**Culturally Responsive Leadership: A Review of the Literature**

**Introduction and Purpose**

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

**Methodology**

Like all other literature reviews, we employed a search methodology aimed at finding and including all of the articles on culturally responsive school leadership in Google, Google Scholar, and academic scholarly search engines (JSTOR, ProQuest, SAGE, ERIC). We summarized each article, noted which were empirical, and noted best practices and strategies that authors reported paying attention to the emerging common themes. But this approach alone, we soon learned, was problematic because a great number of articles did not include titles with either of the terms “culturally responsive” or “leadership,” but contained a great deal of relevance to our topic. For example, Gardiner and Enomoto’s article *Urban School Principals and their Role as Multicultural Leaders* (2006) was highly informative in the ways they developed culture-specific programs to serve immigrant/refugee students. Similarly, Castango and Brayboy (2008) described school-based practices and programs that are responsive to Indigenous youth needs, but had a title that, again, did not signal culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). Indeed, the implementation of school-based programs is often a function of school leadership. Likewise, a number of most data-rich studies (Alston 2005; Ah Nee-Benham, 1997; Author 2, 2005; Author, 2012; Lomotey, 1989; Lopez, Scribner & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Morris, 1991; Tillman, 2006; Walker, 2009) were conducted on nuanced, school leadership approaches responsive to local cultures, but these scholars did not explicitly name their studies with terms including “culturally responsive.”

**Findings**

From the literature review, we articulated several strands of culturally responsive school leadership. In explaining the first aspect of culturally responsive leadership, we rely on scholars who argue that teachers are primarily not culturally responsive, and do not have access to culturally responsive teacher training programs. This lack of teacher education preparation—be it school-based professional development or university preparation programs—is necessary, even when teachers are from the same cultural, racial, and class background of students. Thus, based on our understanding of the literature, we focus on the ability of the school leader to prepare and continuously develop culturally responsive teachers in school. In much the same way that *instructional leadership* scholarship positions the principal as one who develops teaching effectiveness (cite), we argue that principals must play a leading role in helping their staffs to become culturally responsive. They must develop strategies of dealing with teachers who are not, and may even resist becoming, culturally responsive.

Second, in addition to developing teachers directly, school leaders must actually promote culturally responsive school context with an emphasis on inclusivity. For example, the ability of the school leader to mobilize resources to identify and foster a culturally affirming school environment is also paramount. Racialized suspension gaps, for example, would call for a culturally responsive leadership that challenged teachers exhibiting exclusionary and marginalizing behaviors. Thus, in this case, it would be important for culturally responsive school leaders to affirm and protect indigenous student identities in the school.

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

**Conclusion**

There are two additional contributions of the literature that demonstrate the promise of CRSL: *maintaining high student expectations* and the central role of *advocacy* for students, parents, and community based causes. Maintaining high expectations of minoritized students is central to culturally-responsive school leadership (Irvine, 1990; Author, 2011; Walker, 2009). In the theorizing and research around what researchers call “warm demanders,” (Bondy & Ross, 2008; Foster, 1997; Irvine & Fraser, 1998; Ware, 2006), educators are culturally responsive but maintain high academic expectations of students. We suggest that culturally responsive leaders also embody this approach to relationship-building with students and communities. Though sometimes critical, this approach imbues love and hope in school environments (Daniels, 2012). What seems important to these researchers is that students are challenged to learn, but may not learn from educators whom they believe do not care about them or their ways of being (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Kohl, 1994). This is where advocacy becomes such a crucial part of what culturally responsive leaders must do for minoritized youth and their communities.

The role of advocacy in educational leadership is well established as a way for culturally responsive school leaders to lead, earn the trust and credibility of families and communities, and to leverage community wealth (Yosso, 2005) to help the learning of students in school (Author, 2013). Anderson (2009) argues strongly that principals who advocate for students and community-based causes really open opportunities for minoritized students. If minoritized students will not learn from educators whom they feel do not care (Gates Foundation, 2008), then culturally responsive leaders must establish practices that imbue an ethic of care and hope (Daniels, 2012). The literature suggests that community-based advocacy leads to trust, rapport and credibility between the school leaders (Alemán, 2009; Anderson, 2009; Author, 2011, 2012). Indeed, there is no shortage of authors who argue that community organizing can be leveraged for successful school reform (Gold, Simon & Brown, 2002; Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Shirley, 1997). But Ishimaru, Gordon & Cervantes’ (2011) work in San Jose most saliently suggests that the power of this organizing can be very liberating and culturally responsive.