness of cultural complexity that is necessary in doing the work of becoming culturally responsive. Similarly, a checklist approach to becoming culturally responsive would not be suitable to the district's initial values and goals of addressing adaptive challenges, such as developing the critical consciousness of individuals at the school level. Associating cultural responsiveness with a checklist may be an indication that Christine and teachers like her run the risk of misunderstanding the ongoing and continuously reflective nature of becoming culturally responsive.

Most of the teachers believed that the district had not communicated a clear message about cultural responsiveness. Some teachers, like Jeff, associated cultural responsiveness with the district's implementation of CRPBIS. He explained:

> I still don't know what the district's take on it is. I can make my assumption as to what it is. But they truly don't understand what cultural responsiveness is. As far as the district, every meeting I've been into, the first thing about PBIS that turns into culturally responsiveness is how they're dealing with behavior. My take on many of the meetings is that too many Black boys are being suspended. Too many Black girls are being suspended. The majority here is African American. I'm looking at the behavior and the district's not

> really looking at the behavior. They're more concerned about too many Blacks are being suspended or we need to try to get the Blacks back into the classroom.

Jeff's response that district leaders "truly don't understand what cultural responsiveness is" is an indication that he was operationalizing his own understanding of cultural responsiveness as he claimed that he didn't believe that the district had put forth a clear message. Even though Jeff believed that the district had provided no clear message of cultural responsiveness, his description of the district's efforts to be more culturally responsive included an acknowledgment that the racial disproportionality in school discipline practices is an area of concern for the district. Therefore, Jeff had some sense of the espoused values that the district has regarding addressing racial discipline disproportionality, but he did not understand "what" the district believed cultural responsiveness was, as well as how a consideration of race was connected to their espoused values of cultural responsiveness and their goal of reducing suspensions and expulsions in the district. Spillane and colleagues (2002) explained the importance of the "what" in the sensemaking and implementation of policies and practices this way: "What is paramount is not simply *that* implementing agents choose to respond to policy but also *what* they understand themselves to be responding to. The 'what' of policy only begins with the policy texts, such as directions, goals, and regulations" (p. 393).

When asked how, if at all, the district helps teachers and staff understand what it means to be culturally responsive, Tiffany, a kindergarten teacher, stated:

> I don't think they have. They talk about it and they talk it at you. They talk about it and they talk it at you. I don't feel like it's ever really been explained to me and I don't think that they've ever said exactly what it is. It's never been explained to me.

She also expressed frustrations similar to Jeff's about considering race when addressing school discipline:

> I hate that, um, we're tying so much of this, um, suspension to being culturally responsive. Like I don't know if that's true. Like, because if you spoke with the families of kids who were being suspended, if you spoke with them and found out, you know, what they felt was acceptable in the classroom and what's not, they're probably going to agree with you. They're not going to be like, "Well, you're suspending my kid because you know, they're Black." And I feel like that is what is happening. That's where the conversations leads to. You know, "Well, let's not do this because..." And I just, I don't think that that's true.

Like Jeff, Tiffany had made the connection that the district believes there is a relationship between race and school discipline consequences. However, her response suggests that there is misunderstanding as to why race should be considered in issuing disciplinary consequences and how cultural responsiveness is connected to discipline decisions. Tiffany seemed to be unaware that these considerations are made not just because a student is Black but because of the ways students of color are disproportionately subjected to exclusionary discipline practices and consequence for similar infractions committed by their White counterparts (Skiba et al., 2014).

As principal of Applegate, Principal Schwartz would be the one charged with communicating the district's messages about cultural responsiveness to teachers and staff; therefore, it was important to also get her opinion about district-level messages. In terms of district messaging, I initially asked Principal Schwartz how, if at all, she saw the district shaping and supporting their view of what it means to be culturally responsive through their policies and initiatives. She quickly corrected my use of the term "policy":

> Policy? Policy is a strong term because that would indicate that we have to follow them. And that's not the case. I think the district is more introducing supports to try to develop it wherever you may be in the system. The district will encourage us to talk about it and individuals up to the superintendent will be self-reflective about our own bias, but there's no formula for us to do it.

It is logical that the district would not provide principals, teachers, and staff with a specific "formula" for how to be culturally responsive because there is no specific formula that could account for the variability and unique particularities of teachers, students, and their communities from school to school. However, to ensure that the district's espoused values and beliefs align with the understandings and practices of individuals at the school level, there would need to be common and foundational beliefs, purposes, and language around what cultural responsiveness means and should look like in MCSD. It is particularly telling that Principal Schwartz believed that referring to cultural responsiveness as a policy was a "strong term" because labeling cultural responsiveness as a policy means that individuals would "have to follow" and embrace cultural responsiveness as a core value. By not elevating cultural responsiveness to the level of policy, MCSD missed an opportunity to convey and display a commitment to their espoused culturally responsive values. This again, is an example of the gap between what the district said it believed and what it did (or did not do) in practice.

Principal Schwartz explained that the general message from the district to principals, teachers, and staff about cultural responsiveness focuses on relationships. She also explained how the day-to-day messaging and implementation of cultural responsiveness is dependent on the principal:

> They've [teachers and staff] just been given the surface. They've just been given the basic science of trauma. Really the whole message from the district is relationship. You have to have a relationship with a child. It doesn't matter what color they are. As longs as children have a solid relationship and are securely attached to someone. It's not a day to day message from the district. They can't. It's left to the leaders. So I just, through my studies, have just gone deeper.

Principal Schwartz explained that district-level leaders are not directly involved in the everyday cultivation of culturally responsive school environments and that principals are ultimately responsible for making sure that this happens in their schools. Schwartz also explained that she gained most of her knowledge about cultural responsiveness through her own studies. The ways Principal Schwartz used this knowledge to inform her interpretation and practice of culturally responsive leadership will be discussed in the following chapter.

"WILLING, NOT COMFORTABLE"

As mentioned previously, MCSD leaders responded to teacher and staff resistance to having open conversations about race and bias by putting the onus on school principals to have those conversations. But like their teachers and staff, principals also struggled with coming to terms with their own attitudes and emotions about these issues, as well as coming to terms with their ability to confidently lead in a way that centered a critical approach to becoming culturally responsive. Williams explained:

> I don't know if we'll ever be at a point where we feel that principals are doing it with fidelity. This idea of cultural responsiveness comes from a place of emotional desire to see significant change. "I want to disrupt my system and as a leader, I'm going to do that intentionally within my role." Central office folks recognize that we cannot do this work

> without our administrators becoming willing, not comfortable, willing. We have to change mindsets and hearts. And I don't know if we have 90% of administrators who are willing to do that. So, we have to support the ones that are and then try to grow it from within.

Williams raised the important issue of the lack of principal commitment as a significant barrier to becoming a culturally responsive district. As with most school-level reform, principals are the driving force for change and policy/practice implementation. Although scholars have asserted that becoming culturally responsive is an ongoing process of continuous growth in which complete and absolute cultural responsiveness is rarely achieved (Khalifa et al., 2016), Williams was concerned about whether most MCSD principals even had the "emotional desire", willingness, and commitment to overcome their discomfort and attempt to lead in ways that challenge the status quo that often leads to the disenfranchisement of marginalized students and communities in schools. He suggested that because a majority of MCSD employees were not willing to do this work, efforts must be made to support those who are willing to become more culturally responsive. The following chapter examines Tanya Schwartz, one of the few principals identified as willing to attempt to critically engage her teachers and staff in the work of creating a culturally responsive school. The factors that influenced Schwartz's sensemaking of cultural responsiveness, as well as how she interpreted and enacted leadership practices based on this sensemaking, will be considered.

CONCLUSION

The importance of having clear values and vision is well-documented in the research literature on organizational and school leadership (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Manasse, 1986; Nanus, 1992). Yet MCSD's lack of clear vision and messaging about cultural responsiveness contributed to the confusion and frustration felt by teachers and staff around what

it meant to be culturally responsive. These actions included failing to define and openly support espoused culturally responsive values and placing a majority of the onus of developing culturally responsive school environments on principals, teachers, and staff. Although relying on principals, teachers, and staff to do this work is necessary for successful implementation of culturally responsive practices, the nature of engaging in the conversations needed to create culturally responsive environments, especially for marginalized students and communities, requires additional support and commitment to culturally responsive values from the district level.

CHAPTER 5: PRINCIPAL SENSEMAKING

The previous chapter recounted the specific events and decisions that led to the confusion and frustration of Applegate teachers and staff regarding what it meant to be culturally responsive. By not providing a clear policy message and framework and by capitulating on their espoused culturally responsive values, MCSD contributed to a situation where what it meant to be culturally responsive was ambiguous and open to the multiple interpretations of principals, teachers, and staff. The implementation of policies and practices is not a static process in which individuals impulsively and automatically enact policy messages. Rather, individuals filter and make sense of these messages through aspects of their identities (Spillane et al., 2002).

Aspects of an individual's identity play a significant role in their sensemaking, and they function as the primary lens through which individuals make sense of phenomena (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). According to Spillane et al. (2002), an individual's identity is comprised of components such as experiences, beliefs and values, and attitudes that shape how one views the world. In the case of K-12 policy and practice sensemaking, these components of identity also affect why and how individuals implement and interpret policies and practices. This chapter examines how, in the absence of a clear district policy message and framework, these aspects of identity influenced one principal's sensemaking of what it meant to be culturally responsive, as well as how the principal's sensemaking enacted the way they enacted school leadership practices.

Principal Schwartz was identified by Superintendent Williams and other district leaders as one of the few principals in the district who was willing to address cultural responsiveness in more critical ways with teachers and staff. Given this outlier status among her principal colleagues, this chapter explains the aspects of her identity that informed her sensemaking of cultural responsiveness and accounted for her willingness to engage teachers and staff in a more

critical understanding of cultural responsiveness. In response to the resistance of teachers and staff to open conversations about race and bias, MCSD refrained from conducting district-wide conversations and delegated the responsibility of carrying out the work of educating teachers and staff about cultural responsiveness to principals. Instead of continuing to organize these conversations and bring in education experts, the district provided targeted support to principals who felt that their teachers and staff were willing to have conversations about issues such as race, bias, and privilege.

However, as Evans (2007) stated, "School leaders must first interpret the meanings of issues for themselves" (p. 162). Therefore, any information or messages that teachers and staff received about cultural responsiveness would be shaped by each principal's experiences, beliefs and values, and their understanding of their role as a school leader. Since many Applegate teachers and staff felt that the district offered no clear policy message or framework about cultural responsiveness, it was important to get a sense of what Principal Schwartz understood cultural responsiveness to be, as well as her thoughts about the relationship between cultural responsiveness and school leadership. She stated:

> To me it means, when I relate to other people, that I take into account their cultural perspective, and that I don't know everything. Their vantage point or viewpoint is coming from a background of experiences from where they come from. In being open to that and trying to be respectful of that, then relationships build faster. For instance, to me, the first step in being culturally responsive for myself is to recognize my own bias and my own privilege...I'm well aware that I'm a White female. And I know the benefits that that has brought me. I'm not unaware of that. I can openly talk about that. That's big to me […] I have to have courage to just say, I'm White. I don't have the experience that people of color

> have. But I serve a community that has those experiences. I've witnessed my husband have those experiences. Like witness with my own eyeballs. Several times. I could sit and talk about four or five situations where I've seen it happen. And because I'm in a line of work that is of service to people, it's my responsibility to bring it up as an issue. Because that's their experience. Do they all have the same experience? No. But I'm fascinated by it and in order for me to support them, we have to talk about it […] Then the last layer of cultural responsiveness is just making an effort to study the different cultures where your different kids come from, and then teach empathy and tolerance amongst your children and amongst your staff, so that you recognize the background everybody is from.

Schwartz's description of a culturally responsive school leader not only exhibited an acknowledgement of the importance of valuing the cultural perspectives and experiences that students and families bring to schools, but also acknowledged that the primary component of being a culturally responsive leader requires critical reflection (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016) of one's own racial positionality. From Schwartz's perspective as a White female principal of a school that is comprised predominantly of students of color, this means acknowledging the privilege that Whiteness affords her and critiquing her own biases and their potential implications for school leadership and decision-making. Khalifa and colleagues (2016) asserted that any school leader who purports to be culturally responsive must first be critically self-reflective of their own biases, as well as critically conscious of the realities and experiences of minoritized student populations and communities. Khalifa (2018) explained the danger that school leaders pose when they are not critically self-reflective and critically conscious:

> The lack of critical self-reflection, unfortunately, leads to a muting of community voice. This muting, or even erasure, provides an opportunity for school leaders to deny their role

> in the oppression of some communities, and to blame the students and communities for poor school performance and disciplinary problems. It is up to school leaders to decide whether or not they will be anti-oppressive in their behaviors. (p. 63)

As a White woman, Principal Schwartz admitted that she did not know everything about the experiences and realities of her minoritized students and their communities, but she exhibited a willingness to learn from them and seek to understand the sociopolitical issues that affect their lives. She was also self-reflective and openly acknowledged how her White racial identity and resulting privilege might affect her leadership and the ways she interacts with minoritized students and communities. Acknowledging Whiteness, White privilege, and biases is often difficult for many school leaders (Evans, 2007), so I was interested in understanding what factors contributed to the beliefs and attitudes she had regarding cultural responsiveness.

PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES

Schwartz explained the personal and professional experiences that played a significant role in the development of her beliefs and attitudes about being culturally responsive to minoritized student populations and communities. The child of two teen parents, Schwartz lived with her mother and went to school in a low-income community where she was exposed to people from various racial groups and backgrounds. She stated "I lived in a Section 8 housing, so I grew up with kids of all colors, and I grew up with other kids from low-income families like mine." Schwartz was also often exposed to trauma and addiction inside and outside of the home. As a young child, she had witnessed her mother's struggle with drug addiction; in the interview, she recounted the ways it affected her early school experiences. For example, Schwartz recalled how her mother would often lose track of time and drop her off at school hours early and how "the janitor would let me in and fed me and took care of me, or the lunch lady gave me extra

food or things got put in my backpack." According to Schwartz, the care that she received from urban school teachers and staff inspired her to become a teacher in urban school environments. As a teacher in Chicago, she taught "at-risk" students in less than desirable conditions. She explained, "I had firsthand knowledge of working in a dilapidated building with asbestos and not-working bathrooms and no air. It was a lot. I didn't even have books." She explained that despite these circumstances, she enjoyed working with students from urban communities and schools because she felt that, in certain instances, she could relate to what some students had to deal with inside and outside of school:

> As a young teacher, I did not have the knowledge about trauma or cultural responsiveness, but because of my background, I did understand what it meant to be poor. What it meant to be in the context of addiction and being afraid and being hungry. I sort of came in with more empathy.

However, it was a more recent and terrifying experience with the police that further shaped Schwartz's critical perspective and caused her to reflect more deeply about the realities faced by communities of color. It was the summer of 2012, and Schwartz was a teacher on summer vacation traveling to the South with her Black husband and their two children. As they headed back home from summer vacation, they were pulled over by a state trooper. Schwartz described the experience:

> No sooner had we merged onto the highway when the same state trooper pulled right behind us and ran our plates. The next thing I know we were being pulled over on a major eight lane highway in 96-degree heat with two babies. The look of panic on his face let me know that this had the potential to go very, very wrong. I had never, ever seen him that

> close to panic. Intellectually I knew his mother had had numerous conversations about dealing with the police. “Keep your hands at ten and two, just say yes sir no matter how they speak to you and make it home alive.” I had yet to see the horrible images on social media of Black men being murdered by police for absolutely zero reason, but you better believe I paid attention since. The next thing I knew he was taken back to the cruiser and placed in the back seat. Why to this day I haven't a clue? There was zero probable cause.

While her husband was in the back seat of the cruiser, a trooper approached her as she sat in the passenger seat. Schwartz quoted the trooper:

> “I’m sick and tired of being out here in the heat trying to stop niggers from running drugs in my state. You better hope I don’t find anything.” All our luggage was strewn on the side of the road. The dog climbed all through the car. Neither one of them found anything. There was no stash of drugs where he was sure he would find some. Lord knows he double and triple checked. The tears stopped, and I hung my head trying to comfort my girls. He came over to uncuff me, and whispered in my ear, “You know better.” This was the last statement he said to me as he pulled me close to him and uncuffed me. And just like that it was over. He wrote my husband a minimal ticket and drove away with all our stuff strewn on the side of the road. My husband immediately came over and held me sobbing as I tried to pull myself together. I knew that this experience was traumatizing for me but normalized for him. This is how the police do business. Not all of them, but enough. I was so angry...I felt violated, and the experience has caused resentment and trauma for me each time I must deal with the police to this day. My White privilege was not enough.

Schwartz described this experience as a pivotal moment in the development of her critical consciousness of issues of race and social justice. As Schwartz stated, as a White woman, she

does not have the same experiences that people of color have; however, aspects of her identity, such as being the wife of an African American man and the mother of biracial children, gives her a certain level of propinquity to the issues and concerns faced by people of color.

Schwartz's beliefs and attitudes were not only shaped by her personal experiences, but from professional experiences gained in her school leadership preparation program as well. Schwartz was particularly influenced by a course that focused on social justice leadership. The course covered topics such as the systemic nature of racism, White privilege, and implicit bias and how these issues affect the lives of historically marginalized students, families, and communities. Schwartz stated:

> It covered things I knew intuitively, but it put research behind it. And I devoured everything in that class. I wrote and reflected on it...And I thought, all of this reading that I've done and they [teachers] are not exposed to any of it.

Research has suggested that these types of professional development experiences play an important role in shaping the dispositions and sensemaking of school leaders (Rigby, 2016). The influence of such courses on Schwartz's attitudes and beliefs can be seen in Schwartz's response about her teachers who ascribe to a colorblind philosophy when teaching and interacting with students:

> Colorblindness is ridiculous. With what has happened in our society over the past few years alone with Black Lives Matter and the footage of how many young Black men are being murdered by police officers, it's irresponsible to say that we're colorblind. I've had a couple teachers say, "I don't see color. I see humans." I'll hear that, right? I will hear, occasionally, that "all lives matter". And all lives should matter, but all lives don't matter in the same

way for the population that we teach. I think because of the type of leader I am, perhaps if people feel they are colorblind, they are not terribly comfortable saying that out loud.

In this example, Schwartz exhibited the critical consciousness (Gooden & Dantley, 2012; Johnson, 2006) required of a school leader who aspires to be more culturally responsive. She understood that assertions of colorblindness and that "all lives matter" is a problematic view to have for teachers who teach students of color. She also showed an awareness of sociopolitical factors and events, such as police brutality and the Black Lives Matter movement, that more than likely have an impact on the socioemotional and psychological well-being of the students and the community she serves.

Research has shown that how school leaders implement policies and practices is influenced by their own beliefs, experiences, and sensemaking (Anagnostopoulos & Rutledge, 2007; Carraway & Young, 2015; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Both Schwartz's personal and professional experiences contributed to her beliefs and critical consciousness regarding issues of race and social justice, as well as her willingness to critically engage teachers and staff in becoming more culturally responsive. The following section describes the conditions in which Schwartz entered her role as principal, her sensemaking of those conditions, and the specific leadership practices she enacted to create a more culturally responsive school environment.

PRINCIPAL SCHWARTZ'S ARRIVAL AT APPLEGATE ELEMENTARY

Noticing and bracketing cues from the environment. When Principal Schwartz arrived at Applegate, she inherited a school that had previously been in a state of constant flux and transition. In the sensemaking literature, this constant flux and change creates environments that are conducive for sensemaking among individuals in an organization (Maitlis & Sonenshein, 2010; Weick et al., 2005). Within one academic year, the school had experienced four different

principals and interim principals. According to Schwartz, Applegate had a "toxic school culture," in which the majority White teaching staff responded to a majority African American student population in culturally irresponsive ways. Schwartz explained her first *noticings,* as well as the *cues she extracted* from Applegate's school environment as follows:

> The cues were that I saw four leaders before me transition through here. The lunch room was miserable. There was lots of screaming from the staff, and kids didn't want to go to lunch. They came off the bus every day with too many of them looking unhappy. There were cues everywhere to start. Staff was unhappy. They were tired and they were burnt out and needed help. They felt abandoned […] I saw kids getting sent home left and right. I saw kids being yelled at and demoralized and demeaned. It wasn't because they [teachers] were bad people. They were overwhelmed and didn't have leadership to back them up.

Sensemaking often begins with the cognitive process of *noticing and bracketing* abnormal *cues* from the environment in order to organize the *flux* and *chaos* occurring within an environment (Weick et al., 2005). The desire to organize flux and chaos is a way to make sense of the environment and to understand what is going on (Johnson & Kruse, 2019). *Noticing and bracketing* is also guided by "mental models" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412) that are informed by one's prior experiences. In the case of Principal Schwartz, she *noticed*, *extracted,* and *bracketed* cues, such as the constant *flux* in leadership, the behavior of teachers and students, and disciplinary practices. These cues were actions and behaviors that did not conform to the mental models that informed her understanding of what a culturally responsive school environment should look like—mental models that were formed from her personal and professional experiences. Through *noticing and bracketing*, Principal Schwartz created a mental note of these actions and behaviors as concerns that needed to be addressed in the future. To order and make sense of her new school

environment, Schwartz enacted practices that seemed *plausible,* given her personal and professional experiences. The leadership practices that Principal Schwartz enacted follow below. Although the following practices seemed *plausible* to Schwartz, they would prove to be disruptive to the status quo at Applegate.

Addressing discipline and the reliance on suspension practices. In MCSD, sending home kids "left and right" was partially due to a district policy that allowed teachers to send students home without the principal's approval if teachers scheduled and held a meeting with parents within twenty-four hours of the infraction. Under previous principals, teachers relied heavily upon this discipline practice. However, after *noticing and bracketing* cues from the school environment regarding the overreliance of suspension practices, Schwartz enacted leadership practices that she believed would make the school environment more culturally responsive. Informed by her knowledge and consciousness of how students of color are disproportionately affected by exclusionary discipline practices, she began to openly model (Khalifa, 2011, 2018; Tillman, 2005) how teachers should attempt to verbally and physically interact with students in ways that she believed to be culturally responsive, less oppressive, and more genuinely empathetic (Warren, 2017) to the needs and concerns of students. Khalifa (2018) argued that actions such as these work to broaden critical self-reflection beyond the school principal to the school structures. He stated:

> Personal self-reflection is not enough. I argue that all structures and processes in schools need to be critically self-reflective as well […] School leaders who practice CRSL constantly seek, find, and challenge oppressive treatment of students and communities, and they push their staff to do so as well. (p. 60)

In modeling her expectations for teachers and staff, Principal Schwartz challenged the existing structures, processes, and behaviors that teachers were previously accustomed to at Applegate. Here, we see an example of Principal Schwartz exhibiting characteristics of Khalifa et al. (2016)'s third behavioral strand of CRSL (Promoting Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments).

In our interview, Schwartz explained that several students at Applegate had been exposed to trauma, and as a result, often respond to various triggers by exhibiting disruptive behavior. According to Schwartz, simply telling some students that they can't have or can't do something could result in them "throwing chairs and ripping things of the walls". In these cases, Schwartz began a practice of having teachers watch as she modeled how to deescalate these situations by engaging in dialogue with the students. She explained her rationale for this:

> I'm fully aware of what privilege I had because of the color of my skin. Knowing that shapes how I speak to children as a leader. Where some of my colleagues are more concerned with being perceived as the authoritarian and someone to fear, I'm more concerned with them getting back to class.

Instead of shouting at and demeaning students, which Schwartz described as the norm prior to her arrival, she explained how she would often dialogue with students to calm them down. She also made clear to teachers and staff her concerns about the previous discipline practices and worked with support staff to implement restorative justice practices—practices that utilize dialogue and conflict resolution strategies to address issues among individuals (Zehr, 1990). By using her knowledge about the racial disproportionality in discipline, Principal Schwartz acted in ways that challenged and disrupted disciplinary practices of Applegate teachers and teachers' attitudes about discipline that could potentially contribute to the perpetuation of exclusionary

discipline practices. Khalifa et al. (2016) substantiated utilizing knowledge about issues that affect marginalized student populations to disrupt "common patterns of inequities that lead to disenfranchisement" (p. 1281).

Schwartz's attempts to address behavior issues in culturally responsive ways were met with resistance from some of Schwartz's teaching staff. Schwartz's efforts to have her majority White teaching staff center care in addressing the discipline issues of a majority African American student population were perceived by many teachers and staff as "wasting time" and "babying" students who were just "bad and uncontrollable kids." These types of teacher dispositions regarding Applegate students were also evident to Schwartz in how teachers oversuspended students and brought in public safety in response to behavior issues. Schwartz critically reflected about what this means for her as a principal, as well as her teaching staff, when attempting to promote a more culturally responsive school environment:

> If I call public safety, although they're a separate entity, that is the police to the kids. And so now I've failed. I've shown the kids that I can't handle you. The police have to handle you, which sets a whole different tone. I would say, most of it revolves around suspension data and admitting that maybe we need to do something different and not just blame the kids or the parents and send them home.

As a principal who strove to become more culturally responsive, Schwartz believed that the school needed to devise alternative ways to address students' misbehavior, especially when those ways involved law enforcement. She considered how such optics were perceived by young children and the affect these optics would have on children's feelings about school. This is especially important within the current sociopolitical context, in which movements such as Black Lives Matter have highlighted the continued racial oppression of Black and Brown communities through acts of

police violence and brutality. For students in general, the presence of law enforcement has been shown to adversely affect their academic outcomes (Weistburst, 2019), but for students of color, the presence of public safety and police increases their chances of being physically abused by law enforcement (Denton, 2019). A culturally responsive school leader should be critically conscious enough to draw a connection between these in-school and out-of-school realities, as well as the ways these practices facilitate inequities, such as the school-to-prison pipeline. In this instance, Principal Schwartz exhibited characteristics of Khalifa et al. (2016)'s first strand of CRSL by being critically self-aware and self-reflective of the broader sociopolitical issues that affect the lives of her students.

Visual representations of people of color and the incorporation of student voice. Schwartz also attempted to make Applegate more culturally responsive by recognizing the historical and contemporary social movements that impact the lives of students of color. She did this by decorating the walls with historical and contemporary posters of African American figures, social movements, and art. Centering the imagery of people of color was something that Schwartz wanted to do since first arriving at Applegate. She explained her *noticing, extracting,* and *bracketing of cues* from the school's physical surroundings and condition upon her arrival:

> I would say, the lobby was absolutely bare. It looked institutionalized and lonely. I knew that I had to work on that culturally too. All of this plays a factor. The paint was chipping and peeling. There was no student work on the walls.

Figure 5: Mural. Th is figure displays a mural painted by a community artist and commissioned by Principal Schwartz to increase the visual representation of people of color throughout Applegate Elementary.

Schwartz believed that, by adding images of people of color throughout the school, students would have an opportunity to see various representations of people who looked like them reflected in the school environment. She explained:

> I went all out and printed off a bunch of images that I like, right? Knowing full well it was going to cause unrest and uncomfortableness. I can give you examples of Rosa Parks' mug shot. Or Bernie Sanders being arrested during the civil rights movement, right? The feelings of this invokes being marginalized and oppressed. And it also facilitates discussions. We know that in inner city schools, because of accountability and standardized testing, the social studies and science often gets pushed out the door because we're under the gun for math and reading. Kids don't have this background context, and I feel a responsibility to give it to them. At least the most basic of it. What better way than to have pieces of history in the hallway that not only reflect what they look like but will prompt

> some questioning. If the teachers aren't feeling inspired necessarily to plan units around it or don't have the skill set, maybe at least the kids will start asking about it.

Schwartz revealed the rationale behind the *noticing, extracting,* and *bracketing* of information she received about students regarding their lack of exposure to African American historical content. She also revealed the *presumptions* she held about her teaching staff and their feelings about fostering inclusive and culturally responsive spaces for marginalized student populations by acknowledging teachers' potential feelings of discomfort. In any case, Schwartz decided to move forward with presenting her idea to the leadership team.

In our interviews, she recounted how when she brought this idea to her leadership team, teachers and staff took issue with her idea. "It got very quiet." When the teachers finally spoke, they voiced a couple of concerns. First, they believed that the displaying of such images was "too political." For example, in response to an image of Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States, teachers did not see such an image as a potential source of pride and a role model for students, but rather, they saw a politically partisan image. According to Schwartz, "Their concern is, so they say, is that I'm portraying that kids should be of one party." Teachers also expressed concerns about centering African American imagery. One teacher argued, "It can't just be black people, right? We have to make sure we have Hispanic people. We have to make sure we have White people. We have to make sure we have Asian people."

In light of her leadership team's responses, Schwartz decided to center the voices of her students (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Khalifa, 2018), and so she created a committee of students to elicit their feelings about the images and what the images mean to them. After students selected the images they wanted displayed, the group decided they

wanted to have an unveiling of the images around school. During the focus group, Schwartz told the students that she was concerned that other students might not know much about the people and events depicted in the images, so she suggested having students write brief informational text about the images. All the students agreed that this would be a good way to teach their peers about individuals and ideas in the pictures (See Fig. 6 and 7). In this example, Schwartz centered the perspectives and voices of students rather than those of her teachers and staff. In doing so, she placed students' "perspectives and knowledge at the center of school reform" (Khalifa, 2018, p. 70). This leadership decision is consistent with the third behavioral strand of CRSL (Promoting Culturally Responsive and Inclusive School Environments).

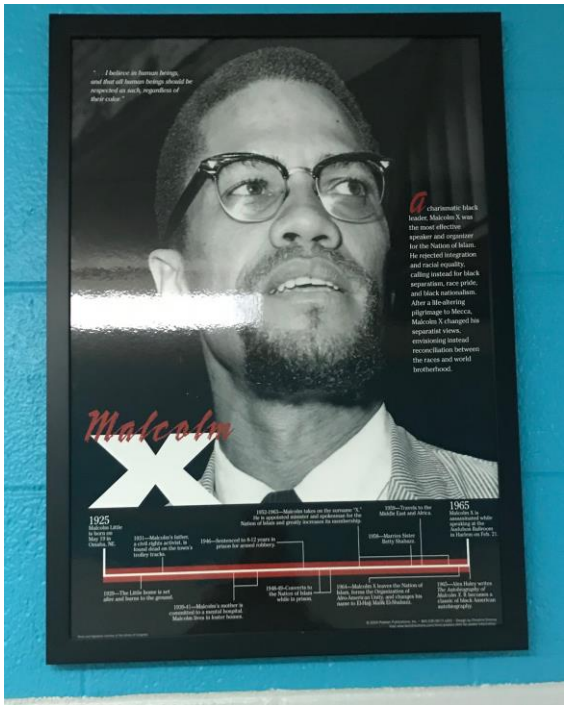

Figure 6: Black Lives Matter Poster *Figure 7: Malcom X Poster*

Figures 6 and 7 display framed posters displayed in the hallway.

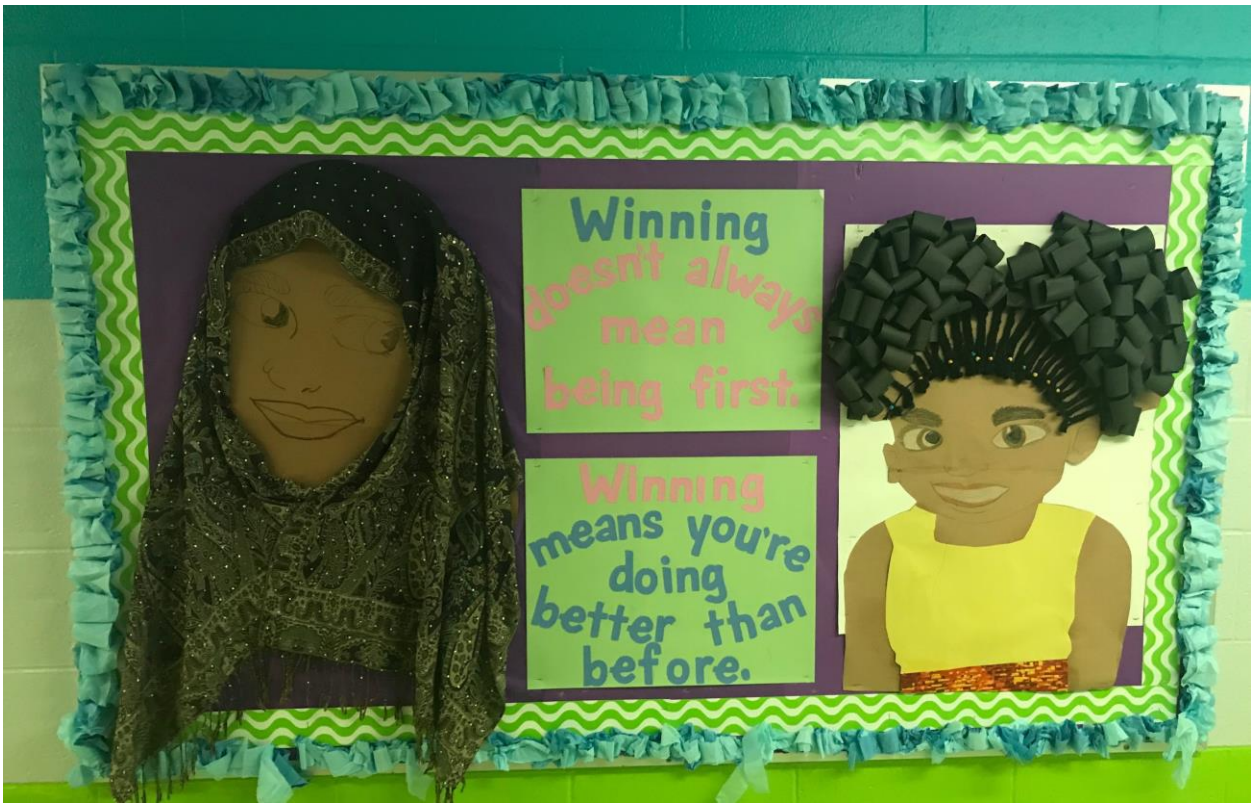

Figure 8: Motivational Bulletin Board. This figure displays a hallway bulletin board with motivational quote.

Schwartz explained that this initiative seemed to be going well until she began to receive complaints about a particular image that was displayed—the image of Malcolm X. Specifically, White parents who were concerned that the image might lead to conversations about race and prejudice questioned Schwartz about the image. Schwartz met with parents to address their concerns and to hear them out, but she also voiced her rationale and perspective about the issue. In Schwartz's estimation, elementary students should begin to learn about certain aspects of American history, even if conversations raise the subject of racism and prejudice. According to Schwartz, doing so in developmentally appropriate ways fosters all students' critical thinking around these issues. When I asked Schwartz about the potential of backlash from teachers and parents for taking this stance, she stated, "I won't back down or take the images down." In

response to potential backlash from parents about displaying these images, Schwartz exhibited a sense of courage and conviction to resistance that was not readily demonstrated by the district. The literature on culturally responsive and social justice school leadership has described courage and commitment as necessary skills for principals who intentionally go against the grain of the status quo (Jansen, 2006; Kose, 2009; Stovall, 2004).

Home visits and challenging deficit perspectives of students' families and communities. Schwartz also scaffolded hands-on learning opportunities that challenged teachers and staff to reexamine their previously held assumptions about engaging their students' families and communities (Flessa, 2009). At the beginning of the school year, she organized a "Back to School" home visit trip. Outfitted in Applegate shirts and hats, and armed with book bags and school supplies, Schwartz and her teachers rode a school bus through their students' communities. When they reached the homes of parents who had requested supplies and book bags, Schwartz, along with teachers and staff, would get off the bus to meet and talk with parents and students. Often, for convenience, Schwartz and her teachers would leave the bus behind and walk through the neighborhoods to find the next family's house.

When I observed and participated in these home visits, teachers and staff seemed to be enjoying the experience. However, Schwartz explained that this was not always the case. In fact, after she had floated the idea of a voluntary whole staff home visit, Schwartz later learned that some of her teachers resisted by calling their teachers' union to express their discomfort in participating in such an activity. They did so without expressing this discomfort to her directly. Nevertheless, Schwartz proceeded with the home visit as planned. In the end, although a few teachers wanted to have future visits in a central location that was more convenient for teachers

rather than families, most of Schwartz's teachers and staff told her that they enjoyed the trip and the learning opportunity.

Aware of her teachers' initial discomfort with the home visits, Schwartz scheduled a follow-up debriefing session a few weeks later. She explained to be that she wanted to give teachers time to process the experience before reconvening. During the debriefing session, teachers were given the space to honestly talk about what they had learned from the experience. She explained that she went first and openly shared some of the assumptions she had about her students' families before visiting their communities. "I made an assumption that many of my families were in apartments when, in fact, many were in single family homes." In turn, teachers began to share the assumptions they also held. Schwartz learned that many of her teachers were "concerned about bed bugs. They were also concerned that, as mandated reporters, we would have a lot of things to report. We had nothing to report." Prior to participating in the home visits, some Applegate teachers and staff held deficit perspectives about their students and their families' home lives. These deficit perspectives and others will be discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

CRPBIS team and developing the culturally responsive capacity of teachers. Many sensemaking scholars highlight the role that social interactions and communication play in shaping the sensemaking of individuals in organizations (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). Taylor and Van Every (2000) stated:

> We see communication as an ongoing process of making sense of the circumstances in which people collectively find ourselves and of the events that affect them. The sensemaking, to the extent that it involves communication, takes place in interactive talk and draws on the resources of language in order to formulate and exchange through talk. (p. 58)

Schwartz envisioned the CRPBIS team as a space where teachers and staff could talk and make sense of what it meant to be culturally responsive. Creating a CRPBIS team was a district-wide requirement for all schools in order to provide a space where teachers and staff could devise and implement new ways to create more culturally responsive school environments (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006), primarily by examining school behavioral practices. However, Schwartz was intentional in making this space a dialogic community of practice (Wenger, 1998). She wanted to design a space where teachers and staff went beyond discussions of behavior incentives and suspension data and began to think critically and self-reflect about how they could become more culturally responsive by learning how issues of race, power, and privilege contribute to racial disproportionality in school discipline, among other things.

According to Khalifa and colleagues (2016), culturally responsive school leaders must be willing to engage in critical conversations with teachers and staff in which they "interrogate their assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the classroom" (p. 1281). By utilizing the CRPBIS team as a space for collective sensemaking of cultural responsiveness, Schwartz did not "simply communicate the policy" but created "learning opportunities so that stakeholders can construct an interpretation of the policy and its implications for their own behavior" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 418). Sensemaking scholars have examined how school leaders have used learning communities in similar ways to shape and influence the practices of teachers and staff, as well as to develop a shared understanding (Coburn, 2001, 2005). Coburn (2001) stated, "People make sense of messages in the environment in conversation and interaction with their colleagues, constructing shared understandings—organization and workgroup specific culture, beliefs, and routines along the way" (p. 147).

However, given that the district chose to let principals lead the work of creating culturally responsive school environments, the interpretation of what it meant to be culturally responsive was shaped primarily by Schwartz's own values and beliefs—values and beliefs that were informed by her personal and professional experiences. Therefore, at the center of Schwartz's interpretation and messaging about cultural responsiveness was a perspective that centered the impact of systemic racism, White privilege, structural inequity, and its effect on students in and out of school.

Taking *cues* from her environment, Schwartz recalled the discomfort that occurred when she attempted to have conversations about issues of race and privilege in whole group staff meetings. She was also aware of how administrators, teachers, and staff responded to the district-wide conversation about discipline. Based on her *noticing, extracting, and bracketing of cues* from the school environment, Schwartz was intentional in ensuring that the CRPBIS team was a small group of teachers and staff who were willing to have conversations that would challenge their own positionalities as teachers of minoritized students. These conversations were often guided by school data, video and audio clips, and book discussions around issues that Schwartz believed were foundational for developing the critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness of her teachers and staff.

Schwartz would often select these videos and materials, and they focused on issues she found to be important, such as racial justice, oppression, and privilege. For example, one book that Schwartz used to help teachers and staff think about race and privilege was *Waking Up White, and Finding Myself in the Story of Race* by Debby Irving (2014). This autobiographical text chronicles the author's process of unlearning her assumptions about race and privilege as an upper middle-class White woman. Teachers and staff read this book on their own time and

reconvened at the next CRPBIS meeting to talk about their thoughts, confusion about concepts, and personal experiences and connections, as well as their emotions and concerns regarding applying an understanding of these concepts to their work of creating a more culturally responsive school environment. In doing so, Schwartz provided a sensemaking space where teachers and staff could openly address issues of race and privilege that are often not addressed because of their controversial natures. This collective sensemaking space provided teachers and staff with the opportunity to share their understandings regarding these issues, as well as to potentially develop a consensus regarding how they would move forward (Weick, 1995) with establishing what it means to be culturally responsive as a school. Weick et al. (2005) described the importance of sharing a common understanding in collective sensemaking. They stated, "To share understanding means to lift equivocal knowledge out of the tacit, private, complex, random and past to make it explicit, public, simpler, ordered, and relevant to the situation at hand" (p. 413). By using the CRPBIS team as a sensemaking space, Schwartz attempted to remove the stigma associated with having difficult conversation among teachers and staff and connected it to the school's collective and relevant goal of creating a more culturally responsive school environment.

Schwartz's intention for the CRPBIS team was to create a coalition of culturally responsive school-level influencers who would promote the shared vision and understanding of what it means to be culturally responsive to the rest of the Applegate teachers and staff. She also saw these individuals as potentially playing an integral role in changing the culture of Applegate, especially in terms of weeding out individuals who were opposed to her vision for cultural responsiveness. Khalifa and colleagues (2016) argued that "culturally responsive school leaders must also be willing to make the hard decisions to counsel out those teachers who recognize this work is not for

them" (p. 1281). However, many of Schwartz's teachers and staff described her as having a passion for social justice. And so, Schwartz believed that by developing a unified coalition of school-level influencers, she could accomplish the goal of making Applegate more culturally responsive without appearing to have a political agenda. She stated:

> Instead of me making the decision, teachers will show teachers the door. If you are not buying into social justice, restorative justice, these types of belief systems and values, then this is not the place for you, and I won't necessarily have to make it explicit myself. Our team is developing, and I really believe teachers will show other teachers the door.

Even though Schwartz seemed optimistic about the progress that she is making toward moving her staff to be more culturally responsive, she is aware of the challenges of sustaining such practices in the long term:

> What's going to happen when I leave? Am I going to walk out of here and this system is going to collapse, and the pictures are going to come down and suspensions are going to go up? And maybe, you know, the years I spent here were for naught. That's my worst fear. I don't know. I just worry that...I just hope that somebody is willing to listen to the lessons that I learned and build on it. Um, and perhaps I can inspire just a couple of leaders to be brave enough to just put some damn pictures up and stand your ground. And then go slow in the process and see what you can do for your kids. Because really, we're here to serve families and students. I understand there's a contract. I understand that you need your teachers to feel appreciated and I do work very hard at that too. But we're here for students and families.

Even as Principal Schwartz worked to create structures and practices to sustain her vision and expectations for making Applegate more culturally responsive, she worried about the likelihood

that these structures and practices would be sustained beyond her tenure as principal. For though her vision was to create a coalition of individuals who would promote her beliefs and practices about culturally responsiveness, "social justice agendas in schools are hard to sell" (Stovall, 2004); particularly hard to sell are transformative leadership (Shields, 2011) agendas that seek to challenge the status quo of previous practices, structures, beliefs, and behaviors.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of a new principal often comes with the implementation of new policies and practices. In this way, Principal Schwartz was no different than the principals who preceded her. However, what distinguished Schwartz from her predecessors was that her practices not only challenged the status quo, but they challenged teachers and staff to begin to think about issues like race, bias, and privilege—issues that many people find controversial and difficult to discuss. Schwartz also expected teachers and staff to amend their own practices and actions in response to this new knowledge as a means to becoming more culturally responsive to the needs of students and their families. However, although Schwartz exhibited many characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader, her conceptualization and subsequent leadership practices highlight the complexity involved in the process of school leaders evolving in their practice toward cultural responsiveness.

For example, CRSL clearly articulates the importance of having school leaders who lead in ways that improve the schooling experiences of historically marginalized student populations and communities. However in doing so, CRSL does not necessarily advocate for leadership practices that essentialize cultural responsiveness in ways that are mutually exclusive to a particular group. In her enactment of what she believed to be CRSL, Schwartz focused on issues of bias and privilege in ways that supported her beliefs about race and racism. There was no

evidence to suggest that Principal Schwartz was opposed to acknowledging the need for CRSL for other marginalized groups and communities, but her own identities and experiences shaped how she conceptualized what it meant to be a culturally responsive leader for marginalized groups.

Schwartz's leadership practices and expectations that centered race, particularly a Black/White racial binary, presented a disruption to the status quo at Applegate. In the sensemaking literature, disruption refers to any major event or occurrence that threatens the status quo of an organization (Giola & Thomas, 1996; Isabella, 1992; Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). According to Walls (2017), disruption to an organization's status quo "triggers a sensemaking episode, i.e., a need to rethink or 'make sense of' a new reality" (p. 11). In the next chapter, I will explore the factors that contributed to the individual sensemaking of teachers and staff regarding Principal Schwartz's practices and her expectations for making Applegate more culturally responsive.

CHAPTER 6: TEACHER AND STAFF SENSEMAKING

Weick et al. (2005) stated, "Who we think we are" (identity) influences "what we enact and how we interpret" (p. 416). As discussed in Chapter 5, elements of Principal Schwartz's identity informed her enactment of leadership practices she believed were culturally responsive. For example, Schwartz's experiences with the police *retrospectively* informed her sensemaking by providing her with a more critical understanding of what it means to be culturally responsive for historically marginalized communities and students and how she might bring a more critical perspective to her school leadership practices. As a result of her experiences, Schwartz's beliefs about what it means to be culturally responsive centered being critically conscious and sociopolitically aware. In this chapter, I discuss how teachers' and staff members' understanding of cultural responsiveness, as well as aspects of their identity, influenced their sensemaking of the disruption caused by Principal Schwartz's practices. Three major themes emerged from interviews with teachers and staff: Beliefs and Values, Personal and Professional Experiences, and Attitudes Toward Leadership Practices. Subthemes such as colorblindness, multiculturalism, and deficit views also emerged.

BELIEFS AND VALUES

Individuals make sense and interpret phenomena in terms of their own pre-existing frames of reference and worldviews (Porac et al., 1989; Weick, 1995). Specifically, as it relates to the sensemaking of K-12 policies and practices, Spillane and colleagues (2002) stated:

> What is understood from a new message depends critically on the knowledge base that one already has. This means more than simply recognizing lack of knowledge interferes with the ability to understand. It means that different agents will construct different

> understanding, seeing what is new in terms of what is already known and believed. (p. 395)

In interviews with Applegate teachers and staff, what was "already known and believed" was evident in their definitions of cultural responsiveness. Their responses to the meaning of cultural responsiveness varied. As discussed in Chapter 4, many of them believed that they received no clear message about what cultural responsiveness means and what it should look like at the school level. This uncertainty was evident in some of the teachers' responses. For example, veteran teacher Christine explained:

> I'm not really sure from the point of view of the district or from the principal. For the principal, it seems that it's mostly about White teachers, and this is something she says. That White teachers need to be more understanding of our children of color. And I'm like, I guess I never knew that I wasn't.

During an interview with Christine, she pulled out her cell phone to search for a definition of cultural responsiveness:

> There's a million definitions. And then it says some of the characteristics of culturally responsive teaching are positive perspective on parents and families. And as I continue reading, I see more things. Like I told you before, I don't really use all the education jargon [...] So this is very new and in all my years of teaching— decades now—it's like when and why is this coming up? [...] Whether she [Principal Schwartz] is doing what she's supposed to be doing in the way that the district wants her to do it. I don't know. Maybe she's doing it her way. I don't know how it is in other buildings. When I do talk to some friends in other buildings, they are like, "Why do you all do that? We don't do that."

Although Christine did not provide her own definition of what cultural responsiveness means, she is an example of how teachers and staff can become confused when a clear vision and definition of cultural responsiveness has not been set forth by district-level leaders (Leithwood et al., 2008; Manasse, 1986; Nanus, 1992). Her questions of "when and why" the issue of cultural responsiveness is being discussed in the district showed that she believed that she had not been provided with a clear rationale and understanding of cultural responsiveness. The lack of a clear message about cultural responsiveness also caused Christine to question how Principal Schwartz enacted her leadership practices. For example, when reflecting about her past experiences about previous principals, Christine stated that Applegate has had principals of color in the past. However, she believed that Principal Schwartz raised the issue of race and its relation to teacher practice more than any of the previous principals. Here, it is apparent that Christine potentially *noticed, bracketed,* and *extracted the cue* of Principal Schwartz's race talk as something out of place and different from what has been done in the past. As she attempted to make sense of the new reality of a principal who openly talks about issues of race, she engaged in *retrospection* by trying to understand her current experience in relation to the past behaviors of previous leaders. This example showed that when teachers and staff are unclear about the district's beliefs and values, especially regarding issues of race in teaching and learning, they may also be uncertain whether principals are using their leadership practices to advance personal or political agendas.

Amanda also exhibited an uncertainty about the meaning of cultural responsiveness after receiving an email from the district prior to our interview:

> I kind of chuckled because I think it [district email] got sent out because there was a lot of behavior issues yesterday. So, they probably dealt with a lot of stuff and they were like, "Send out this email," right? Yeah. This one is called Trauma Responsive Resources. So, I

> guess...See that word gets thrown out a lot, too. So, is it culturally responsive or is it trauma? Or are they the same thing? They sound a little bit different, right?

In this case, Amanda was grappling with understanding the difference between cultural responsiveness and trauma-informed practices. Amanda's uncertainty and confusion about cultural responsiveness is more than likely the result of the district's equivocation and intentional decision to avoid directly engaging in critical conversations that made principals, teachers, and staff uncomfortable. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Superintendent Williams and other district leaders saw trauma-informed initiatives as an opportunity to meet the socioeconomic needs of their diverse student population, as well to indirectly build the culturally responsive capacities of their principals, teachers, and staff. However, this decision had the unintended consequence of positioning culturally responsive and trauma-informed goals as competing priorities (Castillo, 2018) and sending competing policy signals (Spillane et al., 2002), further contributing to the confusion and uncertainty exhibited by Amanda. While some teachers and staff expressed uncertainty about what it meant to be culturally responsive, other teachers and staff seemed to operationalize their own understanding of culturally responsiveness in the absence of a clear message from the district. Beliefs and values that were apparent in these definitions were colorblind and multicultural perspectives and deficit perspectives of students' home culture.

Colorblind and multicultural(ish) beliefs. When asked what being culturally responsive meant to him, Jeff, the only White male teacher at Applegate, responded:

> Cultural responsiveness means that you don't put a label on any single child at all. They are all an individual. They are a human being. There is no color to them [...] We're not putting any preconceived notions on them. "Well, you're coming from this area, so you're

this" or "You're this color so you won't be able to learn that." Everybody can learn something. I believe in each and every child and I will help them reach their goals.

Jeff was opposed to any view of cultural responsiveness that centers a consideration of race. Given his previous views expressed in Chapter 4, his response was presumably a reaction to the district's espoused values and beliefs regarding the role that race plays in the perpetuation of disproportionate disciplinary practices against Black students, as well as his understanding of Principal Schwartz's belief that teachers should be cognizant of the role that race plays in teaching and learning. Jeff's response seemed to be well-intentioned in that he appeared to eschew what he believes to be deficit perspectives of students' abilities based on socioeconomic status or race. However, his response represented a superficial misunderstanding of the "underlying structural ideas" (Spillane et al., 2002) that informed district leaders' and Principal Schwartz's intentions and purposes for raising the issues of race and socioeconomic status. These intentions and purposes were meant not to promote deficit perspectives of students and their communities but to make teachers and staff aware of the myriad ways these issues impact teaching and learning. By asserting that being culturally responsive means believing that "there is no color" to the students he teaches, Jeff put forth a definition and displays a disposition that was colorblind (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Leonardo, 2002) and antithetical to the goals of developing culturally responsive teachers and staff—goals such as becoming critically self-reflective and critically conscious of the lived experiences and realities of historically marginalized students and communities (Khalifa et al., 2016). Here we see that Jeff's prior beliefs about race informed his perspectives of cultural responsiveness.

Tiffany, one of the few teachers of color at Applegate, described cultural responsiveness this way:

> To me it just means taking people for who they are because everyone grows up in their own culture. And I think that there are too many people in existence in too many multiple cultures within cultures within cultures to generalize and say there's four cultures. Like every kid who comes in here has their own culture at home. Culture is like a definition of what you operate in and where you're from. So, everybody has their own culture and there's gonna be things that are similar between people's cultures and there's going to be things that are different between people's culture. So, I think that cultural responsiveness is just being accepting and open to everybody, period. Like not pinpointing and saying that you're this or that [...] I don't think being culturally responsive is all encompassing to Black people. It's including everybody. If we want to be multicultural, um, not culturally responsive, but multicultural, then I think that we have to focus on everybody.

I wanted to know more about her opinion of being multicultural rather than culturally responsive, so I asked her to clarify. She explained that being multicultural meant:

> [...] being responsive to the cultures that you are around and then embracing all cultures. So maybe you're not equal in all cultures, but you can still teach the material of all cultures and acknowledge them all. I don't think that a Black school should primarily just teach about Black people. I think that Black people need to know about other people too.

Like Jeff, Tiffany's response was a reaction to Schwartz's leadership practices—practices that Tiffany believed generalized and made assumptions about the experiences and cultures of students and their families based on their racial identity. She believed that these practices should not focus on one group, but that they should represent and acknowledge all cultures. Here, Tiffany *noticed, bracketed,* and *extracted the cue* of Principal Schwartz's consideration of racial identity. Tiffany made an important distinction that race is not always an indication of one's cultural practices.

However, what seems to be missing is an understanding that multiculturalism is about more than making sure that students' cultural differences are represented and acknowledged in the school curricula and environment. Often multiculturalism has been taken up in schools through practices and interpretations that center surface-level elements of culture, such as language, food, clothes, and holidays (Lee et al., 2006; Meyer & Rhoades, 2006) but depoliticize the sociopolitical objectives of multiculturalism (Banks, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1987). I refer to these practices and Tiffany's perspective as multicultural(ish) because even though various multiculturalism(s), such as critical multiculturalism (May & Sleeter, 2010), seek to affirm diversity, they also require a commitment to addressing and challenging issues that perpetuate the status quo for marginalized communities. Since Tiffany had a perspective about being multicultural that focused only on making sure that everyone is represented equally, she might not have been open to practices that center the sociopolitical issues of specific racial and marginalized groups.

In both examples above, Jeff and Tiffany defined cultural responsiveness in ways that were misaligned with Principal Schwartz's understanding of what it means to be culturally responsive. That is, they both seemed to have a lack of awareness about the deeper rationale and "underlying structural ideas" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 401), such as critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness (Villegas & Lucas, 2002) that were central to Principal Schwartz's understanding of cultural responsiveness. This lack of awareness of the historical and contemporary ways schools have functioned as oppressive spaces for students of color, particularly Black students, in conjunction with colorblind and uncritical multicultural perspectives, work to mask and mute the social inequities experienced by historically minoritized students in and out of schools (Sleeter & Grant, 1987).

Deficit beliefs of home culture. In her explanation of cultural responsiveness, Tiffany mentioned that students' home environments are part of their culture. The concept of a home culture was also shared by other teachers and staff, often in ways that revealed deficit perspectives (Sleeter & Grant, 2003) about students and their home environments. For example, Linda, a support staff member, explained what she believes cultural responsiveness means:

> Well, I think it means a lot of things. Um, I think it means understanding, first of all the culture of this school. Understanding the students where they're coming from, their culture, and we have the demographics that I mentioned before. Cultural responsiveness means understanding them collectively and individually. I have the opportunity to do this since I work with a lot of the kids and talk to the parents and I see firsthand. But I don't think the teachers always have that opportunity to talk with parents other than, you know, during parent teacher conferences or if there's a problem with a student. But, um, I think that's so important. The culture of the school. That involves the cultures of the students. Where they're coming from. Whether it's projects or whether it's apartments because those are two different kinds of lifestyles there. Whether it's homelessness. We have quite a few students who are homeless and that's a whole different culture that I'm trying to understand. I don't even have an understanding of how they are dealing from day to day.

Linda continued to explain the challenges faced by these particular student populations:

> For example, transportation issues. If they miss the bus, if they wake up late, they don't have a way to get to school. Unless they have somebody that can bring them to school or a friend of the parent or whatever. That's the culture that we're dealing with. Why kids come to school angry. Why they want to fight. Why they are mad. Why this student just

had a meltdown, a breakdown and it is not even 10 o'clock. That's the culture and I don't know what's going on.

Linda believed that Applegate's school culture is impacted by students' home cultures. In describing her view of home culture, she made a distinction between the "lifestyles" of students and families who live in apartments or in public housing and those who are homeless. From our interview conversations and my observations, I gathered that Linda was genuinely concerned about the well-being of students and their families. Therefore, I interpret this response as Linda conveying her understanding that students from various socioeconomic backgrounds have unique realities and challenges that teachers and staff should be aware of. However, by associating the effects and conditions of poverty as cultural characteristics of students and their families, she was unintentionally promoting the myth of the culture of poverty (Collins, 1988; Gorski, 2008; Lewis, 1959). This myth claims that people in poverty are poor because they willingly engage in deficient behaviors and values that perpetuate poverty. Although Linda did not express blatant deficit perspectives about students and families in poverty, her association of these conditions and challenges with a culture, albeit unintentional, is problematic. As Hammond (2015) warned, poverty is not a culture and "most families are trapped in poverty and do not willingly embrace it as a way of life" (p. 32).

Jeff also espoused the idea of a culture of home:

> We all have different cultures. See, there's cultures and then there's cultures of home. Every kid has their own culture of home. And there's cultures as far as ethnicities like African American, Caucasian and Native Americans.

I told Jeff that I understood the connection of culture with different ethnicities, but I asked him to further explain his thinking regarding the culture of home. He continued:

> For example, you go into some homes and education is not at the forefront because maybe they had parents who had a bad experience with education. So now their kids can have the same issues that they had. I've had that happen before where I've had to try to change the perception. "I'm sorry that you had that experience and I don't want that experience for your child. And I'm on your side. I'm on your side. I want to work with you. And how can we get your child to the next level."

Jeff put forth the oft-repeated deficit trope that parents and families of students in poverty do not value education (Compton-Lilly, 2003; Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Leichter, 1978). Deficit perspectives were also evident in Jeff's discussion about student families and his perspective on welfare:

> Same thing with welfare. We were talking about jobs. "Why do I have to get a job?" "I'm going to get the government to take care of me." Already in third grade we're having these conversations with your kids and that's not just one or two. It's the majority of my classroom. Something has to give. We have again these cultures at home. It's what's taking place at home and then coming into the classroom. Again, you walk through the door with a blank slate. When these things come out in conversation, we attack them. We try to address each and every need and concern that the kids have.

Jeff described how he worked to discourage students from adopting what he believed are the beliefs of their home culture. As he stated above, these comments are "attacked" in conversations he has had with students. Although Jeff believed that he was addressing the needs and concerns of students, by labeling these comments as something that needs to be attacked, he was potentially sending the message to students that their families and home cultures are abnormal. In doing so, Jeff showed a lack of understanding of the structural and sociopolitical factors that contribute to

economic inequity (Rank, Yoon, & Hirschl, 2003). This lack of understanding has the potential to reinforce Jeff's deficit perspectives of students and their families by mistaking the mechanisms to cope with economic marginalization for norms and behaviors of students and families in poverty (Hammond, 2015).

Derrick, the only African American male teacher in the school described cultural responsiveness this way:

> I think it is being responsive to the culture that you're serving. The 60% of African American students here— there is a certain culture that they know. Whatever it is, they know this culture as being...How do I put it? Because I don't want to say free and reduced lunch and all that. So as I look at this district, culture is what these kids are going through, what they see, what they tell you, what's going on with their mothers, their fathers, their grandmothers, things that they are going through. I think for me, cultural responsiveness is to be sensitive to these children's needs and for me, to treat them in a way that would build them. And just because you don't have a lot of food or money or this and that, that doesn't mean you can't come in here and act correctly. That is, coming in, sitting down, being kind, sharing pencils, walking in the hallway. That's for me the culture of what these kids are. The culture that these kids need to transcend if they expect to become successful. So, as far as cultural responsiveness, maybe these kids are lacking in some things, but they're not lacking in everything. So culturally responsiveness to me, it's just knowing who they are and knowing how to talk to these children. Knowing how to be patient.

Throughout my interviews with Derrick, it was apparent that he believed strongly that he could better understand the experiences of African American students and families because of their shared racial identity. It is this sense of shared experience and racial identity that Derrick

believed informed his ethic of care (Noddings, 2005) when teaching African American children. His description of cultural responsiveness centered a sensitivity and patience to the needs and concerns of African American students, as well as the need to interact and teach them in ways that edify and "build them" up. However, Derrick's statements were also paradoxical. For although he expressed an ethic of care and desire to support African American students, he also associated the effects and conditions of poverty with cultural characteristics of students and their families. For example, Derrick vented his frustration about his students' parents, who he believed weren't supportive of their children's education:

> I'm really saddened by these parents that are not supportive of their children. And you have kids who come in here hungrier and dirtier than I ever was. You know, how are you that stanky at eight years old? You come in and your face is not washed. You didn't brush your teeth. You're wearing the same dirty clothes you had on yesterday. You know. So, as a parent, does your child matter? Again, being a Black man, I have a different perspective from all these White teachers. Of course. I had a different upbringing. It's just different [...] They [parents] don't come up here. They don't send their children here with coats and hats. I bought hats. I bought socks. Those two and three coats over there in the corner, I bought them from Goodwill. They don't come to conferences. You have to call them three, four, five times.

Derrick's perspectives about the conditions and actions of his students and their families were filtered through the lens of his own beliefs and upbringing. Derrick *retrospectively* reflected on his past personal childhood experiences, and as a result, the *cues* regarding parental involvement that he *noticed, bracketed,* and *extracted* from the environment were grounded in these beliefs and experiences. Although Derrick was passionate about making sure his students had a good

education to be successful in a democratic society, he grappled with certain realities of students' home lives that did not conform to his own upbringing and experiences. For example, Derrick mentioned that students' parents not having much money and being food insecure did not mean that students should not be able to come to school every day and abide by the rules and participate in the culture of school. However, research has shown that food insecurity has been found to affect not only the academic performance of children, but to affect their health and social skills as well (Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005). Although Derrick claimed to know his students, and he believed that they shared similar childhood experiences and realities, his comments that students' home experiences and realities are "the culture of what these kids are" and "the culture that these kids need to transcend if they expect to become successful" seemed to define students and parents in ways that could lead to deficit thinking about them.

Beliefs about the sociopolitical realities of marginalized students and communities.

The ways Applegate teachers and staff defined cultural responsiveness provided some perspective about the pre-existing beliefs and values that were operating as they made sense of what it meant to be culturally responsive. Some teachers and staff held beliefs and values that exhibited a lack of critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness. Given the importance of critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness (Khalifa, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002a) in the development of culturally responsive teachers, I wanted to understand the extent to which these beliefs and values shaped their understanding and views regarding contemporary sociopolitical issues. Although Principal Schwartz held certain beliefs about addressing the sociopolitical realities of students and their communities, teachers and staff were not yet at the point in their pedagogy where they were creating lessons that addressed these issues. Therefore, to elicit their thoughts on contemporary sociopolitical issues and the likelihood that they would engage students

in this type of teaching and learning, I presented teachers and staff with artifacts that consisted of a teacher exemplar and student work samples from a kindergarten assignment. The objective of the assignment was for students to write a response and draw an illustration that completed the sentence stem, “In A School Where Black Lives Matter...”. The exemplar and student examples are provided in Chapter 3 (See Figure 4).

Prior to discussing the artifact with teachers and staff, I wanted to know Principal Schwartz’s thoughts and opinions about the artifacts. As she perused the artifacts, she stated:

> Wow. I can only dream. Oh my god. Look at that. Well, this is amazing! We are not here. So that's my next move, once the line is drawn about who's with me and who's not. And those who are with me, we're going this route. And I'll never force a lesson plan like this on a teacher but the rest of us are going there. So, um, you know, I envision parents asking why their child wasn't exposed to this. Or why didn't their child get to experience this? That's where change is going to come. It's not just through me. It's through the community.

Schwartz acknowledged that the artifact presented is an example of the type of lessons that she envisions teachers teaching at Applegate. However, her response suggested that she was aware that this type of approach to teaching would be accepted by some and resisted by others. This is evident in her categorization of those teachers and staff who were with her and those who were not. Those who were with Principal Schwartz seemed to understand the importance of addressing sociopolitical issues such as Black Lives Matter and young students’ ability to understand the issues. Amanda stated:

> I think that kids can handle this conversation. However in CRPBIS, we're talking about can the staff handle this conversation. I think that Schwartz's a little bit afraid of the pushback from staff and that possibly we're not all ready for the conversation. I think we have a ways

> before we get here. Now I know I could have this conversation with my kids, because they don't think like adults. They would have things to say and they would say great things. But I don't see us doing it as a school wide thing right now. I would be okay with doing it in my classroom. I think that would be a good activity, but I don't think school wide we're ready. Which is sad, but I don't think we are quite there yet.

Linda stated:

> I think this is brave of the teacher to even do this because here, I think the teachers would say all lives matter. They wouldn't even touch this. They would just say all lives matter here. They wouldn't even consider Black Lives Matter. But this teacher seemed to be open and wanted to, I think, be socially political. So I think this is brave of the teacher doing this. And then it seems like she got pretty good results from the students too. Because students are aware. They know. They know the different distinctions. So why hide it. Why not talk about it.

Both Linda and Amanda believed that young children have the ability to engage in teaching and learning that brings in contemporary sociopolitical issues. However, they both also expressed concerns about the adults' ability to have these discussions and the potential for resistance. Derrick expressed a similar understanding about children's ability to understand these issues, but unlike Linda and Amanda, he brought a personal perspective as a Black man with young children:

> You see brothers getting arrested and people getting slammed by police. And then you have the Black Lives Matter groups in Washington and in California. I think if you were with your child sitting down and talking about it then you are already aware of these things. If you're not talking about it, you know, I don't think you are paying attention to what's going

on in society. I mean I have two daughters. If I had a son, I would talk about this even more so. I talk about this with my daughters. We've been talking about this for a while. As we watch TV and watch videos and watch things where Black people are being mistreated. And we just talk about situations that I don't want to find my daughters in, especially when you see people getting arrested and beat down.

Others like kindergarten teacher Tiffany, a Black female, were among those who believed that teachers should not engage in conversations about issues like Black Lives Matter with students. After looking at the artifacts, Tiffany stated

> It's interesting. I mean what the kids got out of it. And it's interesting how, um, different it is from what she's saying. Like they are just pointing out the inequities. The kids are pointing out just the inequities. And the teacher is saying that we want equality and that's it. We want to be represented as much as everybody else. So in the pictures there's equality. She tried to diversify the picture.

Tiffany interpreted the students' response to the prompt as a misunderstanding of the teacher's expectations. There is no indication from the prompt that the teacher wants students to talk about equality. There is also no way of knowing any other instructions students received prior to this assignment. However, from the open-ended nature of the prompt, it can be inferred that the teacher wanted students to voice their own opinion of what a school where Black lives mattered would look like.

Tiffany discussed what she believed the students' responses should have been about and how she would edit this assignment if she were to teach it:

> Um, well, this picture should just be an example of what represents diversity. I just, I don't know. I just don't like singling out. I mean, if I were doing kindergarten and I were to edit

> this for my class, then I would say Black, White, Hispanic, Asian, Native American students will all be treated equally. We will all... All of our students will be represented as much as any other student. I mean, wouldn't White kids who read this in kindergarten be like, "What are you talking about?"

Tiffany's interpretation was consistent with the beliefs evident in her prior definition of cultural responsiveness. That is, she believed that to be multicultural and culturally responsive means to acknowledge cultural diversity and to be inclusive of everyone. She interpreted this artifact from the lens of her own beliefs and worldview, and in doing so, disregarded and invalidated what students are actually saying in the work samples. It is interesting to note, that while dismissing the students' feelings and perspectives about valuing Black lives in schools, she ended her response by questioning how White students would feel about an assignment that focused on Black lives. Tiffany may have believed that asking this question showed that she was concerned about the perspectives of all students, but it had the unintended effect of centering Whiteness (Matias & Newlove, 2017) through what I believe to be an "all and none" approach to equality. I use that phrase to mean espousing ideas about equality and inclusiveness for all, while addressing none of the sociopolitical issues and concerns that affect marginalized students in and out of schools.

As she continued to review the artifacts, Tiffany also questioned whether students actually held the opinions about race and school expressed in the work samples or whether they were being influenced and socialized by their parents to think this way about these issues:

> They are aware of race and these issues, but to be fair, are they living it or is someone telling it to them? [...] We can put a lot of this stuff in kids' heads. Because I don't think that kids naturally see or know these things. Like when they're being treated equally and when they're in an environment that is diverse and where race isn't focused on, it's just,

> "Here's another kid in my class." I don't think that they are fully aware of race and inequity. I think that we put a lot of information and expose them to a lot of things where all of a sudden, they're more aware of it than they would have been had you not said anything.

Contrary to Tiffany's beliefs, sociologists have argued that young children are quite aware of social inequities and are appreciative when adults are honest about "the troubling facts of persisting social injustice" (Van Ausdale & Feagin, 2001, p. 208). Although Tiffany believed that children as young as kindergarteners are not aware of race, research has shown that children begin to notice racial difference and exhibit racial bias as early as six months (Xiao et al., 2018). As children become toddlers, they begin to classify people and objects based on perceived similarities through transductive reasoning (Rathus, 2006), meaning that if a toddler sees a person who looks a certain way and that person possesses certain traits, then the toddler will believe that all people who look similar will share the same traits (Katz & Kofkin, 1997). Because young children often lack the sufficient context to critically question their faulty reasoning of racial difference, this can potentially lead to racial stereotyping. It is important that teachers understand that young children do attempt to make sense of race from an early age. Therefore, although Tiffany stated, "I don't talk about race in my classroom," by not doing so, she has limited the potential opportunities for students to question their racial stereotypes, as well as to make sense of their racialized experiences and identities.

Jeff, a former kindergarten teacher, reacted similarly to Tiffany when reviewing the artifacts. He explained:

> I think for kindergarteners, this is going really deep. As far as the whole Black Lives Matter issue, I am a firm believer that all lives matter. I guess it all boils down to your upbringing and how you as an individual are trying to make society better through whatever job or

> profession you have. For me, it's all lives matter and my teaching reflects that. Like I said, I don't care who walks through that door. You are a human being and your life matters to me. I care about each and every one of you and I will do my very best to teach each and every one of you every single day and there will be no preconceived notions. If you're Black, I'm not going to look down on you any differently because you're all smart. You are all smart. You are all capable learners.

Jeff believed that he had a passion for teaching and learning and that all students can learn. He especially prided himself on treating each student as an individual and meeting their academic needs through differentiated instruction. He stated:

> Somebody not being able to do something and then me working with them and finding different ways if they're not getting it the first time. Coming at it from a different angle and saying, "You know what? Let's try it this way." "You know what? We haven't tried it this way yet," until they finally start to grasp it.

It is from the perspective of differentiating instruction that Jeff believed that his teaching reflected his care for all of his students. However, his beliefs about being an individual human being and meeting the needs of students through individualized instruction influenced the way he made sense of any notion that his students might potentially have shared experiences and sociopolitical realities because of their racial identity. As he stated in his definition, "You don't put a label on any single child at all. They are all an individual. They are a human being. There is no color to them." This colorblind and individualist perspective appeared to play a role not only in his interpretation of the kindergarten artifacts, but also in his lack of understanding regarding social movements like Black Lives Matter, the interest and concern that young Black students have

about these movements and issues, and the potential effect these issues have on his students' lives and their communities.

For example, Jeff shared that he has taught students as young as first grade who have brought up the fear of being shot and treated differently by the police because of the color of their skin:

> I've had first graders talking about that when I taught first grade years ago. That conversation has come up that because I'm Black, then I'm going to get shot. I'm going to get pulled over. I'm like, no, you shouldn't think that, I said, and your parents shouldn't be telling you that either, because this is what it is. It is their parents telling them this. Why are your parents telling you that? Your parents should not be telling you that because there is a chance no matter what, if you're not following the directions of the authority, that there is a chance this could happen. Because in this situation, it's life and death for the cop. He asked you to show your hands and you're not showing your hands and you reach for something. Odds are it's going to happen. And you have to look at that. And it drives me crazy that these parents are already instilling in these kids that this is going to happen. So they're coming to school with these preconceived notions already.

Instead of validating and affirming (Gay, 2000) the concerns and perspectives of Black students, Jeff blamed his students' parents for having these conversations with their children. He not only placed the blame on parents for having these conversations, but he rationalized the police brutality that his students fear by making the assumption that the shootings of unarmed people are justified because they are "not following the directions of the authority". Jeff recounted an instance in which he watched a video online of a police shooting with students to determine whether the victim complied with the police. He stated:

> I had this discussion in 2012 after the Trayvon Martin shooting and the other one boy. Many of these shootings, when they look back at the footage and the bodycam footage, were individuals who were not following directions. And this is what I told my students, because we watched it, they were not following directions. They were told, "Show me your hands, put your hands up." "Drop it. Drop it. Drop it. Do not raise your arm at me." And they were told to stop doing something and they continued to do it. Not all of them. The majority of them, though. Whites, Latinos, Blacks. And what is the lesson I taught them? They should start following directions. A lot of this should never have happened if they would have followed the directions that were given to them.

To Jeff, watching a video of a police shooting with students was a teachable moment. However, this action had the potential to (re)ignite racial trauma that many people of color experience when witnessing police brutality against other people of color (Geller et al., 2014; Hardy, 2013), especially in this particular case in which Black students confided in their teacher by sharing their fears of being shot by the police. Jeff's lack of awareness that these incidents often happen regardless of if individuals comply and that unarmed Black people are shot and killed at rates disproportionate to their percentage of the population (Bui, Coates, & Mattha, 2018) showed a lack of critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness of the perspectives that students bring to the classroom.

I asked Jeff if he was aware that many Black parents have what is referred to as "the talk" with their children as a way to increase the probability that they survive encounters with the police. He was unaware of this, and after I explained what "the talk" was, he explained his opinion that parents should in fact have this talk, but not "dwell" on it. He emphasized that this type of talk should teach children about the "crookedness" in society:

> Do I think that it needs to be brought up? In a sense that, you know what, there are some crooked people out there, some crooked police officers [...] There are crooked White cops. There are crooked Black cops. There are crooked Indian cops. There are crooked Muslim cops. There's crooked everything. Every single division of America has crookedness in there, unfortunately: teachers, doctors, lawyers, males, females. Um, it's everywhere and we have to learn to understand that it's going to be everywhere [...] Like when are we going to let the kids make their own decision about that. I'm talking to my son every single day about his behaviors. Couple of times, you know. He'll notice that my speedometer is up there. "Daddy, you might get pulled over for that. Yes, I might. And that would be a reason for me to be pulled over. When I bring up stories like that with my students, they'll say, "My mom said if I'm going under the speed limit, I'm going to pull over because I'm Black. If they just look in there and see that I'm Black." We have got to stop that. That's not true. In some cases maybe, but in everyday living for you as a human being, I don't see that that is going to happen to you. I don't see it. It's few and far between. There is some crookedness, but let's just assume that it's not going to happen to you. They need to know the history, but they should not dwell on it.

Jeff acknowledged that people of color experience injustices at the hands of the police, but again, he rationalized these occurrences as something that "crooked" individuals of all racial backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions do. Essentially, he framed instances of police brutality against people of color as something that is due, in large part, to human nature, rather than systemic, racial oppression. This is a viewpoint that is consistent with his colorblind and individualistic beliefs expressed in his definition of what it meant to be culturally responsive. Van

Ausdale & Feagin (2001) warn against this type of rationalization when speaking to children about racial and social injustices. They caution:

> [D]on't encourage children to believe that negative racial talk or discriminatory action is the conduct only of "sick" individuals or that it indicates a peculiar character flaw or just "bad" behavior. Talk about the fact that the social world we live in is often unfair to people of color simply because they are people of color and that persistent racial-ethnic inequalities are unjust and morally wrong. Make it clear that racial-ethnic prejudice and discrimination are part of a larger society that needs reform and not just something that individuals do [...] children have a strong sense of social justice and do appreciate an adult's honest confirmation of the troubling facts of persisting social injustices. (p. 208)

Lastly, by comparing the conversation that Black parents have with their children about police encounters to that of his and his son's conversation, he equated these experiences to his own and minimized the social realities that people of color face and the concerns that his students have about these issues.

Overall, Jeff did not view his students' concerns about police brutality and Black Lives Matter as valid perspectives but as misinformed opinions that lacked a historical understanding of oppression—opinions that he felt needed to be corrected. He stated

> These kids are so ripe in their young age and to be teaching them that just one color life matters. Because I think that's what a lot of people go by, "We're just focusing on the Black lives." No, it's all lives. All lives. My kids bring this up all the time. "Oh, what do you think of Black Lives Matter"? And I tell them, I said the society that we live in unfortunately, in certain cases, there's corruption and people of color sometimes have been singled out. But is that to say that no one else in any culture has been singled out? And that question alone

> when I flip it on them, they then say, "Tell us more about it." And so then we started talking about the Nazis and the Jews and the Native Americans and the Muslims. And then I tell them the history that they endured. I said, don't you think those lives matter too? We all are in this together. That's what I'm trying to change in here. Because my students only thought that this right here [points to artifacts], that their lives were the only ones. But yet we live in a society with so many. It's like the blinders are on them. That it's just them and them only and the Whites are out to get them.

Because Jeff thought his students' perspectives were misinformed and shortsighted, he had a discussion with them about ways other groups of people have been and continue to be oppressed. By engaging in a discussion with students that deflected attention away from their unique concerns, Jeff further invalidated the perspectives of his Black students. A more culturally responsive teacher might have used this as an opportunity to place the students' concerns within a larger historical and contemporary context in ways that both validated their perspectives and affirmed their right to exist. This approach adds to rather than replaces (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b) the perspectives that Black students bring to teaching and learning.

THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE IN TEACHER AND STAFF SENSEMAKING

Individuals often come to professions like teaching with pre-existing worldviews and beliefs (Villegas & Lucas, 2002b). This was observed in the beliefs and values that Applegate teachers and staff expressed about cultural responsiveness. I wanted to understand the extent to which prior personal and professional experiences informed the beliefs and values that Applegate teachers operationalized when making sense of what it means to be culturally responsive. Spillane and colleagues (2002) stated the following about the effect that prior knowledge and experiences

have on the implementation process and the attitudes and behaviors of those who are expected to implement policy:

> [T]he content of a policy—its ideas about changing extant behavior—depends critically on the implementing agents—their ideas, their expertise, and their experiences. Individuals must use their prior knowledge and experience to notice, make sense of, and interpret, and react to stimuli—all the while actively constructing meaning from their interactions with the environment, of which policy is part. (p. 393-94)

According to Principal Schwartz, cultural responsiveness was not a mandated district policy, but rather an aspirational and conditional goal that was dependent on the readiness of principals, teachers, and staff. However, the same premise offered by Spillane and colleagues (2002) can be applied in understanding how prior knowledge and experiences potentially affected how teachers and staff made sense of her efforts to make Applegate a more culturally responsive school. The following sections will examine the types of experiences that emerged as potential sources of the beliefs and values that teachers and staff hold. These experiences are important to examine, given their potential to influence the beliefs and values of teachers and staff, as well as their attitudes regarding Schwartz's specific leadership practices.

Middle-class experiences and expectations. When interviewing Lauren, I learned that the challenges she had with understanding cultural responsiveness stemmed from her personal experience of growing up in a predominantly White, middle-class community, where she had little exposure to individuals from diverse racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. She stated:

> I think the district definitely puts the idea out there that we need to be culturally responsive, but sometimes we just don't know what that means. Again, coming from my background, just because I want to be culturally responsive, doesn't mean I can be. I just literally don't

> know what some of these children are going through or what their family actually looks like. I literally don't know because I've never experienced it. So I think that's the hardest part. That even though there's the push to be culturally responsive, you gotta tell me very specifically what I need to do, or what I need to say because I just don't have experience with it.

She explained and compared the difference in her middle-class upbringing to the realities of the students she teaches:

> Most of my family and most of my friends had parents that were still married. They both had jobs. I didn't struggle for anything. If I had a problem, I knew my parents were there for me. I knew I could go to my friends. I had a huge support system. I knew they wouldn't ever let me fall on my face. You know, I would always have somebody there for me. So, that's what I'm used to. That's how I grew up. So to come into a school and to know that not every student in my classroom has that support system. Not every family has that support system. If one part of their life fails, it's going to affect everything else because they don't have somebody there scooping them up.

Like many White, middle-class female teachers, Lauren brought her middle-class worldviews, expectations, and experiences into the classroom (Hancock & Warren, 2017; Yoon, 2016). However, she soon realized that the social supports she benefited from as a result of her middle-class status were not available to many of her students.

Lauren also described when she first *noticed*, *bracketed*, and *extracted the cue of* student behavior during her first year of teaching at Applegate. Prior to Applegate, she had taught predominantly White students in a rural school district:

> My first year [at Applegate] especially, I saw a ton of difference between the two different groups. I didn't have as many behavior issues [in rural areas]. My first year here, we had a ton of just behavior issues that I was not prepared to deal with. I think because they were problems I didn't see before. You know, like swearing, throwing things, being disrespectful to the teacher. I was not prepared for that. Because I hadn't seen that before, that was a huge difference. So even though students were rural and living in poverty, they were still respectful to the teacher and they were excited to be at school. And my first year here, I didn't quite get that from all the students. Not saying 100% of the students, but a lot of them were hard.

Lauren's sensemaking of her students' behavioral issues were grounded in her retrospection of prior professional experiences. She attempted to make sense of her current experiences with poor urban students at Applegate by comparing those experiences with the experiences she had with poor rural students. Her response assumed that since both student populations were poor, that their response to schooling should also be similar.

In my interviews with Derrick, it was evident that he also operationalized his middle-class beliefs when discussing student behavior and parental engagement. Derrick became a teacher so that he could impact the lives of all students, but especially Black students. He seemed to be keenly aware of the sociopolitical realities that many Black students and their communities face, and he saw teaching and learning as a way to give Black students a chance to have better life opportunities and outcomes. However, although Derrick had high expectations for his students and believed in their potential to succeed, he also expressed deficit perspectives about their parents—perspectives that were informed by his own experiences of growing up and being raised by a single mother. He stated:

> I'm from an era where parents expected and made sure that we came to school for an education. My mother was a single mother, but she made sure we were clean, fed, and went to school for an education. That was it [...] My mother only had a high school degree, but she made sure that we were in school not acting a fool. That was her thing. She worked and provided for us. So, for me and my mindset, I see that these mothers are young, but my mother was young. That's the difference between my mother and these mothers […] Being the only African American man here and coming from what I've come from, I know these kids. I really know. Although I had a stable home and we weren't poor...but yet I still had a mother and grandparents that focused on education. Whereas we have kids here, not coming to school a lot and now the principal and the district are talking about cultural responsiveness…

Derrick expressed his disappointment in some of his students' parents, particularly single mothers, who he believed did not value education, lacked particular parenting skills, and did not participate in forms of parental engagement, such as attending conferences, volunteering, and assisting their children with homework. Derrick's beliefs are informed by his middle-class values, as well as his experience growing up with a single mother who valued education. For instance, his standard of parental involvement is based on middle-class expectations for parental engagement. However, single parents, especially low-income single parents, more than likely do not have the time to be involved in these types of parental engagement during school hours (Manz, Fantuzzo, & Power, 2004). Also, parents may be intimidated and lack confidence when interacting with school professionals who are often highly educated (Castro et al., 2004; Johnson, 2010). These experiences are compounded for people of color who have historically experienced schools as sites of marginalization (Delpit, 1998; DeMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Graham, 1995).

More asset-based perspectives on Black parental engagement acknowledge that Black parents engage in their children's academic development in ways that do not conform to White, middle-class norms (Neblett et al., 2009; Roberts, 2011). Linda voiced her awareness of these perspectives:

> When I hear staff and listen to what they say, "Well, mom doesn't care. If she cared, then this child wouldn't come to school nasty and stinking. She would come to the parent teacher conference or she could just call me on the phone, and we can do it over the phone." So it's that type of judgmental statements that I hear that parents don't care, and they are not concerned. I don't always jump to that conclusion. Because again, I see parents and I work with them and I know a little bit more about these kids' home life than some of the teachers do. And I look at it from a different perspective or I see it differently. I'm not always quick to judge and put them down.

Linda was aware of the deficit perspectives that some teachers have of parents, but she had asset-based perspectives about parents because of the relationships she has intentionally established with them in her role as a member of the student support staff. She confirmed the presence of deficit perspectives that privilege middle-class norms of parental engagement

Schooling and personal experiences. Teachers often teach the way they were taught (Britzman, 1991; Lortie, 1975; Oleson & Hora, 2014) and this was the case for Jeff. He stated:

> The reason why I became a teacher was because of the sort of the teachers I had growing up. I had some really caring individuals that took me as a person. They cared for me and I was a human being to them. I wasn't just a dollar sign or figure where they were just coming in and going through the motions, you know. It was fair across the board. These teachers met my needs […] They were willing to listen to me no matter what. Because of that,

> because of them, each kid as an individual and it's not, "Oh, you're in this group." It's, “You are the individual that I'm working with right now.” So that carried on to me and it really helped. It really helped shape me.

The beliefs and values that Jeff brought to his teaching, such as his sense of a shared humanity and his belief that all students are individual humans, were shaped by his early school experiences. According to Jeff, his teachers treated him as an individual and addressed his unique needs and concerns as a student, which is why he holds similar beliefs and values as a teacher. He stated:

> That’s why I don't care if you're green, purple, black, white, blue, brown, gray. You are a human being. I'm looking at you as a human being and in this thing called life that we go through, we have our ups and downs. We all do. No matter what ethnic background you are, and I'm going to care for you as a human.

These beliefs and values were evident in how Jeff responded to questions about cultural responsiveness and the sociopolitical realities of his Black students. When Jeff stated his views about a shared humanity and individualism, he did so in a way that implied that he believed that these were noble ideals to possess as a teacher. But by claiming that he did not see his students’ race and minimizing the experiences and difficulties that people of color face because of race, he was participating in the erasure of his students’ identities and realities and subjecting them to colorblind racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2018).

Growing up, Tiffany had experiences that may have contributed to her understanding of race and her understanding of cultural responsiveness and multiculturalism in ways that focus solely on the inclusion of all. Tiffany, a fair complected Black woman, was in fourth grade when she first became conscious of her racial identity. That year, she transferred from a racially diverse

elementary school to a school where she was one of the few students of color. She described her experiences prior to fourth grade:

> We had a pretty diverse population of kids. Like we had kids who were Black. We had kids who were Mexican. We had a few who were Asian. Um, and then we had a few who were White. So I felt like at that point we had more of a diverse group of children where race didn't single you out. Your clothes might single you out, but race never singled you out [...] So it was when I moved in fourth grade that all of a sudden something triggered in my brain. Because when I moved, I moved from a very comfortable situation to a situation that felt very different.

As the result of moving from a majority minority school to a school where she was in the minority, Tiffany became more aware of her racial difference. This awareness was due not only to the racial demographics of her new school, but because of the way she believes she was treated by others as well. For example, Tiffany spoke about being critiqued for the way she spoke, as well as feeling as if she did not fit in among Black or White students. She recalled

> I would get critiqued for saying certain words a certain way. And I would say, "Did you know what I meant?" And they would say, "Yeah, but that's not how you say it." And that kind of kept going on [...] It made me feel very different and it made me feel like I was corrected on the way that I talked all the time. It just made me kind of angry and resentful towards other children because I didn't think that there was anything wrong with the way that I talked. And then at some point I learned how to deal with it and then it was fine. It became normal. But like that integration, like those two years were very significant for me just because it was a turning point for me as far as recognizing that I was different from other people. And then as I got older, I started to find there was a different type of self-

> identity that I almost just took on and started to understand. There was a point where, I dunno, I never felt like I fit in with anybody. I would say, okay, if I hang out with you guys, then you look at me as an outsider. If I hang out with Black people, Black people think that I'm "talking White." And I always had to correct them. And then when I hung out with White people, they'd be like, "Well, you're Black." I knew that I looked different than they did. And I knew that the school where I came from, they look different from a lot of kids that I went to school with. So that's what initially made me recognize race. Prior to that, I didn't think twice because we were all at the same. We were all kids. So there was just this self-identity thing that happened, and it all started there. It never really stopped. It just started and it never stopped.

Tiffany later referred to the development of her views about her racial identity as a "mental transformation". The beliefs about her racial identity were further developed through conversations she had with her family about her family history when she was younger:

> Growing up, I was told by my parents that I was Black, and that Black meant that you were African American. But I was also taught history from my dad as far as our family history on his side. And then he also was able to get into the backgrounds and ethnicities of my mom's side too, but she didn't know so much of. But I guess by growing up, and not identifying with one race or another, my mind kind of started to filter out what did it mean to be Black? Um, and when I was younger, I would say for me it was just, um, there was an automatic association between being Black and being African American. And, um, I guess growing up I didn't necessarily identify with...I mean, well I guess there was a lot of stereotypes back then too. There's still stereotypes now. But there has always been this connotation of being African American and an assumption that you don't have

> money and that you're uneducated. And my family was upper middle class with lots of education. So there were contradictions between the stigmas about Black people who identify as African American and my family.

As an adult, Tiffany had also had opportunities to travel that have caused her to further question what it means to be Black:

> So as I've gotten older and began to travel, I notice that there are Black people who are from other places and cultures. They are just Black something else. And so it was interesting because in those contexts again, I did not share the same culture as other Black people. So I started rethinking about what does this mean. So that, in combination with [what] my dad has told me, makes me think that I don't know what I am. So the only thing that I can solidly say is that I'm Black, but I cannot say comfortably that I'm only African American.

From these experiences, Tiffany observed that the ways some people stereotype Black people were not reflective of her lived reality. These experiences contributed to Tiffany's adoption of beliefs and values that questioned monolithic stereotypes of what it means to be Black.

In the following section, I will examine the attitudes and perspectives exhibited by teachers and staff in response to Principal Schwartz's practices.

ATTITUDES AND PERSPECTIVES TOWARD LEADERSHIP PRACTICES

Spillane and colleagues (2002) stated that when making sense of K-12 policy and practices:

> People are biased toward interpretations of policy consistent with their prior beliefs and values [...] Existing structures can be very resistant to change, and an individual's own experiences are more heavily counted in reasoning about debates [...] Furthermore, strong motivation can affect the way reasoning is carried out, leading people to pay more attention

> to information consistent with the desired outcome or to discount inconsistent information. (pp. 401-402)

This proved true for Applegate teachers and staff. Many of the attitudes that teachers and staff displayed in response to Principal Schwartz's practices and expectations were consistent with their prior beliefs, values, and experiences.

Attitudes toward discipline practices. For example, as described in Chapter 5, one of Principal Schwartz's goals was to reduce the school's suspension rates. She attempted to do this by implementing less punitive discipline practices, such as restorative practices, and by modeling how to resolve discipline conflicts with students in more empathetic ways (Okonofua, Paunesku & Walton, 2016). From my interviews, I found that many teachers and staff *noticed, bracketed,* and *extracted* Principal Schwartz's approach to discipline as a deviation from how discipline had been handled in the past. Many teachers and staff made sense of Schwartz's discipline practices by *retrospecting* and comparing her approach to that of previous principals. For example, when describing one of the former principals, Lauren recalled:

> Everybody knew what to expect from her. She had a very commanding presence and the students were a little bit scared of her, you know. She had a very large presence and maybe it was a little bit intimidating to students, but you knew that if you were having problems in your classroom and you took a student to her, she was going to lay down the law. Either you were going to "toe the line" or we were going to send you home. It was a no-nonsense kind of policy.

Christine recounted an instance when she called the front office to follow up with the former principal about a student who had been removed from her class:

> I called the office and said, "Where is my student?" And she said, "I don't think you heard me. I suspended her for a couple of days because she was too mouthy." And I was like, okay. So she just kind of nipped everything in the bud immediately. "We will not have this. This will not happen."

Although Tiffany was not a teacher during the time this principal led Applegate, she brought with her experiences of her own former principal in a different school district. She recounted:

> She was extremely hardcore. She was extremely hardcore. And when I say hardcore, I mean like, if a kid was messing around on the bus...I remember there was one day when a kid was messing around on the bus. She was at home sick. Someone called or texted her to tell her. And within less than five minutes, she pulled up in her little Cadillac. She pulled up right next to the bus, jumped out of the car in her pajamas, yanked the kid off like it was her own, and put him in her car and drove him off. Like drove him home. Like, I'm not going to play this. And if they were not doing what they were supposed to be doing on the bus, then she would tell the bus drivers to not pick them up. And she would be there every single morning telling him not to pick them up.

Prior to Schwartz, teachers and staff were accustomed to principals who they believed were strong disciplinarians. These were principals who "laid down the law" and "nipped everything in the bud" regarding student behavior. From teacher accounts, the approach to school discipline and student behavior centered on control and compliance. However, although order and discipline are necessary for teaching and learning, suspending students for minor infractions such as "mouthiness" has the potential to increase racial disparities in school suspensions. Research has found that this is especially true for Black girls, who are often mischaracterized as more defiant

and attitudinal when they display behaviors similar to their White female counterparts (Hines-Datiri & Carter Andrews, 2017).

Amanda described the new reality and approach to discipline after Schwartz's arrival:

> Now you'll see the principal walking with children and talking and maybe having them into her office to try to understand their emotions a little bit better. We'll have kids come to my classroom and just kind of hang out and chill in our classroom for a little bit as they calm down and get ready to go back to class instead of sending them home right away, you know? So we are now thinking more about alternatives to continually sending kids home.

However, Linda explained that some teachers were dissatisfied with Schwartz's alternative approaches:

> I think some teachers still prefer suspensions. In theory, I think they like it, but in reality, I think they want consequences. They want strong consequence for that student, or they want that student out of the classroom. Right now! Right now! And with restorative practices, they go back to the classroom. You're not suspending them at all, but they work out whatever the problem was between them. But sometimes these teachers, they want a student out right now. So I don't think it satisfies what the teachers want all the time.

Some teachers like Lauren believed that Schwartz's approach to discipline caused her to be more reflective about her response to difficult behaviors. When Lauren first arrived at Applegate, she brought along her middle-class beliefs and understandings that framed how she viewed her students' behaviors. She reflected:

> I think more now about why something is happening. My first year here, I was probably ready to quit at Christmas time. I just had some really awful behavior in my classroom and it kind of spread like wildfire. I was either going to quit or somehow make it through the

> year and pray that the next year was going to be better. That year, I didn't feel like I had a lot of support or alternatives or places to go with the problems that we're having in the class. Now, I feel like I do a much better job of thinking about why the behavior might be happening. And getting together with families and maybe being a little more open about talking about it and being flexible.

Other teachers felt that Schwartz's empathetic approach to discipline was appropriate in some circumstances, but not in others. For instance, in her effort to be culturally responsive, Schwartz modeled empathetic conflict resolution strategies with students even when their behaviors were considered to be "extreme". Tiffany described what she believes to be extreme behaviors:

> These are the kids who get mad because they don't want to do work or because they want to get on YouTube and you tell them no. So they throw chairs, or they throw pencils, or they run around the room, destroying the entire classroom every single day. Those are extreme. Like I don't think restorative justice is going to do anything for those kids. Those kids need counseling. They need help beyond restorative justice.

As an observer, I saw several occasions of Schwartz physically restraining and rocking these students in her arms to calm them down. She would talk to them about their feelings and emotions and attempt to resolve their conflict—oftentimes successfully—without suspending them. However, teachers like Jeff discounted Schwartz's approach and expressions of compassion as soft discipline. He stated:

> The principal does not handle the suspensions. I feel that she should. I feel that the parents need to see that side of her. What the parents see is the, "Yep, yep. Oh, I'm compassionate. I'm understanding. I'm this and I'm that." But they don't see the, "I've had enough of this.

> We've worked with you. We've tried this. We've tried that. You're not accepting responsibility here. You're not trying to work with us anymore."

Schwartz's practices disrupted the status quo regarding discipline at Applegate. As a result of this disruption, Jeff's response showed his preference for the "no excuses" and zero tolerance approach that previous principals used with parents and students. He discounted this new reality because it was inconsistent with what he had come to "know and believe" (Spillane et al., 2002, p. 395) about how discipline is handled at Applegate. Attitudes such as these inform teacher and staff sensemaking and play a significant role in determining whether Schwartz's discipline practices are successfully implemented and sustained in the future.

Attitudes toward black imagery. Another practice that Schwartz implemented to create a more culturally responsive school environment was the inclusion of images and visual representations of people of color, mostly Black people, throughout the hallways and common areas of the school. Teachers and staff held varying attitudes and perspectives about this decision. Some saw these images as positive validations of students' identity and culture, while others believed that the images focused too much on Black culture while excluding students from other cultural backgrounds. For example, Linda, who grew up in the segregated South, believed that Black Applegate students lacked the cultural validation she experienced as a result of having all Black teachers. She thought it was therefore beneficial for Applegate students to see themselves reflected in the images around the school. She stated:

> These pictures help students see people that they can identify with. People like them. They see somebody Black and they see somebody that they can relate to. And I think that was her [Principal Schwartz's] reasoning for doing this. Also, I think she got feedback from parents that said that you don't have any Black pictures on these walls. And that was another

> motive for doing that; because of parents complaining that there were no Black pictures of people representing their culture here in the hallways.

Linda expressed an overall positive attitude about the Black images because she knew, from her personal experiences, the value of representation for Black students. She also explained that the lack of representation in the school was something that some Black parents voiced concerned about.

Although he was new to the school, Derrick also noticed that there was a focus on Black representation throughout the school:

> I think she's trying to build a Black culture. I had not been in this school before now, but I heard teachers say all these pictures were not up in the hallway before she came. Now you have pictures of Black leaders and Black people. African American people throughout the building. So, I think consciously she wants people, kids in this school to see African American faces.

Some teachers like Amanda and Christie were open to the idea of having diverse pictures in the school, but they did not understand why the images seemed to focus primarily on Black people. Amanda stated:

> I mean we definitely hung up pictures of African American movie stars and everything in the hallway. Is that being culturally responsive? I mean, we definitely did that. I think it's really great that our kids see them. They talk about them here and there. I think they notice them. I think it's good that they're up there. It may be nice to see other cultures too, though. Is that weird? I mean, we have other cultures except for African Americans, and we decided to hang up all of those being African Americans. Is that kind of strange to

you? I think it's a little bit strange. It'd be nice to have all cultures up, so that's the one thing that I thought was a little bit strange.

Although Amanda was not opposed completely to the images, she was still attempting to make sense of what it means to be culturally responsive and whether displaying these pictures is a culturally responsive practice. She believed that a better alternative would be to display more diverse pictures.

Christine was also concerned about having only Black images outside of her classroom, so she asked Principal Schwartz to display a more diverse representation of images outside of her classroom. She stated:

> I asked for the pictures outside of my room to be representations of different races or ethnicities and genders. So I have females and males out there. I do like the bulletin board with the girl with a hijab and the black girl, but I still think we need to also include our Asian children and our Hispanic children. It feels like it's getting to be more one-sided and I maybe have to look at our demographics. But I still think regardless of it...I mean think of what our country is. What is it, 13% of Americans are African American? Do you know the statistics? It's something...but regardless, I think it should be for every race or nationality or whatever the groups of people we have here. Like my little girl who is Hmong, she should be able to feel connected as well.

Christine's perspectives did not account for the fact that Black students rarely see themselves reflected in the curriculum, their teachers, or in their school leadership (Sleeter, 2011b). The lack of Black teachers and staff at Applegate was something Principal Schwartz noticed when she first arrived, and it was something she mentioned as influencing her decision to put visual representations of Blackness around the school.

Linda believed that some of the reactions to Schwartz's decision stem from having a teaching staff in which the majority of teachers live and grew up in suburban environments. She stated:

> I know that it's not easy. That's not easy because the majority of the teachers grew up and live in suburban areas. I mean this is probably a culture shock for them as well. And I think that [Principal Schwartz] is trying to change that and in trying to make them more aware of the population of students that we're dealing with, but there is pushback because I've heard that when Schwartz leaves, they are going to take all these pictures down. I said, "What?" But it's not just all Black. She's got Latino and other cultures included. If you walk around and look at all these pictures, you will see it's not just all Black.

However, diversifying the images was not only the perspective of White teachers. Tiffany also questioned the purpose of the images and what she considered to be an "imbalanced" focus on Black people. She stated:

> I don't think that putting up a bunch of pictures of Black people is culturally responsive. I think it's just a lot of pictures of historical figures who are Black. I think that excludes other cultures. If there are no Hispanic pictures up, if we're not reading any books with people who are Hispanic or Spanish in them, then who are those children going to associate with. They're now isolated because your focus is all on Black people. It just feels imbalanced.

Tiffany and other teachers exhibited multicultural(ish) perspectives in their sensemaking of the images. This perspective takes the focus away from those students who have been historically marginalized and who continue to be marginalized in schools by advocating for the representation of all students. While the acknowledgement and representation of all students' identities and

cultures is a common practice in schools, espousing multicultural(ish) perspectives of diversity and representation for all, but not addressing the issues and concerns that plague diverse communities is not enough in today's racially and politically charged environment. As Au (2017) stated:

> [M]ulticultural education is important, but in the face of hateful violence being visited on so many of our students and communities, it is simply not enough. We need to consider what we are willing to do to defend our children, their parents, and our schools, and we need to be clear about where our solidarities lie. (p. 148)

This sense of solidarity can be challenging for administrators when their teachers and staff have perspectives that are misaligned to their objectives and goals. This misalignment of perspectives can be seen in Jeff's views about Black students, their community, and the police, as well as how he reacted to a Black Lives Matter image as we ended one of our interviews. Jeff prided himself of building relationships and meeting the needs of all his students, but as we passed the Black Lives Matter image this particular evening, he pointed at the image and explained that this was the type of thing that was not needed at Applegate, and that "Not Black lives, but all lives matter". This showed how Jeff's beliefs were misaligned to Schwartz's critically conscious purpose and school vision.

Tiffany also seemed to take issue with Schwartz's sociopolitical focus and her race-centered approach to cultural responsiveness:

> I guess what she's trying to do is to make sure that we're educated on the people who are in our school, which in essence is culturally responsive. But I guess my disconnect is that I disagree on who she's saying is in our school [...] If you assume that a majority of our school is African American, and they're not...If you assume this, then that assumption is

incorrect. And then when you put all these faces up, then what about the kids who don't identify as what she is saying everyone is? Who are they going to find commonalities with?

In this response, it is apparent that Tiffany believed that, by displaying images related to Black culture, Principal Schwartz acted on her own assumptions based on students' racial identity. She believed this despite school data at the time of this study that shows that most Applegate students identified as students of color (See Figure 8). She explained:

> I think that we should be talking about all of the great leaders. I don't think that we should just single out a few. Diversify it. Rosa Parks is an important aspect of our history. But why are we only focusing on Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King? Why don't we just talk about them and present their faces versus talking about the fact that they're Black. Do you know what I mean? Like, not, "Here's Obama. Look at the Black face. Yay!" How about just, "Here's a man who became president and this is what he did." And their eyes will see that maybe he looks closer to them. We don't have to say, "You can do whatever you want and don't let anyone tell you that you can't." Like, no. Why? Show them examples versus always put the race first, if that makes any sense.

Much of how Tiffany made sense of Schwartz's decision to display these images was based on her own prior personal experiences and beliefs about race. As previously stated, Tiffany had been in the process of making sense of race, culture, and identity since she was a child. Her belief that there are many assumptions made about racial identity, especially the racial identity of African Americans, is evident in how she made sense of Schwartz's decision to display these images, as well as her belief that Principal Schwartz should take a colormute (Pollock, 2004) approach that avoids openly centering and talking about race with students. However, Tiffany's observation that Principal Schwartz seemed to base some of her leadership practices on

assumptions and generalizations about students' racial identity is a point worth considering. As Sleeter (2011a) cautioned, essentialization occurs when teachers and administrators have "a fairly fixed and homogeneous conception of the culture of a minoritized group, with an assumption that students who are members of that group identify with that conception of who they are" (p. 14). Tiffany's observations raised the possibility that, although well-intentioned, some of Principal Schwartz's leadership practices could be based on essentialized notions of students' cultural and racial identities.

Attitudes toward home visits. As mentioned in Chapter 5, Principal Schwartz created opportunities to strengthen the relationship between teachers and staff and the students and community they teach and serve. Although not required by the district, she started a back-to-school home visit and bus trip that has become an annual Applegate event. In the summers of 2017 and 2018, I had the opportunity to ride along and assist teachers and staff as they delivered backpacks and school supplies to new and returning students. This was not only a backpack and supply giveaway, but it was also an opportunity for teachers and staff to engage with students, families, and other members of the community. Some teachers like Amanda were on board with this event from the beginning. She stated:

> That's why I'm here, because I think it's so different and innovative, and that's awesome that we do it. But of course I told my other teacher friends at different schools about this experience. "Well, I can't believe your principal made you do that." Well, no, they didn't make me do it. I wanted to do it. It was cool. It was like ... I love that we did that.

Amanda saw the back-to-school home visits as an "innovative" practice that provided the opportunity to engage directly with her students' community. She even continued this practice on her own to build relationships with her students' parents and improve overall teacher-parent

communication. This sentiment was not shared by all teachers and staff, however. Principal Schwartz recounted the response of some teachers after she first proposed the idea of a home visit and community bus tour:

> There was pushback, enough to call the union, and they were uncomfortable. That really brought the issue to the forefront that we have some bias. I stood my ground and we went out and we ended up having a really good time. They were open about perceptions shifting, and again, not everybody, but enough where I think the culture shifted. Since then, we are on a growth trajectory, but we have a long way to go.

According to Principal Schwartz, some White teachers and staff were afraid to venture into the community where their students lived for fear of what they might encounter in the community and how parents might respond to them visiting their homes. Jeff stated some of the reasons for teachers' angst and resistance:

> I think it [the home visit] was met with resistance. I think there were a lot of questions. We're going to put forth all this time, we have this list of students, how many homes are we going to get to, how are they going to perceive us coming here? Are they going to be angry or upset or are they going to be happy? Will they ask, "Why are they coming here"? You know, disrupting their plans or whatever.

Research has found that although the majority of teachers who teach students of color are White and middle-class, White middle-class teachers are often unaware of how to navigate interactions with students of color and their communities (Henfield & Washington, 2012; Picower, 2009), particularly when racial and cultural differences intersect with class differences. Teachers' willingness to participate in the home visit appeared to have changed over the years, but a post-

home visit debriefing session uncovered some of the assumptions that some teachers and staff had about their students and their families. Linda recalled this session:

> I think there are implicit biases that they have that they may or may not be aware of because when we did the home visits and [Principal Schwartz] asked us to give her feedback on what we felt and what we experienced, some teachers made comments like, "I was just surprised that the homes were neat and clean." What? So already they had preconceived in their minds that they were going to go into some nasty homes. That's an implicit bias.

Linda recognized her colleagues' attitudes as implicitly biased regarding assumptions about the cleanliness of their students' homes. This particular deficit perspective of students and parents as unclean was previously voiced by Derrick when he described his views on some students' appearance when they arrive to school. Derrick's deficit perspectives of some of his students' families were again apparent in his response to participating in home visits:

> They don't come to conferences. You have to call three, four, five times. The teacher next door is thinking about doing a home visit with parents. I ain't going to your house. I'm not going to your house for no home visits, when you know your child is up here. I've called you four or five times. I've emailed you and it bounced back. No! Homework goes home and it doesn't come back. So there's just no accountability. I don't want to say that these parents don't care. I want to say that it's possible that they had bad experiences in school. Maybe school wasn't their thing. So I don't want to say that they aren't good parents, but they're not doing anything.

Although Derrick was adamant that he would not visit the homes of students whose parents he felt were not accountable for their child's education, it is exactly these types of practices that

research has shown are beneficial when building relational trust between parents and schools (Adams & Christenson, 2009; Adams, Forsyth, & Mitchell, 2009). Derrick explained that he did not want to completely believe that these were not good parents, and that maybe their reluctance was related to prior adverse schooling experiences, but by refusing to engage parents and families from various socioeconomic backgrounds in ways that do not conform to middle-class norms, Derrick missed the opportunity to build the relationships that would benefit the students he wants to advocate for and serve the most.

This session also showed that Derrick was not the only teacher that held deficit perspectives about students and their families. Linda stated:

> Like I said, I don't know if they're always aware of that...I'm sure I have them [implicit biases] too. But I think it's hard to look within yourself and to really be honest with yourself and see, okay, I know I'm prejudice [sic] due to this extent, but I'm going to be open and not be judgmental. But I see that coming out when they talk about students. I see the judgment coming out.

Linda expressed an awareness of her own implicit bias, as well as the implicit biases of her colleagues, regarding the views and perceptions they held about students and their families. Principal Schwartz envisioned a school environment where teachers and staff would engage in conversations about topics such as implicit bias, as well as the underlying issues such as structural racism that support these biases.

Attitudes toward CRPBIS team as a collaborative sensemaking space. In her efforts to make Applegate a more culturally responsive school, Principal Schwartz implemented practices that sought to meet the needs of various stakeholders in her school community, such as students (discipline practices, empathetic engagement, and Black visual representation) and

parents (home visits). Many of the practices that Schwartz implemented required a paradigm shift in the way that teachers and staff think about discipline, teaching and learning, and parental engagement. Sensemaking scholars assert that social learning opportunities facilitate sensemaking by providing a space for individuals to develop a common understanding of the expectations for their new reality (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995). In the case of Applegate, this new reality was the expectations that Principal Schwartz had for her staff for becoming a more culturally responsive school. In this section, I discuss Schwartz's use of the CRPBIS team as a collective sensemaking space to facilitate such paradigm shifts for teachers and staff, specifically around the issues of race, privilege, and bias—issues that Principal Schwartz believed to be important in order to become more culturally responsive. The ways teachers, inside and outside the group, made sense of the use of this space as a potential place to build the culturally responsive capacity of its team members is also examined.

In much the same way that teachers and staff were resistant to discussions of race and bias during district-wide professional development sessions, Applegate teacher were also reticent to have these conversations at the school level. Lauren explained:

> I mean, there are things that Schwartz will bring up in our staff meeting, but not all staff is super excited to talk about that. Sometimes I think the conversation falls flat. Maybe one or two people will share, but it's hard in a room full of 25 people to have that conversation. Not everybody is comfortable with it. It might fall flat sometimes. And I think the principal will get ideas and try to push things, but when she gets no response or no conversation back or nobody's on board with it, it's hard to keep on pushing. So she does what she can and pushes when she can.

Christine provided an example of a staff meeting in which Tiffany disagreed with Principal Schwartz. She explained:

> One teacher was offended when Principal Schwartz told us that you have to teach Black children differently and this particular teacher raised her hand and said so. She said, “I want my child to be taught in a way that is best for my child.” It was in so many words like that. And I said, “That is what I'm about. I'm going to try to help you in any way I can.”

Principal Schwartz clarified her intentions regarding those remarks in a follow-up interview. She explained:

> I brought up the research that African American and Latino students really benefit from discussion and being able to be supported in talking. And I was immediately attacked because she has a daughter that is African American, and she felt like I was generalizing. And she said that she would be upset if somebody said, "My daughter needs that because she's Black." And I said, "Again, what's good for kids of color is probably good for everybody." It's just being culturally responsive where you're hitting more modalities of learning styles to try to reach more kids. It's not that that's going to work for that kid every single time.

Teachers like Tiffany and Christine interpreted Principal Schwartz’s attempts to meet the learning needs of diverse students as a generalization of student learning styles based on their racial identity. However, for decades, scholars have argued that students of color, specifically African American students, have different interactional styles and cultural differences that vary from their White counterparts, and that these learning styles and differences have implications for teaching and learning (Delpit, 1992; Hale, 1982; Watkins, 2002). Tiffany *extracted a cue* that focused on a

perceived generalization based on race. Her response to Principal Schwartz was consistent given her previously mentioned beliefs and experiences regarding race and racial identity.

As stated in Chapter 5, the formation of a CRPBIS Equity team at every school was required by MCSD so team members could think of ways to create more culturally responsive school environments, mainly by examining behavioral practices, such as suspension and expulsion, and by creating ways schools could reduce suspension rates. As a principal intern and researcher, I attended several district-wide principal meetings. At one of these meetings, I had the opportunity to observe a breakout session in which principals discussed how they were utilizing their CRPBIS teams. As I listened, I realized that most of the discussion about CRPBIS focused on routines, incentives, and suspension data. There was no discussion at the time of how their efforts were connected to creating a more culturally responsive school environment. I could not distinguish from the discussions what principals understood to be the difference between PBIS and CRPBIS.

However, as a participant observer of Applegate's CRPBIS team, I noticed that Principal Schwartz did not only use this group as a space to discuss behavior routines, incentives, and suspension data, but she expanded the purpose of this group to include building the culturally responsive capacities of teachers and staff through discussions about race, privilege, and bias. CRSL research literature has acknowledged that culturally responsive leaders work to build the capacity of their teachers and staff to enact CRP (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Voltz et al., 2003). In this way, the CRPBIS team became a smaller and more intimate space where Principal Schwartz provided teachers and staff with the foundational knowledge to begin to critically understand the school's suspension data and practices from their own positionality, as well to understand the necessity for culturally responsive pedagogy. This was something that she could

not accomplish in larger staff meetings without receiving pushback. In this example, Principal Schwartz exhibited characteristics of the second CRSL behavioral strand developing culturally responsive teachers. She also engaged in the sensemaking process of *enactment* (Weick, 1995) by using the CRPBIS team as a space for collective conversation and sensemaking that helped participating teachers and staff to arrive at common understandings and future actions towards becoming a more culturally responsive school.

At any given CRPBIS meeting, team members could be found working toward creating the culturally responsive school that Principal Schwartz desired by engaging in book discussions and talks about their own experiences and understanding of race, privilege, and bias, as well as by listening to various videos and podcasts on these issues. This is what Weick et al. (2005) referred to as the "talking into existence" of a future reality (p. 413) and the use of communication and dialogue to lead individuals to action toward a desired goal (Weick, 1995). It was Schwartz's intention that this space would give teachers and staff the tools to engage in critically conscious and sociopolitically aware teaching, learning, and interactions.

Lauren explained why she believes this space was a valuable asset:

> I think our principal is very much ready and willing to talk about racism, systemic racism and cultural responsiveness. But I think she's feeling pushback from people in the whole group setting. I think the small group is an asset. Do I think you could have the same conversation whole staff? No. But you can openly talk comfortably because you're at a small table. You're all reading the same information. I think by being a part of the same CRPBIS group, you're in the same mindset so you can have open conversations. Whereas I think if you brought it to the staff as a whole, it would be difficult because I think you'd

> get more blowback from people who are not being as open minded because they're not in the same headspace.

Amber echoed Lauren's view of the CRPBIS team as a space where teachers and staff can have open conversations about difficult issues:

> I think it's nice being in a small, safe environment. You know that you can have open conversations with people. It's bringing the topic to the table. So it's nice being challenged by the principal to say, here's the data that we're seeing in America. Here's the data that we're seeing at our school. Are these things that we're doing? Can we change our bias? Can we help the students that are maybe getting left behind? Or the students that are getting suspended repeatedly?

Both Lauren and Amber saw the CRPBIS team as a safe environment that gave like-minded teachers and staff the space to engage in conversations and sensemaking about difficult issues. Laruen, who identifies as White, also saw this as a space for new learning where she could examine the ways in which her positionality as a White, middle-class woman has influenced her knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about issues such as race, bias, and privilege. One way that Principal Schwartz facilitated teachers' learning and self-reflection was through a book discussion of the book *Waking Up White*. As previously mentioned, this book is an autobiographical account of the author's process of unlearning her assumptions and beliefs about race and privilege as an upper middle-class White woman. After engaging in a discussion with the group about the book, Lauren reflected about how her experiences of being raised in racially homogeneous environments shaped her lack of awareness about issues such as systemic racism:

> I think I can see how White I grew up. There's some things growing up that I just never had to deal with. So I think the book is bringing to the forefront issues like systemic racism

> and the ideas that I have about these issues. I've been like, "Oh wow! I didn't even connect those dots." So, I'm learning that systemic racism still exists, but it didn't touch my life growing up where I grew up or with my family. It's good to think about those things and become aware of them.

These are the same experiences that Lauren previously mentioned as influencing her ability to understand and be culturally responsive. However, she believed that participating in the group increased her ability to self-reflect on her actions in the classroom:

> I think it's helping me question myself. So like when I make choices in class, I think I'm doing a better job of thinking back on it and being like, "Okay, is this the choice I want to make for this student? Is this a choice I would make for every student exhibiting this behavior?" I'm questioning myself more and asking myself if I'm being biased in my actions? Am I doing the correct thing? I think like evaluating. So I think it's good because it's just keeping me conscious of how I'm treating each student. Do I have any of these biases in my teaching practices or am I doing best for the students in my classroom no matter who they are.

New learning was not only limited to White teachers. Linda, a Black staff member who grew up in the segregated South, remarked about how she was also unaware of how systemic racism functioned through practices and policies such as redlining and the GI Bill until she read *Waking Up White*. She stated:

> When I actually read about this White woman and the advantages she had and all the privilege she had being White. My family didn't have any of that. I was getting really upset. Subsidized housing, the GI bill—which practically paid for their first home and the scholarships that sent her dad to school. My dad didn't go to college. My dad was a laborer.

> I don't even know if he finished high school, to tell you the truth about it. But I was getting angry because I was sitting there reading. They had all of this, all the time [...] We missed the boat and we didn't even know we were missing out. That's the thing. We didn't even know we were missing out until I started reading that book and I got mad.

This space seemed to serve the purpose of meeting Schwartz's intended purpose of "talking into existence" (Weick et al., 2005, p. 413) and developing the mindset and establishing the foundational knowledge she believed was necessary for teachers and staff to make Applegate a more culturally responsive school. Teachers and staff discussed issues of race, privilege, and bias that some believed contributed to their new learning regarding the historical origins and contemporary manifestations of structural and systemic racism. As a result of these conversations, teachers, most of them White, noted a change in the way they critiqued and self-reflected on their own teaching practices.

However, not all team members thought that this group was achieving its intended purposes of building the culturally responsive capacities of teachers and staff. Although White teachers and staff saw this as a space for new learning, Black teachers and staff on the team had reservations about their White counterparts' willingness to be vulnerable enough to have open and difficult conversations about their beliefs about race, bias, and privilege. Linda described her impression of White teachers' participation in the group and their unwillingness to be vulnerable:

> Schwartz is pushing for social justice and they're not ready to go in that direction. Even in reading the book, *Waking Up White*, you can count the people that are talking about the book or having discussions and it's mostly the Black ones. But most of the time when she asks if anyone has anything to say, it's the three of us that's doing all the talking. That group is very uncomfortable for some of them. I don't know if they're afraid to really express

> what they are feeling and thinking. If they might believe that we might think they're racist. And maybe that's the fear, but I don't know. But I don't hear a lot of discussion or a lot of comments coming from the White teachers. You have to be very vulnerable and a lot of people don't want to be that vulnerable. They don't want to voice the stereotypes they have of children and their homes and their families. So if they're not comfortable in that small setting, how can we have a whole staff discussion if they're not willing to share?

Derrick expressed similar sentiments:

> I think some of the participants are opening up a little bit more. And I think a couple of members are saying more things that make it sound like they're on board with the group. I just don't know if they are believing it, doing it, and putting it into action [...] A couple of the White women are becoming aware of the issues that Principal Schwartz raises in the group, but they don't seem willing to do too much. They are aware of the issues. They know the issues exists, but they don't seem willing to do extra. They are going to do their job and at the end of the day go home.

Due to the nature of teaching, teachers are often asked by district leaders and principals to adopt various policies and practices, and many teachers see these requests as something else to do in addition to the many day-to-day tasks that are required of them. This can be seen in how teachers like Christine and Lauren wanted specific lists and directions of what it means to be culturally responsive so that they could be compliant. When the extra task that teachers and staff are being asked to do requires them to be vulnerable, as well as to shift their mindsets about issues they find uncomfortable, the implementation of policies and practices can become even more complicated. Linda and Derrick believed that although White teachers may have learned new things about race, privilege, and bias, they were not necessarily having the types of conversations

that would engender critical self-reflection about their positionalities and their views on these issues. Their perceptions of their White colleagues' involvement in these meetings show that while some teachers may believe that they are open to participating in equity groups like the CRPBIS group, discussions that center race and other issues can still be challenging when they require self-reflection and self-interrogation of one's own bias and privilege.

Ultimately, Principal Schwartz envisioned that members of the CRPBIS group would function as school-level influencers who would help to create and promote an environment that reflects the beliefs and values she believed were necessary to be culturally responsive. She explained:

> Instead of me making the decision, teachers will show teachers the door. If you are not buying into social justice, restorative justice, these types of belief systems and values, then this is not the place for you, and I won't necessarily have to make it explicit myself. Our team is developing. I really believe teachers will show other teachers the door.

Although this was Principal Schwartz's vision for the future, teachers were still in the nascent stages of making sense of her expectation that they think about race, privilege, and bias and about how their positionalities might influence their interactions with students and families. Amanda explained her readiness to do this work:

> They [the district] aren't even willing to take a stand on it yet. With a topic that is already touchy for a lot of people, what message am I supposed to be competently throwing out to other teachers and staff? You know what I'm saying? Like, I need to know more of what our vision is. What the district's vision is before we hit the ground running on that one. I don't feel as informed. I feel like I'm just learning about it right now and kind of

> just taking it all in. I don't think it's something I could really teach to other teachers. So I don't think I'm ready for that yet.

Amanda was willing to be part of the CRPBIS group, but she did not feel that she was prepared or comfortable enough to assist other teachers and staff in their own mindset and paradigm shifts. Her feelings were partially due to the fact that she did not believe that she had learned enough about the issues discussed in the CRPBIS group, but she also seemed reluctant to engage teachers and staff in conversations about "touchy" topics without knowing what beliefs and values the district held about being culturally responsive. Engaging teachers and staff in these conversations requires a certain level of vulnerability, but the district's lack of a clear message about cultural responsiveness created a sense of ambiguity around the issue and provided no support in terms of the assurance of a unified message and values for administrators, teachers, and staff. In essence, if administrators, teachers, and staff are to engage in critical conversations about race, privilege, and bias, then the district should have an openly stated philosophy of where they stand on the role these issues play in teaching and learning, as well as why they feel it is important to address these issues.

There were also teachers who, although not part of the CRPBIS group, voiced their opinions about the way this space was used, particularly as it related to discussions about privilege. Jeff, who decided to leave the CRPBIS group because he no longer found the conversations to be relevant, believed that teachers and staff should not be expected to have conversations about privilege. Jeff's attitudes about the group were based on his own beliefs that privilege does not exist. When asked about his thoughts about Principal Schwartz's efforts to engage teachers and staff in conversations about privilege, he stated that "there's no such thing" as privilege. He elaborated further about his beliefs:

> A lot of my friends are Black. My really good friends are Black, and we have these discussions too. I bounce these ideas off of them and I brought up that *Waking Up White* book and the whole privilege thing. And I don't know, putting myself in somebody else's shoes is not the same thing as looking at somebody and understanding that we all go through trials. We all have our ups and our downs. Some people's ups are a lot more than others. Some people's downs are a lot more severe than others. But we all go through it. Regardless of what race you are.

Like Jeff's response to his Black students about their fear of the police, he continues to rationalize his colorblind beliefs by decentering the role of race and speaking of privilege in terms of a shared humanity that lacks an awareness and critique of White privilege. His response also suggested that he utilized his Black friends in ways that validate his colorblind perspectives and attitudes. He continued:

> To say that one gets it [privilege] more than the other. I don't know. I guess I have to read the book and see the different perspective, but I'm a history major. I have all sorts of history. I have the African American history, I have the Japanese history, the Chinese history, the Muslim history, the Native American history, the Jewish history. I mean, we're talking about magnitudes of history and oppression and I don't know if that book is the right avenue to go about it. To all of a sudden make people think that they are privileged in some way because of the color of their skin or where they grew up is not right. I don't think that's the way to go about it. I think we need to look at it as each individual human being deserves an education here at school, regardless of what color they are or where they've come from.

As a former history major, Jeff seemed to believe that he had an expansive view of oppression, and he used his knowledge of the oppression of historically marginalized groups in a way that

served his colorblind narrative of a shared humanity and avoids implicating White privilege and White supremacy in discussions of privilege and oppression.

CONCLUSION

This chapter provided insights into how teachers and staff made sense of Principal Schwartz's practices to make Applegate a more culturally responsive school. Findings revealed that some teachers and staff found Principal Schwartz's actions to be disruptive to the status quo at Applegate. Findings also revealed that teacher and staff attitudes and perceptions toward Principal Schwartz's practices were informed by their individual beliefs and experiences. Specifically, individual beliefs and experiences informed how teachers and staff made sense of Principal Schwartz's practices in ways that seemed plausible and reasonable to them. Overall, although there was learning and collective sensemaking happening around cultural responsiveness in groups such as the CRPBIS team, the perception that White teachers might still be struggling with these concepts, the pushback and resistant attitudes of other teachers, and the lack of a clear message about what cultural responsiveness means and how it should be enacted potentially jeopardizes the sustainability and future implementation of Schwartz's practices. The following and final chapter will synthesize findings across Chapters 4, 5, and 6 to provide implications for practices at the district-level and school-level and to suggest implications for future research.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this case study was to understand how one principal and her teachers and staff made sense of what it means to be culturally responsive and the factors that influenced their sensemaking, within a district where becoming culturally responsive was an aspirational goal. The principal in this study was identified as one of the few principals in the district willing to promote cultural responsiveness within their school in critical ways. And so, this study also specifically examined how teachers and staff made sense of their principal's particular leadership practices and vision—practices and a vision that primarily sought to promote a more culturally responsive school environment by raising the critical consciousness and sociopolitical awareness of teachers and staff, among other practices. In this chapter, I provide implications for district-level and school-level practices to promote culturally responsive school environments, as well as implications for future research. The conclusions for these implications for practice and research were drawn using organizational sensemaking frameworks (Spillane et al., 2002; Weick, 1995), as well as characteristics of CRSL (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

DISTRICT-LEVEL IMPLICATIONS

District leaders must craft and convey clear policy messages. District-level messages about policies and practices are important to the sensemaking of school-level implementers because they communicate the "substance and intent" of those policies and practices (Ellis, 2016, p. 6). Also, how policies and practices are communicated can directly impact how implementers understand policies and practices (Ellis, 2016; Owings & Kaplan, 2012).

In the case of Applegate, teachers and staff who did provide a definition of cultural responsiveness provided definitions that were informed by their own perspectives about what it

meant to be culturally responsive. Others were confused and frustrated about the topic of cultural responsiveness because, although the term was used in the district, they believed that the district provided no clear guiding message that they could follow regarding what it meant to be culturally responsive.

Teacher and staff perceptions that the district provided no clear policy message were supported by an examination of district-level documents. These documents displayed no clear message, common language, or understandings that conveyed the "substance and intent" of what was meant when the district used the term *culturally responsive*. Typically, districts that choose to adopt particular policies and practices convey these types of messages, common language, and understandings through visible and accessible district-wide mission or core values statements. However, MCSD's documents and online resources provided no clear explanation of their values, intentions, or collective understanding of what it meant for MCSD to be culturally responsive. Documents that were provided as examples of the district's cultural responsiveness initiatives focused solely on CRPBIS and the implementation of behavior strategies. The lack of a clear message about cultural responsiveness found in these documents and resources was consistent with the observation of a district-wide principals' meeting described in Chapter 6 in which principals discussed how they implemented CRPBIS in their schools without evidencing a clear understanding of what distinguished PBIS from the modified version that seeks to promote cultural responsiveness.

The challenges of enacting organizational change through the implementation of policy and practices have been well researched, particularly within complex K-12 educational organizations (Elmore, 2016; Priestley, 2010; Thomson et al., 2009). Educational policy and practice implementation is potentially further complicated in school organizations when policies

and practices challenge individuals to shift their mindsets in order to accomplish organizational goals (Heifetz et al., 2009). Specifically, promoting culturally responsive school environments necessitates cultivating mindsets that are conducive to disrupting policies and practices that perpetuate the status quo for historically marginalized student populations and communities. As evident in this study, school district leaders are concerned with representing diverse cultures and perspectives found within their districts through their policy messages. Indeed, due to current demographic shifts, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural diversity can vary significantly from school to school. As a result, school districts are not culturally monolithic, and efforts to become more culturally responsive should be dependent on the cultural particularities of communities represented in the school. However, despite the potential cultural variability within schools, what should be consistent are district-wide policy messages and understandings that are grounded in common understandings of what it means to be culturally responsive, ideally in ways that are supported by the research literature (Khalifa, 2018; Long, Souto-Manning, & Vasquez, 2016).

Therefore, although districts are complex organizations comprised of diverse groups and perspectives, district leaders who seek to implement culturally responsive policies and practices must not be afraid to take courageous stances that require principals, teachers, and staff to be critically reflective of their behaviors, practices, and structures. This begins by establishing a clear common language, unequivocal policy messages, frameworks, and understandings. By communicating and committing to clearer messages about cultural responsiveness, particularly messages that center an interrogation of the status quo for marginalized students and communities (Khalifa et al., 2016; Khalifa, 2018), teachers, staff, and administrators are at least clear concerning the district's organizational beliefs, values, and goals regarding cultural responsiveness.

District leaders must be committed to centering culturally responsive values and beliefs. The ability to support clear and unequivocal policy messages requires what Assistant Superintendent Williams referred to as an "emotional desire" and commitment to promote cultural responsiveness as a core district-wide belief and value. Williams made this statement when speaking about the need for principals who are willing to take up the work of creating culturally responsive school environments in critical ways. However, "emotional desire" is also required of district-level leaders who craft and convey policy messages that seek to promote more culturally responsive school environments. MCSD leaders expressed certain beliefs and values about what they believed was important in order to create more culturally responsive schools, particularly for historically marginalized student populations. This was evident in their decision to invite scholars and consultants to engage their principals, teachers, and staff in conversations about issues that went beyond superficial representations of culture and included a consideration of more complex issues, such as race, bias, and privilege. However, the resistance of principals, teachers, and staff caused MCSD to capitulate.

As a result, the district refrained from whole-district discussions about these issues and delegated the responsibility of leading these conversations to principals. Essentially, district leaders wanted willing school principals to take the risk of having critical conversations with teachers and staff, even though they weren't willing to do so as a district. This was an opportunity for MCSD to model their commitment to their espoused organizational values and goals for cultural responsiveness. Instead, the actions they enacted showed that MCSD leaders were not committed enough to their culturally responsive goals to openly support their beliefs and values in the face of resistance. The subsequent "invisible hand" approach of providing principals with resources under the condition that teachers and staff were willing to engage only

worked to further distance the district from actively and openly shaping and leading the work of creating a more culturally responsive school district.

District leaders must actively establish a district-wide culture of cultural responsiveness. District leaders must not only express their commitment to cultural responsiveness by crafting unequivocal policy messages that center cultural responsiveness as a core value and belief, but they must also put their commitment into action by actively working to implement and sustain structures that disrupt the practices and systems that are oppressive to students, particularly those who have been historically marginalized (Denicolo et al., 2017; Khalifa, 2018; Kohli, Pizarro, & Nevárez, 2017). MCSD took a step in this direction by implementing CRPBIS in the district. This implementation included the establishment of CRPBIS teams and advisory groups and the use of data in each school to measure the success of implemented strategies. While these elements are important for creating more culturally responsive schools, individuals at the school level need not only a change in strategies, structures, and practices, but they also need supplemental school-level and district-level opportunities to understand why such strategies, structures, and practices are necessary for the success of all students. The need for such opportunities was evident in how some Applegate teachers and staff could not understand why MCSD's discussions of CRPBIS often focused on the district's racial disparity in school discipline, particularly among boys of color. MCSD's attempt to engage in conversations about the district's racially disparate discipline practices without providing teachers and staff with an ongoing means to understand and interrogate structural inequities and their connection to schooling, teaching, and learning.

These learning opportunities also provide an opportunity for districts to establish a cohesive district-wide culture of cultural responsiveness through a common language, collective

messages, understandings of cultural responsiveness, and the development of teachers' and staff members' culturally responsive capacity beyond strategies such as CRPBIS. This sense of cultural cohesiveness around culturally responsive goals was not apparent in MCSD. Principal Schwartz attempted to create a culturally responsive school culture at Applegate through her leadership practices and the facilitation of a sensemaking space, the CRPBIS team. However, the lack of both cultural cohesiveness and an unequivocal advocation of beliefs and values at the district level contributed to the challenges of implementation Principal Schwartz encountered at the school level.

SCHOOL-LEVEL IMPLICATIONS

Research on policy and practice implementation and sensemaking shows that, regardless of if district-level leaders convey clear messages about their values and goals, principals, teachers, and staff are still more than likely to filter and interpret these messages through aspects of their own identity in ways that make sense to them (Coburn, 2001; Lipsky, 1980; Spillane et al., 2002). This was also found to be true in this case study. In the absence of a clear district-wide policy message about cultural responsiveness, and as a result of district-level leaders' decision to delegate the responsibility of leading critical conversations and creating more culturally responsive school environments to principals, Principal Schwartz interpreted and enacted cultural responsiveness in her school in ways that were shaped primarily by her own beliefs, values, and experiences. Chapter 5 provided a detailed account of how factors such as her personal experiences with police and professional educational experiences influenced her beliefs and values about what it means to be culturally responsive as a school principal. These aspects of Principal Schwartz's identity made her more inclined to interpret and enact cultural responsiveness in ways that centered issues such as race, race privilege, and systemic oppression.

These experiences informed her decisions to talk about such issues with teachers and staff during meetings as a way to contextualize academic, behavioral, and socioemotional data for marginalized student populations. These conversations were sometimes met with open disapproval and resistance because some teachers considered Schwartz's conception and enactment of CRSL to be too race-centered, specifically as it related to Black students.

In many ways, Principal Schwartz exhibited characteristics of a culturally responsive school leader. She was critically reflective of her race privilege, and she encouraged and provided opportunities for teachers and staff to be more reflective of their race privilege as well (Ginsberg & Wlodkowski, 2000; Khalifa et al., 2016). She was critically conscious and sociopolitically aware of the issues that impacted minoritized communities, especially communities of color (Hammond, 2015; Khalifa et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1994). She also enacted practices that sought to disrupt oppressive disciplinary practices and center students' perspectives in school-level decision making (Antrop-Gonzalez, 2011; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). The purpose of CRSL is to create school environments that disrupt the oppressive schooling practices and policies that have been detrimental to many students, particularly those from minoritized groups. According to Khalifa (2018), minoritized groups not only include students who are Black, but students who are "Indigenous, Latinx, low-income, LGBTQ, refugee, ELL, and Muslim", among others (p. 19). Minoritized groups encompass a broad range of students and communities who have been historically oppressed in schools.

For this reason, Schwartz's understanding of culturally responsiveness might seem to be narrowly construed by certain standards. This was certainly a source of tension for teachers and staff who believed that Principal Schwartz was not creating a culturally responsive environment for all students, but that she instead had a political agenda that was partisan to Black students and

communities. This again underlines the importance of having district leaders who craft, convey, and commit to unequivocal values and beliefs about cultural responsiveness. This practice potentially minimizes the possibility for confusion about district beliefs and values. Because the district provided no clear message and understanding of cultural responsiveness, teachers and staff questioned the motives and manner by which Principal Schwartz enacted her leadership practices, even when district leaders gave principals the leeway to promote cultural responsiveness in their schools. Therefore, if the district leaders believe that these types of practices and conversations are necessary for creating more culturally responsive school environments, then principals who facilitate these conversations and enact practices in this way should be openly supported by the district in ways that do not position them as outliers in doing this work.

Attitudes towards Principal Schwartz's enactment of leadership practices were not only the result of teachers and staff not knowing the district's view on cultural responsiveness, but like Principal Schwartz, they also made sense of her leadership practices through their prior beliefs, values, and experiences. Interviews revealed that many of their attitudes and perspectives toward Schwartz's leadership practices and decisions were shaped by personal and professional experiences that informed their current beliefs and values. Teacher and staff perspectives included authoritarian and zero tolerance views of school discipline; race-neutral, colorblind, and individualist perspectives of the sociopolitical issues that affect marginalized communities; and deficit perspectives about student families informed by middle-class values. As described in Chapter 6, Principal Schwartz's conception of cultural responsiveness centered being critically conscious and aware of the sociopolitical realities of the students and communities that the school served. Therefore, her beliefs and values did not align with those of some her teachers and

staff. A mismatch of beliefs and values between school leadership and teachers and staff threatens the implementation and sustainability of school-level practices that aim to promote a more culturally responsive school environment (Khalifa, 2018). Some scholars have suggested counseling out teachers whose beliefs and values do not align with the overall objectives and goals of the school (Khalifa, 2018; Kochanek, 2005). But such action can be challenging, especially in contexts similar to this case study, in which individuals at the school level do not have a common language, clear policy messages, and understandings about what to do and why it is important.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This case study has implications for understanding the factors that impact teachers' and staff members' understanding and sensemaking of policies, practices, and initiatives that seek to promote culturally responsive school environments. These factors include individual aspects, such as the role that beliefs, values, and experiences play in how administrators, teachers, and staff make sense of cultural responsiveness and CRSL practices. Although this study was limited to an examination of one elementary school principal, future research might include broadening the scope of research on school-level sensemaking by including the perspectives of other school-level community members, such as students and parents, over a longer period of time. Also, within school districts that adopt cultural responsiveness as an aspirational goal, future research might examine how multiple school principals make sense of district-wide culturally responsive goals.

In this study, some teachers and staff believed that elementary-aged students were not prepared and aware enough to have critical conversations about issues of race and systemic oppression. Different grade levels and school contexts in which students are thought to be aware

enough to understand sociopolitical issues and express diverse social identities might be considered for future research as well. The conceptualization of cultural responsiveness for this study centered around issues of race, race privilege, and the systemic oppression of communities of color in part because of the specific circumstances that were unique to the district under study, as well as because of the beliefs, values, and experiences of school principal in this study. However, another study might examine how individuals at the school and district levels make sense of becoming more culturally responsive for other minoritized groups, such as Latinx students, Muslim students, immigrants, English Language Learners, LGBTQIA+ students, and others.

This study examined how school-level implementers made sense of what it meant to be culturally responsive and the factors that influenced their sensemaking. Sensemaking frameworks and CRSL practices provided a lens to understand the role that cognitive factors play in the implementation of policies and practices that promote cultural responsiveness in schools. Particularly, sensemaking frameworks provided a way to more deeply understand how school leaders and teachers understand efforts to become more culturally responsive. School leaders and teachers are not often afforded the opportunity to articulate and reflect on their understandings of cultural responsiveness given the operational and instructional demands of the profession.

Findings revealed that aspects of school-level implementers' identities, such as beliefs, values, and experiences, played a significant role in how they defined and conceptualized what it meant to be culturally responsive. These aspects also informed how the principal, teachers, and staff members enacted, interpreted, and responded to leadership practices that sought to promote a more culturally responsive school environment. This study also provided insight into the factors that can potentially impact district-level and school-level efforts to implement policies

and practices that seek to promote culturally responsive school environments, especially those that challenge principals, teachers, and staff members to be critically self-reflective of their beliefs, behaviors, and practices.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Participant Consent Form

Research Participant Information and Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a research project. Researchers are required to provide a consent form to inform you about the study, to convey that participation is voluntary, to explain risks and benefits of participation, and to empower you to make an informed decision. You should feel free to ask the researchers any questions you may have.

Study Title: Becoming Culturally Responsive: A Mini-Ethnographic Case Study of School-Level Sensemaking

Researcher and Title: Darius Johnson, Doctoral Student; Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews, Associate Professor of Teacher Education

Department and Institution: Department of Teacher Education, Michigan State University

Address and Contact Information: Erickson Hall, 620 Farm Lane, East Lansing, MI 48824

EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH:

You are being asked to participate in a research study that examines how school-level agents (principal and their teachers/staff) make sense of culturally responsive district-level policies and initiatives and 2) how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense of how these policies are implemented at the local, school-level by school administration.

WHAT YOU WILL DO:

Participation in this study will involve participating in two to three initial 45-60-minute semi-structured interviews about how you understand district-level culturally responsive policies and initiatives, as well as how you make sense of the way your school principal implements culturally responsive practices within your school context. Participation will also involve allowing the researcher to observe and take notes of the school context. Examples may include, but are not limited to, faculty meetings, faculty book discussions, and principal/teacher/student/family interactions, etc.

YOUR RIGHTS TO PARTICIPATE, SAY NO, OR WITHDRAW:

Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may choose not to participate in the study at any time and withdraw from further participation in the research by emailing Dr.

Dorinda Carter dcarter@msu.edu. There are no consequences for withdrawing from the study. If you choose to participate in this study, you may also refuse to answer or skip certain questions without consequence.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION FOR BEING IN THE STUDY:

Compensation for this study includes a $25 gift card at the conclusion of the study.

CONTACT INFORMATION FOR QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS:

If you have concerns or questions about this study, such as scientific issues, how to do any part of it, or to report an injury, please contact the researcher (Dr. Dorinda Carter Andrews, Michigan State University, Department of Teacher Education, 620 Farm Lane, Erickson Hall, Room 331, East Lansing, MI 48824, dcarter@msu.edu (517) 432-2070

If you have questions or concerns about your role and rights as a research participant, would like to obtain information or offer input, or would like to register a complaint about this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program at 517-355-2180, Fax 517-432-4503, or e-mail irb@msu.edu or regular mail at 4000 Collins Rd, Suite 136, Lansing, MI 48910

DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT:

I agree to be a participant in the study *Becoming Culturally Responsive: A Mini-Ethnographic Case Study of School-Level Sensemaking*.

_____Yes _____No

_____

Printed Name

_____ _____

Signature Date

APPENDIX B: District Leadership Team Member Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this dissertation study. The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense of culturally responsive district level policies and initiatives and 2) to examine how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense around how these policies are implemented at the local, school-level. The purpose of this interview is to understand how district level leadership frames messages around cultural responsiveness in schools, as well as how the district supports local level agents in implementing culturally responsive policies and practices.

Defining and Framing the Message Around Cultural Responsiveness (cues/messages)

1. This district is engaged in efforts and initiatives to create more culturally responsive schools. How does the district define cultural responsiveness?

2. From your understanding why has the district decided to implement culturally responsive initiatives and practices?

3. What is the district doing specifically to create more culturally responsive school environments?

4. How do you see teachers putting cultural responsiveness into practices? Teachers?

5. What materials, professional development, and/or opportunities are principals, teachers, etc. given to understand and implement the district's vision of cultural responsiveness? (For example, post-PD what's the follow-up)

6. Is there anything you would like to add regarding the district's efforts to promote cultural responsiveness within schools in the district?

APPENDIX C: Teacher Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this dissertation study. The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense of district level policies and initiatives to promote cultural responsiveness and 2) to examine how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense around how these policies are implemented at the local school-level. The overall purpose of the two interviews is to understand how teachers and staff understand cultural responsiveness, as well as their understanding and thoughts about how efforts to be culturally responsive are being enacted in the school environment.

Individual Cognition

Personal Background

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself: Where did you grow up?
2. What was school like for you as a student?
3. What did you learn from those schooling experiences that you still carry with you as a teacher?
4. What experiences encouraged you to become a teacher?

Experiences and Expectations of School Leadership/Principal

5. This school has experienced transition in leadership in the last few years:

    a. How do you feel about the recent transitions in leadership over the past few years?

    b. What were the strengths? Challenges?

Understanding of District Message of Cultural Responsiveness (cues/messages)

6. The district and your principal are making efforts to become more culturally responsive:

7. Have you ever heard of cultural responsiveness?
    a. If no...
    b. If you had to explain what cultural responsiveness is to someone who had not heard the term, what would you say?

8. How has the district helped you understand cultural responsiveness?
    a. Principal?

9. With your current understanding, what does cultural responsiveness currently look like at your school?

10. What do you think culturally responsiveness should look like in your school?

Teacher Interview Protocol (Cont'd)

11. What are some of the challenges that you are experiencing with understanding cultural responsiveness in your school?

    a. Can you describe some experiences that were challenging or beneficial to gain an understanding of cultural responsiveness in your school?

Attitudes in Sensemaking

12. What is your understanding of the role of race and privilege in academic achievement?

13. I asked the previous question because one of the principal's goals is to help teachers understand the role that issues such as race and privilege play in teaching, learning, and academic achievement. What are your thoughts/feelings about working in a school that promotes culturally responsiveness in this way?

CRSL: Community Outreach/ Engaging Parents and Students in Community Context

14. Your principal has also led and modeled expectations for actively engaging the local community (i.e. whole staff home visits, etc.):

    a. What are your thoughts/feelings about working in a school that promotes culturally responsiveness in this way?

Discipline/Suspensions

As you know, this principal is trying to reduce suspensions rates:

15. How, if at all, has this decision regarding disciplinary practices affected your teaching practice and/or classroom dynamics?

16. To help reduce suspension rates, your principal has implemented the use of restorative justice sessions to address behaviors. Do you know what restorative justice is and/or have you attended a restorative justice session?

    a. If yes, what are you feeling about this approach?

    b. If no, is there a particular reason why you were not able to attend?

CRSL: Developing Culturally Responsive Teachers/Staff

17. How if at all, has your way of thinking about issues such as race, privilege, etc. changed as a result of the principal's vision and leadership practices?

APPENDIX D: Principal Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this dissertation study. The purpose of this study is twofold: 1) to examine how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense of culturally responsive district level policies and initiatives and 2) to examine how a principal and their teachers/staff make sense around how these policies are implemented at the local school level. The purpose of this interview is to understand how school level leadership is interpreting and enacting cultural responsiveness in the school environment.

Building Rapport

1. Where did you grow up?
2. What were your own schooling experiences like?
3. What were your teaching experiences like?
4. Why did you decide to become a principal?
5. Can you describe the school you lead to me? Demographics? Culture and climate? Strengths and weaknesses?
6. Do you think your school values the diversity represented here? How so? Do you have specific examples of things you do (or don't do)?

Individual Cognition

Understanding of District Message of Cultural Responsiveness

7. What are specific policies/initiatives that the district is engaged in to promote culturally responsiveness in schools?

8. What do you see as the strength in these efforts? Challenges?

Sensegiving Around Cultural Responsiveness

9. Have you set forth a vision for the school around cultural responsiveness? Why or why not? (***sensegiving*****)**
    a. If so, how did you come to articulate this vision?
10. How did you communicate it to faculty and staff?
11. What materials, professional development, and/or other opportunities are teachers and staff given to understand and implement the district's vision of cultural responsiveness? (For example, post-PD what's the follow-up)?
12. Do you deviate from the district's interpretation of cultural responsiveness? If so, how and why?

Principal Interview Protocol (Cont'd)

Personal Efforts to develop CR Leadership Identity

In a previous interview, you mentioned that you have made personal efforts to embed yourself in the community (i.e. joining a Black church in your school community):

13. Why did you decide to do that? Has this informed your leadership practice in any way, especially around becoming a culturally responsive principal? If so, how?

14. What does It mean to you to be a principal who is personally striving to be culturally responsive, and who wants to lead others to be culturally responsive as well?

Emotions in Sensemaking

15. What compels you to practice a leadership style that centers cultural responsiveness?

16. What do you feel about enacting this leadership approach?

17. What do you see as the benefits of leading this way? Challenges?

Situated Cognition

18. What are some of the factors (external and/or internal) (positive or not so positive), if any, that have impacted your approach/vision to being a more socially conscious school principal?

Appendix E: Conceptual and Theoretical Framework Thematic Coding

Table 2: Culturally Responsive School Leadership Thematic Coding

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) (Khalifa et al., 2016)	
Coding Themes (Based on CRSL Behavior Strands)	**Example/Evidence**
Critical Self-reflection	Evidence that principal perceives that they possess "an awareness of self and an understanding of the context in which they lead" (p. 1281), as well as a critical consciousness of the issues that affect diverse students and communities
Culturally Responsive Teacher Development	Evidence that principal perceives that they model and support the development of cultural responsiveness among their teaching staff
Culturally Responsive School Environment	Evidence that principal perceives that they promote a culturally responsive/inclusive school environment, including challenging and supporting their school community in interrogating the status quo as it relates to diverse student populations?
Culturally Responsive Student, Parent, and Teacher Engagement	Evidence that principal perceives that they engage diverse student, parent, and community contexts including, not limited to, efforts to "promote overlapping school-community contexts, speaking (or at least honoring) native students' languages/lexicons, creating structures that accommodate the lives of parents, or even creating school spaces for marginalized students' identities and behaviors" (p. 1282)

Table 3: Sensemaking Thematic Coding

Sensemaking Characteristics (Weick et al., 1995)	
Coding Themes	**Example/Evidence**
Identity Construction	Evidence that principals, teachers, and/or staff sensemaking is informed by their worldview and personal experiences, in tandem with the presumptions they make about their unique school context
Retrospection	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff reflect on previous experiences (i.e. as a former teacher or past experiences with students, teachers, and parents within their current schooling context) to guide their sensemaking around cultural responsiveness
Enactment	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff engage in enactment through collective sensemaking (talking/conversation) that leads to understanding and future actions toward cultural responsiveness
Social and Collaborative	Evidence that principal, teachers, and/or staff make sense of their current reality by fostering common understandings, language, and expectations in a social and collaborative setting
Ongoing	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff sensemaking process begins with the noticing and bracketing of cues [phenomena] with the school environment
Cue Extraction	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff receive district and school-level cues/messages that inform their perspectives on cultural responsiveness
Plausibility	Evidence that principal, teachers, and/or staff make sense of leadership decisions and actions based on what they believe is plausible and reasonable according to their personal experiences, beliefs, and values.

Table 4: Policy Sensemaking in K-12 Contexts Thematic Coding

Theoretical Considerations of Policy Sensemaking in K-12 Contexts (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002)	
Individual Cognition	
Interpretation of Policy Messages	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff within the same school context have different interpretations about what it means to be culturally responsive and how to create a culturally responsive school environment
Misunderstanding of New Ideas	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff believe that they know what it means to be culturally responsive or are already being culturally responsive enough
Superficial Understandings of Policy Message	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff understandings of cultural responsiveness focus on superficial features (i.e. food, festival, fun, respect for all) rather than deeper, critical elements of cultural responsiveness (interrogating status quo of marginalized students/communities, etc.).
Bias of Prior Beliefs and Values	Evidence that principal, teachers and/or staff are biased toward previous interpretations and understanding of cultural responsiveness
Affective Cost of Self-Image	Evidence that addressing cultural responsiveness creates a potential range of emotions for principal, teachers and/or staff (i.e. guilt, ineffectiveness, etc.) that potentially work against adopting reform ideas
Situated Cognition	
Social Interactions	Evidence that formal groups (equity teams, whole staff meetings, etc.) and informal groups contribute to principal, teachers and/or staff sensemaking and implementation of policies and practices that seek to promote culturally responsive school environments
Organizational Context	Evidence that organizational context and arrangements support or hinder principal, teachers and/or staff understanding and sensemaking of cultural responsiveness
Historical Context	Evidence that individual and organizational historical context affects the implementation of policies and practices that seek to promote culturally responsive school environments

Table 4 (Cont'd)

Values and Emotions	Evidence that emotions and personal values play a role in principal, teachers and/or staff sensemaking of cultural responsiveness and the principal's efforts to create a more culturally responsive school environment?

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