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Strategies of Elementary Principals Supporting Teachers Using Culturally Responsive Discipline Practices

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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tracie Connelly

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University
2024

Abstract

Strategies of Elementary Principals Supporting Teachers Using Culturally Responsive

Discipline Practices

by

Tracie Connelly

MA, Bowie State University, 2006

BA, Rutgers University, 1994

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2024

Abstract

As school populations become more diverse, principals are challenged to create opportunities for teachers' development of culturally responsive discipline practices. To increase equity, school district leaders and others in the community need to know more about the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The conceptual framework was a combination of elements from Bass's transformational leadership theory and Khalifa's culturally responsive school leadership model. The research question addressed principals' descriptions of the support provided to help teachers develop culturally responsive discipline practices. Data were collected via interviews with eight elementary school leaders with at least 2 years of experience in diverse schools in a Mid-Atlantic U.S. state. In vivo and pattern coding were used to analyze data and develop themes. The emergent themes were school leadership practices, fair and sensitive communication, and ongoing professional development. Building strong relationships enabled principals to support teachers by modeling sensitive communication, participating in coaching conversations, and modeling fairness that supported student differences. The leaders used professional development to build teacher capacity across the schools. Positive social change implications include enhanced culturally responsive practices and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers, which may create school community cultures that are more inclusive of diverse student populations and give students of color more opportunities for school success.

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Dedication

First, I would like to dedicate this study to God for giving me the strength to persevere when faced with challenges throughout the process by enabling me to see the light at the end of the tunnel. I also dedicate this study to my parents and husband; your support was unmeasurable. To my children, Savannah and Ronnie, thank you for understanding the time commitment required for this study, keeping me focused, and believing in me to the end. Family is everything!

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Elementary principals oversee the enforcement of discipline practices and are responsible for ensuring teachers make equitable decisions that demonstrate cultural responsiveness (Gregory et al., 2021). The increase in the diversity of U.S. school populations has created a need for a greater understanding of the ways in which elementary principals support teachers' culturally responsive practices (Banwo et al., 2022). The study site was experiencing an increase in several cultural groups, causing school leaders to address the inclusion practices necessary to create welcoming environments for these groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). Cultural insensitivity is a growing national concern, with students of color being suspended at rates 3–5 times greater than their peers (Gibson & Decker, 2019). Gay (2018) argued that culturally relevant teaching alone could not solve the problems faced by marginalized students who receive inequitable discipline practices. Further research is needed to determine how elementary principals might support teachers in their use of culturally responsive discipline practices that might result in increased equitable decisions made by teachers.

The inequitable discipline decisions in the Mid-Atlantic state where this study took place resulted in African American students being suspended twice as much as their peers (State Department of Education, 2019). The use of culturally responsive discipline practices allows principals to create an environment where students are disciplined equitably and with cultural sensitivity (Uygur, 2022). Educators in schools with racial

disproportionalities in suspensions may be vulnerable to criticism of racial insensitivity and bias (Gibson & Decker, 2019).

Principals lead the change in their buildings and have varying approaches to supporting teachers in understanding the cultural needs of students. According to Longmuir et al. (2022), school leaders tend to focus on broad ideas, such as trust and relationships, rather than behaviors or programs that promote cultural responsiveness. School leaders have implemented several programs used to reduce disciplinary disparities, such as Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS), Social Emotional Learning, and Response to Interventions; however, these programs have not addressed culturally or racially based practices of teachers (Fergus, 2021). Research on how elementary principals support teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices with diverse cultural groups has been limited (Fallon et al., 2022).

In this study, I examined the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. Positive social change implications may include enhanced culturally responsive practices across the schools in the study site district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers, which would help create school community cultures that are more inclusive of diverse student populations and give students of color more opportunities for success.

In Chapter 1, I introduce the problem statement, the study's purpose, and the research question guiding the study. The conceptual framework and the methodology and research design. I also provide operational definitions of key terms as well as identify assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and the significance of the study.

Background

Despite school leaders' implementation of different programs to support teacher discipline decisions in the classroom, cultural groups are overrepresented in discipline infractions (State Department of Education, 2019). Teacher discretion is central to exclusionary discipline decisions that result in office referrals (Gilleskie & Li, 2022). The scope of this study focused on understanding the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices in a Mid-Atlantic U.S. school system. Researchers have investigated racial disparities in student discipline, the influence of implicit biases on student discipline, and the effects of classroom management systems on student discipline (Cakir et al., 2022; Fergus, 2021). However, limited research has focused on leadership behaviors that support elementary teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices (Banwo et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). To increase teachers' culturally responsive practices, elementary principals need to use effective leadership behaviors to help teachers respond to the cultural diversity of their students (Johnson et al., 2022). Paul and Araneo (2019) recommended integrating culturally responsive practices in professional development to address the inequitable discipline practices in schools.

Several studies have shown elementary principals' use of school reform systems to address culturally responsive practices. Fergus (2021) discussed principals' use of programs, such as PBIS, Social Emotional Learning, and Response to Interventions, to support teachers in their discipline practices, finding that these programs did not address culturally or racially based practices driven by teacher perceptions.

Administrative discipline data in a North Carolina school system demonstrated that principals and teachers might discipline students differently from various cultural groups, supporting a theory of discrimination of punishment (Gilleskie & Li, 2022; Welsh, 2022). Increasing diversity requires school leaders to implement mechanisms to ensure equity and cultural responsiveness for marginalized students (Brown et al., 2022; Vassallo, 2022). Marcucci and Elmesky (2020) argued that teacher perceptions of student behaviors may be influenced by racial and cultural understandings of appropriate student behavior. Teachers' lack of understanding of how to manage diverse classrooms and discipline plans are factors that contribute to the need for administrators to support teacher disparity in discipline practices.

A broader understanding among elementary principals of leadership behaviors to support the development of teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices is essential to gaining insight to address this phenomenon (McCoy-Wilson, 2022). The lack of culturally responsive discipline practices contributes to the school culture and behaviors linked to a gap in practice by school leaders (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). The cultural beliefs of teachers influence their discipline decisions, affecting the responsive school culture that principals endeavor to build in schools. Principals are under pressure to manage the increasing complexity of diverse and multicultural student populations (Paletta et al., 2020).

Strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals to support teacher use of culturally responsive practices is a gap in practice. Principals who do not understand culturally responsive leadership behaviors are challenged to support teachers in this

paradigm shift (Cobanoglu, 2021). Williams et al. (2022) argued that research on teachers in ethnically and culturally diverse settings indicates they struggle with classroom management that is culturally responsive. The work of principals includes the development of professional competencies, enabling them to lead and organize the paradigm shift (Paletta et al., 2020). This study may provide enhanced culturally responsive practices across the study site schools and district, resulting in more equitable discipline referrals by teachers.

Problem Statement

The problem that inspired this study was the inconsistency in strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. As school populations become more diverse, principals are challenged to create opportunities for teachers' development of culturally responsive discipline practices (Fergus, 2021; Larson et al., 2018; Little & Tolbert, 2018; Lustick, 2020). Understanding different cultures could affect how teachers and principals implement discipline practices. Tefera et al. (2022) examined how cultural responsiveness affects the degree of discipline African American boys in elementary schools received compared to their peers and found that the lack of culturally responsive discipline practices from preschool to high school revealed that African American boys received more referrals for discipline incidents.

In the Mid-Atlantic school system study site where almost 60% of the student population is African American, district personnel research indicated this demographic group represents almost 80% of suspended students. Principals use teacher referrals for

discipline to determine which students are suspended, and data reveal higher rates of referral and suspension for students of color compared to their peers (Gilleskie & Li, 2022). Principals are responsible for evaluating and supporting culturally responsive discipline practices (Lustick, 2020). The evidence from the study site district and the research literature demonstrates the need for more understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary school principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices.

The gap in practice the study addressed is the limited understanding of what strategies and behaviors are used by elementary principals to support teachers in their use of culturally responsive practices. Gaps in effective culturally responsive leadership behaviors occur when principals lack the cultural competencies for leading diverse populations (Banwo et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). The leadership behaviors displayed by school leaders can shift the mindset of teachers when addressing student discipline (Larson et al., 2018; Lustick, 2020). Findings from the current study may include enhanced culturally responsive practices across schools in the study site district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. To develop this understanding, I interviewed eight principals and assistant principals who had experience supporting teachers leading diverse classrooms. The phenomenon of this study was how elementary principals and

assistant principals describe the behaviors and strategies used when they are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline.

Research Question

Research questions guide data collection and focus the research study. In this basic qualitative study, the research question was: How do elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school system describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study comprised Bass and Riggio's (2006) theory of transformational leadership and Khalifa et al.'s (2016) culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) model. Bass's model evolved from the seminal work of Burns in which leaders seek to change existing thoughts, techniques, and goals for better results and the greater good (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In the current study, the elementary principals were the leaders seeking to transform teachers' thoughts and techniques used when disciplining students. In Bass's transformational model, leaders use the techniques of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence to support and transform the members' actions in an organization (Flynn, 2021; Stewart, 2006). Through the lens of idealized influence, the behaviors and strategies used by principals may account for the discipline practices used by teachers.

Khalifa et al.'s newer CRSL model evolved under the idea of culturally responsive education originating from the theories of cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2015). The framework includes four

CRSL behaviors: (a) critical self-awareness, (b) culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation, (c) culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and (d) engaging students and families in community contexts (Khalifa et al., 2016). Critical self-awareness can account for the elementary principals' behaviors used when supporting teachers' discipline practices, while culturally responsive and inclusive environments can account for the strategies selected by principals to enhance the culturally responsive school environment when supporting the teachers. In the current study, I used the theory of transformational leadership and the concepts within the CRSL model to structure the interview protocol, analyze the data, and discuss the results.

The CRSL model and transformational leadership theory were an appropriate framework for this study to develop an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. Answering the research question depended upon critical self-awareness and culturally responsive environments referenced in the CRSL framework to understand the experiences and perceptions of principals regarding their leadership practices. Additionally, I drew upon transformational leadership theory when crafting the interview protocol through the lens of idealized influence to gain an understanding of how the principals' behaviors and strategies connect to influential practices when supporting teachers. I returned to this framework when analyzing and discussing the data.

The essence of Bass's theory of transformational leadership is that the leader motivates and influences followers and encourages challenges to the status quo, ultimately altering the existing environment (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In the current study,

the influential leader was the elementary principal, and the challenges to the status quo were the current discipline practices. When transforming an environment, followers must feel a sense of trust, admiration, and respect for the leader, and through inspirational motivation, the vision articulated by the leader should be appealing yet purposeful to provide the group with the energy necessary to move the organization forward (Stewart, 2006). The result of these efforts is members who are willing to invest in new ideologies while maintaining optimism about future outcomes.

The semistructured interview questions were also created in accordance with concepts from the CRSL model and transformational leadership theory. I developed seven interview questions that were asked of the eight participants. Following the transcription of each interview, I used the CRSL model and transformational leadership theory to guide data interpretation, coding, identification of themes, and final analysis.

Nature of the Study

In this basic qualitative study, data were gathered from eight principals and assistant principals in a school district in a Mid-Atlantic U.S. state. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a researcher conducts a basic qualitative study when they are interested in how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. Using this design, data are collected through interviews, document analysis, or observations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Burkholder et al. (2020) described qualitative research as “an exploratory investigation of a complex social phenomenon conducted in a natural setting through observation, description, and thematic analysis of participants’ behaviors and perspectives for the purpose of

explaining and/or understanding the phenomenon” (p. 83). The phenomenon of this study was how elementary principals and assistant principals describe the behaviors and strategies used when they are supporting teachers’ use of culturally responsive discipline. Denzin et al. (2023) defined qualitative research as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world, free to interpret the world through representations, such as field notes, interviews, and conversations, using a naturalistic approach. On the contrary, a quantitative approach is primarily deductive, where hypotheses are generated and tested, often resulting in numeric and statistical data (Burkholder et al., 2020).

I chose a basic qualitative design because it enabled the collection of detailed information about the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals. A qualitative study allowed elementary principals to describe how they interpret their experiences supporting teachers and speak about the meaning they attribute to their experience (see Denzin et al., 2023; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I collected data from semistructured interviews with eight elementary principals and assistant principals to answer the research question. Upon completion of all interviews, data analysis included transcribing recordings, reviewing responses to distill themes, and analyzing themes to determine their pertinence to answering the research question.

Definitions

The following definitions of key concepts were used throughout the study:

Cultural awareness: Being conscious that human interactions are different from one cultural group to another and an individual having an increased understanding of

one's own and other people's culture with a positive interest in how cultures connect and differ (Nechifor & Borca, 2020).

Culturally responsive leadership: Leadership philosophies, practices, and policies that create inclusive school environments for students and families from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Savvopoulos et al., 2022).

Discipline practices: The disciplinary consequences of behavioral incidents include (a) office referrals, (b) in-school suspension, (c) out-of-school suspension, and (d) expulsion (Lacoe & Manley, 2019).

Inclusive school environments: An environment that fosters positive social experiences for students of diverse backgrounds through a sense of belongingness that is free of discrimination and provides social and psychological well-being of those interacting within the environment (Nishina et al., 2019)

Leadership behaviors: The practices, actions, mannerisms, policies, and discourses that influence school climate, school structure, teacher efficacy, or student outcomes (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Principal: The instructional leader in a prekindergarten–Grade 5 institution responsible for managing the school culture in an influential manner by mentoring, coaching, and supporting the transfer of knowledge to teachers (Paletta et al., 2020)

Assumptions

I made three assumptions critical to this study. One assumption was that all participants were honest and forthcoming in their responses to the interview questions. My second assumption was that principals have varying backgrounds in understanding

cultural responsiveness. The study site school system held a 1-day system-wide professional development on cultural sensitivity and responsiveness. District leaders indicated that principals and equity lead teachers were to continue professional development with staff throughout the school year, but few to no specifics were provided. The third assumption was that participants were interested in participating in the study and were not influenced by other motivating factors.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this basic qualitative study was the description of strategies and behaviors of elementary principals and assistant principals in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. study site. The scope of a study frames the group to which the study might be applicable and provides a clear extent of the content covered that will answer the research question (Burkholder et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I conducted interviews through Zoom video conferencing with state-certified elementary school principals and assistant principals from one Mid-Atlantic school system. Cultural responsiveness was a problem in the school district. A lack of cultural sensitivity can affect student achievement by increasing teachers' negative responses, resulting in a disparity of exclusionary decisions. Although culturally responsive practices are not new, there was a need to understand how principals can support teachers in culturally responsive disciplinary decisions.

I only included certified elementary principals, licensed by the state department of education, with at least 2 years working in diverse settings as participants in this study. The scope of the research included elementary principals in schools serving students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. Elementary principals were selected because they

serve students in the formative years for student development and were the school leaders supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive practices at the study site. I included prekindergarten because elementary schools in the study site school system have prekindergarten students as the entry grade level for school-age students. Additionally, teachers who participated in the system-wide professional development on cultural sensitivity make daily discipline decisions for students. The support principals provide to teachers at this level can considerably impact student behaviors and make schools a more inclusive environment (Marcucci & Elmesky, 2020). I developed the interview questions with the aim of answering the research question on how elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school system describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices.

The study was delimited to certified elementary principals and assistant principals from the same regional areas within the study site to increase the likelihood of similar demographics and levels of cultural diversity. I did not select instructional lead teachers who may serve in a leadership capacity because principals make decisions regarding student discipline at the study site. The lead teachers may not have been trained as administrators to identify leadership behaviors through the lens of a school leader. I considered selecting principals from across the county but determined a sample of principals serving similar demographics would provide good evidence for supporting teachers in culturally diverse schools. The purpose of the one-on-one interviews was to gain information on strategies and leadership behaviors used by principals when supporting teachers' culturally responsive practices.

Limitations

According to Burkholder et al. (2020), limitations are weaknesses in the study design or methods, and researchers should consider a plan to overcome the identified weaknesses. Collecting data from one Mid-Atlantic school district was a limitation, resulting in the lack of transferability outside the study site. All participants in the study worked for the same school district and may have had similar experiences that may not be accurate in another site. Additionally, a sample size of eight may have limited the generalizability of the findings.

To control bias, I created a thorough research plan that involved sequencing interview questions to avoid leading questions and developed standards for interpreting data. My position as a current school leader may have created a potential barrier when interviewing participants. Some principals may not have been motivated to participate in the study or talk openly without a sense of trust (see Au, 2019; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Stepping outside my role as a school administrator and identifying my researcher role as a student supported the inquiry role when engaging with all participants.

The coding phase of the research design presented possible issues with interpretation; however, using reflexivity controlled for my influence on the study. Reflexivity necessitates a critical and continuous reassessment of the researcher's subjectivities to ensure coding captures the participants' voices as the experts of their responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I used member checking to confirm the interview transcripts with the participants and solicit feedback about the data and my conclusions (see Burkholder et al., 2020). I also used strategies, such as thick description and

sequencing of methods, to ensure validity and address concepts, such as dependability and transferability.

Significance

Principals are responsible for creating a school that is inclusive and supportive of its members (Uygur, 2022). Administrators must work diligently to change the culture by elevating the responsive behaviors of the teachers when managing student discipline (Genao, 2021). School leaders who create environments where teachers are supported increase the equitable practices of teachers (Gregory et al., 2021). It was important to study this phenomenon to gain an understanding of how principals support teachers to determine next steps in creating more equitable discipline practices. This study is significant because it fills a gap in practice in understanding the strategies and behaviors elementary school principals use when supporting teachers in their use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The findings may help principals understand leadership behaviors that support culturally diverse schools and guide professional development to support teachers in building a more culturally responsive school. Potential implications of this basic qualitative study include enhanced culturally responsive practices across the schools in the study district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers.

Summary

The research problem was the limited understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices in a Mid-Atlantic U.S. state. This is an important issue because culturally diverse students comprise 57% of student school populations;

however, this same group is unequally represented in discipline incidents and comprises 80% of students removed from the classroom for discipline concerns (State Department of Education, 2019). A qualitative approach allowed me to examine the phenomenon under study. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The CRSL model and transformational leadership theory formed the conceptual framework. Data were collected using one-on-one semistructured interviews conducted on the Zoom video communication platform. Data collected from interviews were transcribed and thematically analyzed to identify common emergent themes and determine their pertinence to answering the research question.

The study was delimited to certified elementary principals and assistant principals within the same regional areas within the study site to increase the likelihood of similar demographics and levels of cultural diversity. The scope of this study was the description of strategies and behaviors of elementary principals and assistant principals in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. study site. To limit bias, I created a thorough research plan that involved sequencing interview questions to avoid leading questions and developed standards for interpreting data. The findings may help principals understand leadership behaviors that support culturally diverse schools and guide professional development to support teachers in building a more culturally responsive school (see Banwo et al., 2022; Larson et al., 2018).

Chapter 2 will begin with an introduction and overview of the literature search strategy, including sources used and key terms searched. Further explanation of the conceptual framework will include key theorists and its application to the study. I will also provide a thorough and exhaustive review of the current research related to the key concepts and variables of the study. The chapter will conclude with a summary.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that inspired this study is the limited understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices in a Mid-Atlantic U.S. state. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The population under study was elementary principals and assistant principals in a Mid-Atlantic school district.

In this chapter, I examine the research applicable to elementary principals' strategies and behaviors when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices. Data trends in the United States reveal a disparity in cultural group exclusion practices and suspension rates (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). District personnel research indicated culturally diverse students comprise 57% of student school populations; however, this same group is unequally represented in discipline incidents and comprises 80% of students removed from the classroom for discipline concerns. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2021), students of color comprise 12.3% of school suspensions, while their noncolored peers comprise 3.42%. These trends support the need for a greater understanding of the principal's role in dismantling the disparities.

In an effort to support teachers in their discipline practices, elementary principals have implemented frameworks, such as PBIS, to support teachers in classroom management practices to decrease the number of office referrals and exclusionary

practices (Fergus, 2021). U.S. classrooms are becoming more diverse, and administrators must find ways to help teachers support the needs of all learners in a culturally responsive manner. According to Jones et al. (2019), principals who enact culturally responsive leadership practices can stimulate the growth of culturally responsive teachers who are then able to implement more equitable discipline decisions. The literature suggests that leadership behaviors displayed by principals influence the discipline practices of teachers (Banwo et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Enhancing the foundational experiences of diverse student populations influences the need to better understand how elementary principals might support teachers' culturally responsive practices (Green, 2019). There is a need to implement strategies to improve teachers' experiences managing students of different backgrounds (Waite, 2021). Scholars have noted the importance of gaining a better understanding of behaviors and strategies implemented by principals supporting culturally diverse settings.

This chapter begins with a description of the literature search strategy, including the library databases and key terms used. A discussion of the conceptual framework follows with more information on culturally responsive school leadership and transformational leadership theory, which grounded the study. Next, I provide an exhaustive review related to the key variables and concepts, including culturally responsive leadership styles, instructional leadership, and the historical and current context of racial disparities and discipline. The chapter concludes with a summary and transition to Chapter 3.

Literature Search Strategy

This literature review required searches of databases accessible through the Walden University Library, including EBSCO, ERIC, Education Source, Academic Search, Emerald Insights, and Directory of Open Access Journals. Throughout my coursework at Walden University, I maintained an interest in culturally responsive practices and had also obtained several resources from coursework articles. Key search terms used in the literature search strategy were *cultural responsiveness*, *cultural awareness*, *elementary principals*, *discipline strategies*, *discipline practices*, *principal supports*, *teacher supports*, *racial disparities*, *cultural diversity*, *school suspension*, *cultural supports*, *leadership practices*, *leadership behaviors*, *transformational leadership*, *cultural shift*, *school culture*, *principal behaviors*, *relational-cultural theory*, and *school discipline*. In reviewing the search results, I gave priority to articles published in 2018 or later.

Google Scholar was also used for locating research articles on the study's topic. I examined articles in Google Scholar through the Walden University Library by limiting the search criteria to peer reviewed to ensure the status of articles used in this literature review. Key search terms at this point included *cultural responsiveness*, *awareness*, *transformational*, *student discipline*, *professional development*, *leadership behaviors*, *discipline practices*, and *cultural competence*.

The search process was iterative and improved over time. As the research progressed, Sage Journals, Academic Complete Search, and Education Source frequently produced relevant, peer-reviewed articles for the study topic. In an effort to exhaust the

literature search, I used the ProQuest database to explore the reference sections of dissertations with a similar topic to mine as a means to locate additional articles and authors. Mainly qualitative articles were reviewed, but some quantitative studies were incorporated in the search for data points relevant to the study's topic. I read and annotated articles with a focus on relevance to the research question, created an annotated bibliography for each article determined to be relevant to the study, and placed an entry for each article in a modified Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet columns were labeled citation, annotated bibliography, key variables, and concepts.

Conceptual Framework

The phenomenon under study in this research were the strategies and behaviors elementary principals use to support teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices. Over 2 decades ago, discussions on cultural relevance (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2015) came to dominate discourses on education and reform (Khalifa et al., 2016). Gay (2015) noted that culturally relevant teaching alone could not solve the challenges facing marginalized students. As school leaders help teachers develop, it is incumbent upon them to train teachers to have a greater cultural understanding of the students they serve.

The current study was grounded in Khalifa's CRSL framework and Bass's transformational theory. Khalifa et al. (2016) noted that leading by example requires a display of specific behaviors supported through professional development opportunities. Bass's theory of transformational leadership focuses on leaders who motivate members of the organization by reforming the perceptions and values of the members (Bass &

Riggio, 2006). Through the lens of idealized influence, the behaviors and strategies used by principals may account for the discipline practices used by teachers. In the CRSL framework, Khalifa et al. described leadership behaviors aligned with transforming organizations. Use of the CRSL frameworks allowed for critical self-awareness by the subject of this study, elementary principals, while focusing on supporting teachers in discipline practices that develop culturally responsive and inclusive environments.

Khalifa's CRSL Model

Khalifa et al. (2016) argued that culturally responsive leaders develop and support the school staff and promote a climate that makes the whole school welcoming, inclusive, and accepting of minoritized students. CRSL encompasses antioppressive/racist leadership, transformative leadership, and social justice leadership by leaders challenging environments that marginalize students of color by protecting and celebrating cultural practices from these students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa's CRSL framework includes four behaviors: (a) critical self-awareness, (b) culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation, (c) culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and (d) engaging students and families in community contexts.

Critical self-awareness focuses on the need to examine how leaders and their organizations contribute to, reproduce, or contest oppressive practices in schools by having a critical consciousness regarding the treatment of its members (Banwo et al., 2022). This awareness includes understanding one's values, beliefs, perceptions, and influences on serving marginalized students. Critical self-awareness requires leaders to be deeply aware of the differences between school-centric and community-centric

expressions of education (Banwo et al., 2022). Principals and teachers must understand who they are and the context in which they lead and teach (Wandix-White, 2020).

Principals are responsible for supporting teachers' keen understanding of the inequitable factors that adversely affect diverse members of the school (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al., (2016) noted that having this keen understanding allows principals to envision and create an inclusive environment for marginalized students.

Culturally responsive curricula and teacher development requires responsive leaders to support new curriculum and instruction modes that improve the learning and humanization of minoritized students (Banwo et al., 2022). This second aspect requires the principal to challenge common patterns of inequities rather than only prepare culturally responsive teachers. Principals must lead the development and maintenance of culturally responsive practices in their schools. Teachers can develop a keen understanding of inequities and responsive practices through intentional professional development opportunities. Banwo et al. (2022) noted that leaders must develop strategies to address staff members' resistance to cultural responsiveness.

Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments address the school climate and how it influences disparities in educational outcomes. Disparities in discipline practices negatively affect the outcomes of marginalized students academically and economically (Vassallo, 2022). Khalifa et al. (2016) argued the importance of creating environments that affirm students' identities. School leaders may have to leverage resources that foster embedded cultural affirmation when creating culturally responsive environments (Zhang et al., 2020). Promoting an environment of inclusivity is

paramount in deracializing suspension disparities aligned with specific cultural groups (Gibson & Decker, 2019). The critical consciousness referenced under critical self-awareness in transformational leadership theory becomes pivotal in navigating the courageous conversation with members that present different understandings of the end goal for the organization (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Engaging students and parents in community contexts is the fourth layer of culturally responsive leadership and incorporates adults outside the school as bearers of culturally appropriate knowledge (Khalifa et al., 2016). This layer speaks to leaders having the ability to establish routines for learning from and advocating for community knowledge, self-determination, and goals by engaging students, families, and community members in culturally appropriate ways. Leaders who engage students and their families increase the trust and dialogue necessary to positively shift culturally responsive practices (Banwo et al., 2022; Sisson, 2022). Khalifa et al. (2016) explained that this fourth layer requires school leaders to overlap contexts, such as language, historical backgrounds, and experiences, by creating structures to incorporate marginalized students' identities and behaviors.

Bass's Theory of Transformational Leadership

Bass's theory of transformational leadership evolved from the original author, James Macgregor Burns's 1978 model, in which leaders seek to change followers' existing thoughts, techniques, and goals for better results and the greater good (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders look beyond their interests to act for the organization's good (Flynn, 2021). In Bass's transformational leadership theory, leaders

use the techniques of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence to support and transform the members' actions in an organization (Flynn, 2021). Bass and Riggio (2006) believed the traditional leadership styles, such as authoritative and top-down, did not explain the motivational factors necessary for change when belonging to an effective organization.

Individualized consideration refers to the degree to which the leader gives support and empathy to followers by listening effectively to their concerns and acting as a coach and mentor (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The leader keeps the lines of communication open and creates an environment of respect while celebrating the individual contributions of all members of the organization. This leadership style has a charismatic leader at the helm, and charismatic leaders use personality and charm to influence followers (Flynn, 2021). The attributed charisma is how the leader uses self-confidence and assertiveness to garner respect and trust from followers (Flynn, 2021).

Intellectual stimulation involves followers asking questions, thinking deeply, and figuring out better ways to execute organizational tasks (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leaders stimulate their followers to be innovative by questioning assumptions, reframing problems, and developing innovative approaches (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Leaders encourage independent thinking through nurturing and view unexpected situations as opportunities to learn and develop. This leadership style welcomes creativity in their followers.

Inspirational motivation begins with the leader articulating a vision appealing to others and communicating the vision with optimism about future goals (Bass and Riggio,

2006). Through this motivation, followers feel an intense sense of purpose, motivating them to work. Bass and Riggio (2006) described inspirational motivation as a process that arouses team spirit and a commitment to a shared vision. Communication skills are vital to this leadership style to make the vision understandable to all and inspire followers to engage with a strong belief in their abilities to bring forth change.

Idealized influence requires leaders to model ethical behavior that assists in gaining respect and trust from followers (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Two aspects of idealized influence are the leaders' behaviors and the elements that are attributed to leaders by followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Members of an organization are influenced by strong leadership, and transforming an organization begins at the top, with the leader modeling the behavior that is part of the vision used to motivate members. Modeling the ideal behavior clarifies the vision and influences the followers to trust and remain committed to the transformational process. Bass and Riggio (2006) explained that leaders with idealized influence are willing to take risks and ensure followers that obstacles will be overcome.

The theory of transformational leadership and the CRSL model speak to a school leader's ability to leverage resources, foster cultural affirmation, and address how the school climate influences disparities in the organization (Banwo et al., 2022). Inspiring motivation is necessary for supporting teachers to see the importance of cultural affirmation along with the use of resources to develop a more inclusive learning environment. Few scholars have used transformational leadership theory to study school leaders as it relates to culturally responsive practices. Cobanoglu (2021) examined

whether primary school teachers' cultural intelligence, the principals' management of diversity, and their transformational leadership were correlated. The author found that teachers' cultural intelligence positively predicts the transformational leadership of principals through the principals' diversity management skills. The current study benefitted from this conceptual framework, specifically the idealized influence of the leader and its relevance to the CRSL behaviors of critical self-awareness among organizational members working towards culturally responsive and inclusive school environments.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Culturally Responsive Practices

Culturally responsive practices in schools refer to the ability of personnel to make accommodations to the recognized cultural identities of each student by understanding the historical context, cultural experiences, cultural group, race, and ethnicity of the students they serve (Bellamy et al., 2022). Educators have experiences that shape their beliefs, cultural identities, and the meaning they have applied to those experiences. These experiences can be different from the students they serve as a result of generational and cultural differences. In some cases, the experiences may be characterized as traumatic. Bellamy et al. (2022) evaluated the effects of culturally responsive supports with trauma-informed behavior support practices on student behavior and found that staff attitudes and knowledge of how to interact with students improved. Additionally, data from their study indicated a decrease in problematic behaviors resulting from teachers implementing culturally responsive and trauma-informed supports.

Cultural groups share similar experiences that may be unfamiliar to other cultural groups. Culturally responsive practices begin with acknowledging the existence of cultural differences and purposeful networking that allows for thought-provoking conversations to open one's horizons (Jones et al., 2019). Conversations and teacher support may assist in teachers gaining an understanding that problem behaviors can present as an adaptation of adversity. The negative action or problem behavior can shift with proper guidance from teachers. Culturally responsive practices are associated with positive student behavior and may inform professional development for teachers (Larson et al., 2018). School principals are leading schools that are becoming more diversified in their student population, and teacher preparation programs provide limited pre-teaching opportunities to understand how to lead diversified classrooms (Green, 2019; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Therefore, principals must become purposeful in planning professional development to meet the culturally responsive needs of teachers. The impact of historical adverse treatment of different cultural groups has many social and academic disadvantages for marginalized students (Bellamy et al., 2022; Jarvis & Okonofua, 2020). Professional development can serve as a process for addressing the adverse treatment in schools for marginalized students.

Cultural Competence

Five elements of cultural competence are assessing cultural knowledge, valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference, adapting to diversity, and institutionalizing cultural knowledge (Brion, 2019). Leading diverse schools can become challenging if the principal lacks an understanding of the five elements. A case study in

Ohio examined how school leaders in diverse settings can lead and embrace different cultures, beliefs, and norms. At a school where the mission was to provide quality education to all students that prepared them professionally and personally, the principal's data review revealed disparities in discipline response across cultural groups. The principal's lack of cultural competence resulted in the leader being culturally blind and promoting cultural blindness among the staff (Brion, 2019). A lack of cultural competence impedes change by not understanding the rationale behind the required adaptations (Brion, 2022). Culturally competent people see and understand differences that they accept and respect.

When working on school-related initiatives, cultural competency enables diverse groups of teachers to communicate freely. Another study examined teacher leadership and communication amongst diverse colleagues when working on committees to implement programs within the school. Teachers of diverse backgrounds struggled to work collaboratively on decision making resulting in negative progress on the implementation of the planned program (Green, 2019). The study concluded that cultural competence amongst staff members warrants attention to avoid cross-cultural breakdowns when working together.

Cultural Awareness

A lack of cultural awareness among school leaders can impact the school, students, and community by limiting an equitable education for all (Brion, 2019). Cultural awareness is multicultural relations experienced with individuals from various cultural backgrounds, which promotes intergroup acceptance to deepen one's

understanding of cultural differences (Baltes et al., 2015; Savvopoulos et al., 2022).

Nechifor and Borca (2020) noted cultural awareness involves understanding other people's cultures with a positive interest in how cultures connect and differ. Elementary principals leading diverse schools may create inclusive environments by fostering staff understanding of cultural differences, which can model and promote acceptance of all school community members (Savvopoulos et al., 2022).

Culture Shift

As demographics shift in schools, the transformation results in a cultural shift. The Northwestern portion of the United States is experiencing an unprecedented cultural shift with an increased Latinx population at increased rates (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). Cultural shifts affect how school leaders respond to the diversified needs of the evolving student demographics (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). Research has shown that cultural shifts impact how principals lead to maintain effectiveness with the student population (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). As the culture shifts, school leaders may need to re-evaluate the parameters of inclusivity within the school, ensuring all cultural groups are included. Implementing inclusion practices may be challenged by deficit thinking held by members of the school community, which requires coaching from the principals to transform thinking based on previous experiences (Fergus, 2021; Flores & Gunzenhauser, 2019). The principal is instrumental in transforming the culture and providing the necessary support to move to a more inclusive school environment.

Leadership Styles

Several studies have noted that leadership styles that principals adopt can significantly contribute to the leaders' ability to develop a culturally responsive culture (Banwo et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals often face the dilemma of whether to control or empower students. There are benefits to putting people and individual contextual circumstances before bureaucratic rules, and leaders who strive for leadership approaches that will accommodate students from all cultures are more likely to value the diversity of their students (Banwo et al., 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). The literature suggests that leadership manifested by the principal affects the members of the school and the overall culture of the building (Kalkan et al., 2020). The four leadership styles that emerged during the literature review were equitable school leadership, culturally relevant leadership, culturally responsive leadership, and collective leadership.

Equitable School Leadership

Equitable school leadership provides equitable conditions and outcomes for underrepresented students (Leithwood, 2021). Principals are members of cultural groups and may use their cultural wealth, a knowledge of one's culture, to inform decisions. Researchers describe a critical issue in school systems as deficit perspectives about families of color, resulting in the need for equity-focused instructional programs and resources for marginalized students (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020).). One study conducted in the southwestern United States found that equitable school leadership involves developing culturally responsive relationships within the school community (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). In order to develop culturally responsive

relationships, leaders must meet with the school community to hear their voices and concerns. Understanding the community and the position of its members allows for equitable decision-making.

Equitable school leadership is guided by risk-taking visionaries attempting to transmit their beliefs and values into the daily routines in schools to provide equity for all groups (Vassallo, 2022). This leadership style may come with challenges from those who share varying beliefs and thinking regarding decisions made. Principals make decisions about discipline daily. Bastable et al. (2021) found that school leaders must understand the influence of deficit thinking on discipline practices to create school consultation models that incorporate a variety of cultures to brainstorm ways to address teachers' thinking and engagement with diverse students. Addressing teachers thinking through using supports and strategies can enable equity in discipline decisions at the classroom level.

The inequitable treatment of diverse groups of children in schools was the foundation for the 1970s effective school movement (Leithwood, 2021). Race-based differences in how schools implemented discipline policies served as evidence for the movement (LaForett & De Marco, 2020). The current longstanding disparities in discipline practices demonstrate the complexity of the issue and the need for equitable school leadership practices that will provide equal opportunities for marginalized students. Leithwood (2021) noted school leaders are pivotal in the success of a significant shift toward equitable practices in schools. Cognitive dispositions that enable equitable school leadership are deep knowledge about students' diverse cultures, ethnicities, and

languages, critical self-reflection, effective and equitable experiences for diverse students, and a critical perspective on practices and policies that will improve equity (Leithwood, 2021).

Culturally Relevant Leadership

Principals provide a range of opportunities and experiences for students. Effective leaders provide culturally relevant school experiences, including culturally relevant teaching, curricula, programs, and tutoring (Leithwood, 2021). Case studies conducted with Aboriginal students found effective leaders held elevated expectations for students and fostered a sense of belongingness while building trust with students, parents, and community members (Leithwood, 2021). Leaders in an Islamic school in the United States used culturally relevant leadership to develop students' critical social consciousness using inter- and intra- faith dialogue and syncretism (Leithwood, 2021). The leadership approach with Islamic students may push the heels of the separation of church and state. Still, it is worth noting the relevance of faith in the Islamic culture and the culturally relevant leader creating a space in schools for these students to feel included.

Professional development led by culturally relevant leaders ensures the content reflects the participants' needs and cultural backgrounds (Brion, 2022). For example, professional development in classroom management might include information on behaviors common to specific cultures and resources on best practices to decrease the occurrence of such behaviors. A case study that explored the use of cultural responsiveness by European principals working in predominately African American rural

communities found that systems of communities that integrated culturally relevant leadership and professional development positively influenced student performance (Jones et al., 2019). The researchers concluded networking and professional development opportunities are necessary for a shift toward a culturally responsive culture.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Sustaining culturally responsive parent-school relationships is a collaborative effort that involves building trust, welcoming parent voices in decision-making, and advocating for community-based projects (Khalifa et al., 2016). Culturally responsive leadership engages with school community members and remains sensitive to all members' needs. Leaders who enact culturally responsive leadership practices can influence the development of culturally responsive teachers (Jones et al., 2019). Through leading by example and building strong communities, schools led by culturally responsive leaders benefit from a more inclusive environment that allows teachers and students to thrive.

Research shows a need to equip teachers with adequate training that enhances equitable school practices. Strategies have been developed to decrease the effects of implicit biases on disciplinary decisions (Bastable et al., 2021). Limited studies focused on the association between motivational factors for teachers and culturally responsive leadership practices. One attribute of transformational leadership is an inspirational motivation that arouses team spirit and commitment to a shared vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Culturally responsive leadership provides the foundation for communicating shared decision-making for all school community members.

Collective Leadership

Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasized that leadership can occur at all levels of the organization by any individual and is not only the responsibility of the people at the top. Transformational leadership is a collective action where motivation ignites individuals into action for specific outcomes. Scholars argue that reflective practice intended to drive organizational change involves self-reflection on one's identity and beliefs (Ezzani, 2021). An element of self-reflection is data-informed to educate the collective body on the need for organizational change. Collectively the group will analyze and make sense of the data before working together to create actions that will produce the desired results. When given the following data in a collective leadership organization, teachers were 3.78 times more likely to refer African American students to the office than White students (Ezzani, 2021); participants would envision the desired results and collectively develop a plan to obtain those results.

Transformational leaders may use instructional mechanisms to guide teachers collectively in recognizing the influences of their beliefs, values, and attitudes in their decision-making (Ezzani, 2021). Collective groups can be diverse with a variety of cultural beliefs. School leaders who lack the training or practical experience in culturally responsive practices may need to recognize when relationships fail to thrive across diverse groups (Green, 2019). Leaders that create collaborative spaces where all voices are valued enhance shared understanding of the vision by noting that tense communication impedes organizational progress (Green, 2019). Collective leadership includes the input of all stakeholders (Levitan, 2020). Using data to guide the rationale

for the vision provides inspirational motivation or influence for collaborative efforts. Creating a culturally responsive environment for improvement can only be done by promoting collaborative processes (Crawford et al., 2022; Paletta et al., 2020).

Instructional Leadership Conditions

Instructional leadership refers to the principals' leadership practices that enhance the teachers' ability to instruct students with positive outcomes (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Principals support teacher development by addressing professional learning needs, understanding power-distance relationships, and enhancing teacher self-efficacy. Professional learning is necessary for teachers and principals for transformational change. Bass and Riggio (2006) indicated transformational leaders empower followers to pay attention to their individual needs and personal development. The relationship between principal and teacher impacts instructional leadership and professional learning, which can influence teacher self-efficacy.

Shengnan and Hallinger (2021) found significant direct and indirect effects of principal instructional leadership on teacher professional learning using a mediation model. It is important to note that mediating factors such as understanding the professional learning needs, power distance relationships, and teacher self-efficacy contribute to the principal's success in leading faculty (Larson et al., 2018; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Before principals can lead professional development on cultural practices, they must first delve into their cultural understanding of transformational practices.

Professional Learning Needs

School principals' professional development should be focused on strengthening leadership for learning (Paletta et al., 2020). Hence transformational leadership theory suggested the end goal is for followers to develop into leaders (Bass & Riggio, 2006). School leaders provide professional development for their faculty by either utilizing outside resources to have an expert present or leading the session themselves as the instructional leader. Principals must spend time honing their craft on leading teachers toward improvement. During this journey, principals balance time between instructional and transformational leadership. Paletta et al. (2020) cautioned that transformational leadership does not replace instructional leadership by emphasizing that transformational leaders promote collaborative environments that perpetuate professional knowledge sharing. Effective principals benefit from professional development that assists in strategies to build collaborative professional learning communities that work to support the vision. Paletta et al. explained that increased distribution of leadership results in a stronger commitment and effectiveness of teachers. Individually held cultural beliefs are often overlooked in understanding how they serve as an enabler or barrier to enacting leadership practices. Professional development on cultural responsiveness may support teachers' understanding. Responsive leaders understand that people have individually held cultural beliefs that help them to see the broader culture through the lens of their experience (Scribner et al., 2021). These individually held cultural beliefs influence one's understanding of how culture guides or impedes implemented leadership practices (Kunesh & Noltemeyer, 2019; Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021).

Power Distance Relationships

Shengnan and Hallinger (2021) stated power distance refers to culturally influenced beliefs individuals hold concerning the role of status, authority, and power in interpersonal relations. In low power distance societies, teachers are expected to operate with greater autonomy, exercise their voice freely, and have access to principals who involve them in decision-making (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). In contrast, high power distance societies are characterized by deference to rank, status, and authority. A recent study that examined the impacts of power distance on principal-teacher interactions found that high power distance relationships were associated with weakened effects of principals' instructional leadership and professional learning (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). On the contrary, teachers who perceive low power distance operate with more autonomy and experience higher degrees of self-efficacy, believing they can make a difference. Instructional leadership aimed at transformational change involves understanding factors within the relationship that may propel or hinder the change.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

The principal-teacher relationship is influenced by the ideology of the principal. Idealize influence in transformational leadership theory requires gaining respect and trust from followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The principal may influence the teacher's self-efficacy enhancing their confidence, commitment, motivation, and student learning (Ham et al., 2020; Paletta et al., 2020). Teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's belief in their capability to successfully complete teaching tasks, develop professionally, and influence student engagement and learning (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Teachers' self-efficacy

is influenced by the quality of leadership, autonomy, school climate, and culture (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Transformational leaders may influence self-efficacy through leadership behaviors modeled during professional development (Shengnan & Hallinger, 2021). Providing teachers with strategies to help them complete tasks successfully may result in autonomous actions that benefit the greater good.

Historical and Current Context of Racial Disparities and School Discipline

School leaders make discipline decisions often as a result of office referrals from teachers. Each year, millions of K-12 students are subjected to exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension, expulsion, and detention (Afacan et al., 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights report, boys of all races were disproportionately disciplined at a rate of 70%, with African American boys being suspended and expelled at proportions that were 3 times their enrollment. African American girls were disproportionally represented at rates 2.5 times their enrollment. Excluding students from learning increases the likelihood of poor academic performance (Conway-Turner et al., 2020; Larson et al., 2018; Wiley et al., 2020). Within the United States, school leaders and teachers contribute to this data that is collected systemically and reported to the Department of Education.

Racial disparities are evident in discipline practices. Addressing the complex systemic crisis of disproportionate discipline practices is a collaborative effort addressed by school leaders engaging with the internal and external school community (Afacan et al., 2021). The internal community consists of those staff members who interact with students daily. Bal et al. (2019) noted one way for school leaders to engage with the

internal community is by keeping race and equity at the forefront of professional development.

Longitudinal studies were conducted to examine the racial disproportionality plaguing U.S. schools. Bal et al. (2019) noted that interventions that solely aim to change behaviors or racial beliefs of individuals could not address the multilayered and cultural-historical nature of racial disproportionality due to the complex way race and behavior intersect in U.S. schools. Before principals can change behaviors, consideration of the thought processes based on the historical experiences of teachers might allow alternate points of view to emerge. Transformational leadership theory indicates elements that are important to the issue of social change, such as idealized influence and inspirational motivation, can help leaders promote organizational change (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Racial Disparities

For over 30 years, the documentation of disciplinary over-representation of Black, Latinx, and Native American students has been highly consistent in national, state, district, and building-level data (Fergus, 2021). Studies have shown that schools led by African American principals committed to addressing racial disparities can still have minoritized students receiving discouraging messages and unfair punishments (Cakir et al., 2022). Hence the issue of addressing racial disparities does not diminish when the person enacting and receiving the discipline is of the same race. Gilleskie and Li (2022) studied the equity in the suspension of African American and White students coming from different economic backgrounds in a North Carolina school system based on offenses. Racial disparities did exist when analyzing data by type of offense. Still, the

size and direction of the disparity depended on the types of offenses when comparing suspension data within the same school in the same academic year. Gilleskie and Li (2022) did not find evidence to support a correlation between racial disparities and the principal's race.

Trends and Discipline Policies

School leaders are required to follow discipline policies. These policies guide their discipline decisions. In 2014, the US Departments of Justice and Education, led by Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, released a school discipline guidance package to reform discipline policies (Gilleskie & Li, 2022). The lack of specificity regarding school discipline at the federal level permitted states and districts to legalize zero-tolerance policies with extreme prejudice (Curran, 2019; Kyere et al., 2020). The Obama Administration was the first to attempt to curb and eliminate zero-tolerance policies and assist school districts and schools in identifying the point in the school discipline process that mistreated students of color (Williams et al., 2022). Zero-tolerance policies have excluded marginalized students from the academic setting at higher rates than their peers creating a negative outcome for students on the receiving end of the disciplinary decisions. School leaders who have followed strict zero-tolerance discipline policies may have inadvertently contributed to the mistreatment of students of color.

The school discipline guidance package motivated several states to enact new legislation regarding school discipline policies. Williams et al. (2022) analyzed student code of conduct policies across 50 states to determine the presence of culturally responsive classroom management (CRCM) in the policies. The researchers found that

state policies did not incorporate CRCM and provided limited support for integrating CRCM. Williams et al. noted that CRCM is a framework or mindset that is only as effective as the teachers that incorporate it in their classrooms. Interviews conducted with teachers in the qualitative study revealed that while teachers could not define CRCM, the strategies used to develop caring relationships with students and community members were aspects of the CRCM framework. The strategies school leaders utilize when addressing CRCM not only help to build relationships but are integral in transforming the mindset of teachers applying elements of the framework.

Federal law exists to protect student populations who have been historically marginalized and discriminated against in schools. Title VI prohibits racial discrimination in public schools. Under the guidelines of Title VI, schools will be held accountable for any discriminatory actions their administrators, teachers, or school resource officers may take against students based on race (Gibson & Decker, 2019). To refute charges of discriminatory treatment, schools must prove they have not limited or denied educational services, benefits, or opportunities to a student or group of students of a particular race by treating them differently from a similarly situated student (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Although Title VI does not explicitly reference cultural groups, members of a particular race may be members of cultural groups that are marginalized in schools and be the recipients of disproportionate disciplinary practices.

Administrator and Teacher Core Values

Administrators and teachers have core values and beliefs that govern their decision-making regarding students. Ezzani (2021) described the importance of school

leaders engaging in the iterative process of reflective practice that considers their beliefs and behaviors associated with those beliefs. Ezzani conducted a case study that explored an urban elementary school principal's effort to advance reflective and anti-oppressive practices to counter teachers' beliefs and behaviors toward their African American male students. The finding revealed that data-informed leadership supported professional development opportunities to develop a collective consciousness of teachers' core values and beliefs to support a cultural paradigm shift. Professional development should permit participants to critically self-reflect on their beliefs and identities (Ezzani, 2021).

Administrator and teacher core values are a domestic and international concern. A study exploring the problems teachers experienced in classrooms with students of diverse cultural backgrounds found that one of the five emerging themes was attitudes and prejudice (Sari & Yüce, 2020). Most mentioned under the theme of attitudes and prejudice was the inability to acknowledge and show an interest in students with different cultural backgrounds. The study also noted teachers' lack of experience in dealing with cultural problems contributed to the problems in the classroom (Sari & Yüce, 2020). Effective educator professional development requires using the interconnected model of professional growth. The comprehensive framework recognized multiple ways of change across four domains, the first being important for this paper. It addresses personal growth, including knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs (McDaniel et al., 2021). Administrators must provide support for teachers and note that a full or half-day professional development session on culturally responsive practices is insufficient for the adequate development of key competencies of teachers to enact culturally responsive discipline practices

(McDaniel et al., 2021). Abacioglu et al. (2019) noted the importance of strong teacher-student relationships as the foundation for understanding student characteristics and moving culturally responsive practices forward in classrooms. Teachers' core values can influence cultural responsiveness. A strong teacher-student relationship may begin the process of gaining an understanding of different core values.

Culturally Responsive Classroom Management

Building positive and culturally responsive relationships is crucial to developing social and emotional learning programs. Instead of ignoring students' assets or viewing them as deficits, culturally responsive approaches should be used to leverage resources and build upon strengths (Gregory et al., 2021). School leaders are responsible for cultivating this growth within their teachers and creating a safe environment by providing professional development that enhances **culturally responsive classroom management** (Jennings et al., 2019).

Cakir et al. (2022) conducted a study to examine the use of culturally responsive practices in classroom management aimed at addressing racial disparities in school discipline using learning labs in urban schools in Wisconsin. Classroom management remained an issue for some teachers using the school-wide **PBIS**. Still, researchers noted PBIS did not address the dilemma of disproportionality in discipline practice (Cakir et al., 2022). **CRCM** centers on educators structuring their classroom and their actions to respond to culturally diverse students while minimizing inequitable disciplinary practices (Williams et al., 2022). Research on classroom management highlights the teaching workforce is comprised of White monolingual women from environments vastly

different than their diverse students, which causes them to struggle in managing culturally diverse classrooms (Williams et al., 2022). A review of the literature demonstrates the presence of school-wide behavioral programs that do not necessarily address the problem of inequitable discipline practices indicating the need for an inclusive approach that can decrease the disparity. Often, these programs are used by school leaders in an effort to support teachers.

Several factors play into the classroom behaviors seen in students. Bellamy et al. (2022) used a multiple-time series, quasi-experimental design to evaluate exclusionary practices on marginalized students using culturally responsive and trauma-informed practices focused on adverse childhood experiences. Children exposed to adverse events are more likely to be issued disciplinary referrals and suspensions and have higher absenteeism rates (Bellamy et al., 2022). The study used trauma-informed care specialists to support vulnerable students who usually fell into a particular cultural group. Researchers found the program implementation effectively improved staff attitudes regarding underlying causes of problematic behaviors and impacted teachers' responses when interacting with behaviorally challenged students (Bellamy et al., 2022). Culturally responsive school leadership supports understanding underlying factors to better understand cultural diversity when managing student discipline.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature review contains information related to administrators' strategies in supporting teachers to enact culturally responsive discipline practices. Kintner-Duffy et al. (2022) identified evidence of a disparity in discipline practices with cultural groups

and teachers' lack of understanding of how to manage behaviors in diverse classrooms (Kintner-Duffy et al., 2022). Some researchers found that state and local policies did not incorporate CRCM (Williams et al., 2022) or teachers lacked trauma-informed behavior support (Bellamy et al., 2022), which contributed to the need for school principals to provide support mechanisms to help teachers navigate the challenges of leading diverse classrooms. Brion (2019) noted the importance of principals having cultural competence to lead diverse student populations and expressed the importance of school leaders developing teachers' use of critical self-awareness to understand their students' cultural needs.

CRSL focuses on the school leader's role in fostering cultural responsiveness at the organizational level by being aware of the school and student culture (Scribner et al., 2021). Principals must work for practices that provide opportunities for teachers' development of cultural competence and awareness in managing classroom discipline (Banwo et al., 2022; Hur, 2022; Khalifa et al., 2016). Several factors contribute to the administrators' lack of support for teachers' cultural responsiveness, such as inexperience with diverse populations, lack of cultural understanding, and leadership practices that do not incorporate critical self-awareness (see Gay, 2015; Genao, 2021).

Scholars noted that the principal's beliefs and perspectives shape their leadership, and how those beliefs are enacted determines the cultural responsiveness represented in the school culture (Hur, 2022; Scribner et al., 2021). Khalifa et al. (2016) explained that it is the job of instructional leaders to develop and improve teachers' craft in ways that result in improved student outcomes, but this must be done with cultural responsiveness.

Professional development plays a role in informing teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices. Allport's contact theory notes that stereotypical beliefs and prejudices are reduced when given opportunities for cooperative engagement with individuals of other cultures (Savvopoulos et al., 2022). This theory forms the basis of cultural educational programs. It connects to individualized consideration under the theory of transformational leadership, where the leader gives support and empathy to followers by acting as a coach and mentor (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Although the literature offers extensive research on culturally responsive practices and school discipline, there is not much research on the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers practicing culturally responsive discipline in the classroom. This basic qualitative study addressed a gap in practice in the leadership behaviors and strategies used by principals.

The next chapter provides information about the study's research method. The information consists of the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures. Steps taken to safeguard the participants' rights and confidentiality will be explained in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem that inspired this study was the limited understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices in a Mid-Atlantic U.S. state. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices.

In this chapter, I provide the rationale for the use of a basic qualitative design in this study and an overview of my role as the researcher. The chapter contains a description of the methodology, including criteria for participant selection; instrumentation; and procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and data analysis. The study's trustworthiness is discussed through the lens of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I also explain the ethical considerations and procedures for maintaining participant safety and confidentiality. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points and a transition to Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rationale

The following research question guided this basic qualitative study: How do elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school system describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices?

The phenomenon under study was how elementary principals and assistant principals describe the behaviors and strategies used when they are supporting teachers'

use of culturally responsive discipline. The underlying conceptual framework comprised CRSL and the transformational leadership theory, which were appropriate to study leadership behaviors when transforming practice. The research tradition that guided this basic qualitative study was constructivism, which is aimed at understanding a phenomenon (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Exploring how administrators describe their behaviors aligns with constructivism based on the interpretive nature of how they assign meaning to their experiences. This type of exploration aligned with a qualitative approach. Quantitative research uses numeric data points, while qualitative captures experiences, conceptualized understanding, and imagery (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Bastable et al. (2021) noted that qualitative research considers how the researcher's worldview and experience influence the research process. I sought to understand how principals describe their experiences, behaviors, and strategies in supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices. Burkholder et al. (2020) emphasized that people experience phenomena rather than reality because each person may have a different view of what constitutes reality. Based on the phenomenon being investigated and the research question, the most appropriate research tradition for this study was the qualitative method. A basic qualitative study design was more appropriate than other traditional qualitative research designs such as grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, and case study.

Grounded Theory

The primary purpose of all qualitative research is to describe phenomena that occur in the world (Burkholder et al, 2020). Grounded theory leads to complex

understandings focused specifically on theory development (Burkholder et al., 2020). Some benefits of grounded theory are ecological validity, research findings being an accurate representation of the real-world setting, and novelty; these theories have the potential to make innovative discoveries (Burkholder et al., 2020). Interviews in grounded research are iterative, where questions may change during the interview process leading to new areas of exploration (Burkholder et al., 2020). I did not seek to develop a new theory in this study; therefore, ground theory was not appropriate for the research design.

Ethnography

Similar to grounded theory, the analytic focus of ethnography is not theoretically driven (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The major purpose of ethnography is to describe the behavior of a cultural group in relation to a phenomenon, and the researcher is usually immersed in the culture for an extended period of time, collecting data from multiple sources (Burkholder et al., 2020). Ethnographers seek to understand culturally embedded meanings of people and how the conceptualized meanings shape one's beliefs, assumptions, and biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I did not conduct this study to research the culture of elementary principals to understand how that culture shapes meaning. As a result, this design was not the most appropriate for the current study.

Phenomenology

Phenomenological studies consist of individual interviews intended to produce composite themes from individual experiences (Burkholder et al., 2020). I considered this approach because it can be used to describe the common meaning of several individuals'

lived experiences of a phenomenon (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). An advantage of this research design is that it can help to understand meanings people develop from experiences. Phenomenology is not an appropriate study design when information is collected on the usefulness or process of aspects of the phenomenon (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The study may obtain information regarding processes in participants' descriptions of strategies and behaviors used, and for this reason, I did not choose this design for the current study.

Case Study

Case study research involves an intense exploration of a phenomenon through various lenses to uncover multiple facets of the topic (Burkholder et al., 2020). Qualitative case studies aim to paint a comprehensive picture of a unit of study around some phenomenon and differ from other qualitative designs by the data collected (Burkholder et al., 2020). Some examples of the types of data collected in case studies are interviews, documents, observations, and surveys. Using a variety of data sources is a benefit of case studies and assists in presenting a comprehensive understanding of the bounded unit, which supports transferability. The source of data in this study were interviews, which is why I did not choose this design for the current study.

Basic Qualitative Study

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) noted that in a basic qualitative study, data can be collected through interviews, document analysis, or interviews. I intended to use interviews to obtain data on how principals interpret their experiences through their descriptions of how they support teachers, which made a basic qualitative study

appropriate. The general purpose of a basic qualitative study is to understand how people make sense of their lives (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I examined the descriptions elementary school principals provided of their strategies and behaviors in supporting teachers regarding culturally responsive discipline practices. Using a basic qualitative study design with semistructured interviews gave me the opportunity to follow up on answers given by the respondents in real-time, which provided more depth to the conversation and support for the emerging themes during data analysis.

I used the basic qualitative approach to guide this study (see Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Also referred to as a generic or interpretive qualitative approach, the basic qualitative design can stand alone without being led by a specific set of philosophic assumptions, such as those found in the research approaches of phenomenology, grounded theory, or ethnography (Merriam, 2009). Generic or basic qualitative studies focus on understanding a problem or challenge being experienced by the study's participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The researcher who conducts a basic qualitative study seeks to understand how people interpret or make meaning in their world and from their experiences. The basic qualitative study design was appropriate to gain an understanding of how principals describe their behaviors and strategies used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices.

Role of the Researcher

The primary role of a researcher is to conduct a study that uncovers knowledge and presents evidence-based conclusions. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study and must

plan for influences that can affect the data. As the researcher, I planned this basic qualitative study by setting the criterion for participation, designing an interview protocol that aligned with the conceptual framework, conducting semistructured interviews with eight elementary principals and assistant principals, analyzing data using cycles of coding and thematic analysis, and reporting bias-free findings with references to the conceptual framework and research literature. Managing the integrity of the study was of utmost importance. My role as the researcher required me to control bias and report findings that were accurate and captured the pure essence of each participant.

The primary instrument in qualitative studies is the researcher who must understand that their positionality can shape the data and findings (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Maintaining subjectivity for the study requires the researcher to engage in reflexivity to mitigate biases that can affect validity. Ravitch and Carl (2021) explained that qualitative research has the potential for researcher bias from the influences of experience and noted that the researcher must remain aware of the values and beliefs that might create bias in the study. I used reflexivity and member checks to mitigate bias in the study (see Babbie, 2017).

As a current elementary assistant principal, I have interactions with other school administrators throughout the study site district. Despite my role in the district, I held no supervisory role over the eight participants selected for the study. In my role as an assistant principal, I am viewed as an employee; however, for this research study, the participants only saw me as the researcher. Since I am an administrator in the district where I conducted the study, I realized that I may be biased toward participants'

responses. I believe that school leaders must recognize and support the cultural differences that exist within their student populations. Another bias is my belief that teachers discipline students based on their stereotypical beliefs about cultural groups. Using bracketing and reflexivity, I strived to remain open-minded during data collection and thematic analysis.

Member checks supported the trustworthiness of the current study. Utilizing reflexivity as an ongoing process to critically assess my positionality, subjectivities, and guiding assumptions as they related to the research was a necessity (see Burkholder et al., 2020). Transcript checks helped participants validate their responses, ensuring research bias did not affect the transcribed findings that would result during thematic analysis. Another method used to bracket researcher bias was to engage in external interviews with nonparticipants through peer reviews, which allowed me to recognize and correct biases in questions, probes, or interview behaviors as a reaction to participants' responses (see Burkholder et al., 2020).

Methodology

A basic qualitative design is most appropriate when a researcher's primary goal is to uncover and interpret the meaning participants construct to their lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), constructivism underlies a basic qualitative study. In the current study, the description participants provided in their answers to the interview questions reflected their constructed understanding of how they are supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices.

Participant Selection

Participants in this study consisted of eight elementary principals and assistant principals from the study site. All potential participants held a state administrator's license and had experience working in a culturally diverse setting for at least 2 years. Participant selection aims to select a sample population that can answer the research question rigorously and thoroughly while providing a contextualized understanding of the phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2020). The participants in this study were elementary principals who attended the 1-day systemic training on cultural responsiveness. Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted that study participants should be able to provide data to answer the research question during one-on-one interviews. To select participants, I used convenience sampling with purposive sampling criteria. Convenience sampling refers to selecting a sample based on availability, while purposive sampling is based on the needs of the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I collected a sample from the principals that were available in the study district who met the selection criteria of the study. I sent an email to identified persons indicating the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, confidentiality measures, and a request for them to take part in the study. The first eight participants who responded were selected, and I thanked them for their consideration of my invitation. The letter of informed consent was then emailed to the selected participants. Once the signed consent form was received from them, the interviews were scheduled.

The study consisted of eight elementary principals and assistant principals working in the same school district. Ravitch and Carl (2021) noted that the goal of

sample size in qualitative research is to answer the research question, making the number of participants less important. I determined that a sample size of eight principals should provide sufficient information for data saturation during analysis. Data saturation was not reached with fewer participants, so the sample size was not reduced during data collection. All participants were certified state administrators with a minimum of 2 years of experience working in the Mid-Atlantic school district and had experience working with culturally diverse school community populations.

After receiving approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I officially applied to conduct the study with the Office of Research and Evaluation for the Mid-Atlantic school district. Once approved, participants who met the criteria based on site and level (i.e., elementary) were recruited using my Walden University email address and provided with an introductory letter requesting their participation in the study.

Instrumentation

The primary instrument in qualitative studies is the researcher who understands that their positionality can shape the data and findings (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Maintaining subjectivity for the study requires the researcher to engage in reflexivity to mitigate biases that can affect validity. For this study, I used a self-designed, semistructured interview protocol as the data collection instrument. The semistructured questions asked elementary school principals to describe how they work to support teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices. The data collected were shared with the school system to provide recommendations on strategies elementary

principals may use to support teachers. The recommended strategies can potentially promote positive social change in the leadership behaviors of elementary principals.

Consistency in the interview process supports the reliability of the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Methodological consistency increases the likelihood that the researcher's interpretation of the data is valid (Burkholder et al., 2020). The self-designed interview protocol listed semistructured questions and follow-up questions to ask each participant. The design of the interview questions was in alignment with the purpose and research question. Maintaining consistency across interviews supported the qualitative study's trustworthiness.

To establish content validity, I invited three principals who were not going to be participants in the study to test the interview protocol and determine if the questions solicited sufficient information to answer the research question. Additionally, the practice interviews provided me a chance to develop possible follow-up questions to enhance the data collection instrument. Principals were asked to provide feedback on the clarity of the interview questions to strengthen the instrument as well. Some suggestions were to include a story option to allow for a thick description from the participant that may reveal more data. Another suggestion was to use the term "steps taken" rather than strategies because an action may be omitted if not viewed as a strategy by the participant. I used these suggestions to restructure the interview questions by making them more direct and including several options for probing questions. I asked the same seven questions to each participant to establish consistency with the protocol. The open-ended nature of the

protocol and probing questions included provided the opportunity for follow-up questions as necessary.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, I requested a list of elementary principals and assistant principals with a minimum of 2 years of experience as an administrator in a culturally diverse school. The potential participants were contacted through email, asking them to participate. I provided them with a copy of the IRB consent form that detailed the study's nature, background, and purpose. In addition, the email included steps to maintain confidentiality. The email contained my contact information so that they could contact me to ask questions that need clarification.

Next, interviews were scheduled with one-hour time slots that were conducted via Zoom for a date and time agreed upon for each participant. Participants received the Zoom link and a copy of the interview questions 48 hours before the scheduled one-on-one interview. The interview protocol that included interview questions was designed to ensure consistency and organization across interviews.

With the participants' permission, the interview was recorded with a backup digital recorder and an online platform to ensure accuracy. During the interview, I took notes to guide follow-up questions as needed for clarification. At the end of the interview, participants were informed that the interview would be transcribed and that I would send them a transcript for review. I shared that the purpose of this process is for them to edit and clarify anything captured by them in the interview. Participants were informed to contact me if they have any questions or need additional information.

Data Analysis Plan

After conducting the interviews, I used a transcription program to transcribe each recording. Next, I read each transcription while listening to the recording to ensure accuracy and alleviate the possibility of misinterpretation. Managing the data creates a holistic understanding of the data to support the meaning-making process (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). After authenticating the transcripts, the data was prepared for first-cycle coding; in vivo coding was used during first-cycle coding to identify words or short phrases from the participants' data and honor the participants' voices (see Saldaña, 2021). Pattern coding identifies similarly coded data and organizes them into constructs as I search for patterns of human relationships and emerging themes (see Saldaña, 2021).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a qualitative term synonymous with validity in quantitative research that explains the degree of confidence the researcher has in the resources and methods used in the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). When designing a study, researchers want to utilize collection methods that will yield the most relevant and trustworthy data for answering the research question(s). There are four criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative studies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Each criterion has strategies the researchers can use to strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the study. Without implementing strategies to ensure trustworthiness, the findings may lack credibility and rigor, diminishing their impact on the field of study.

Credibility

Burkholder et al. (2020) explained credibility as ensuring the findings are believable given the data presented. For example, if the research question is about the support given to teachers, the data collected should provide examples of support rendered. I implemented two strategies to establish credibility: member checking and triangulation. Ravitch and Carl (2021) describe member checks as how a researcher checks with the participants in a study to validate the reconstruction of their realities as adequate representations of what they shared and provide an opportunity for the participants to react to the reconstruction. Member checking was obtained by providing copies of the transcribed interview to participants and by soliciting their feedback on my initial interpretations of their data to ensure an accurate representation of what they intended to say (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Triangulation is the use of more than one source to verify the basis of a claim (Burkholder et al., 2020). Triangulation was used by examining the claims made by eight principals and assistant principals through their responses. First, I transcribed all the data. Second, I used in vivo coding for first-cycle coding. Next, I used pattern coding and triangulated the data from all participants to develop emerging themes across responses during thematic analysis. Validity or trustworthiness was established through the convergence of information from multiple interviews.

Transferability

Transferability or external validity relates to the extent to which the findings are generalizable (Burkholder et al., 2020). A researcher's responsibility in establishing

transferability is to provide a sufficient description of the setting and assumptions of the study for readers to make an informed interpretation of the study's findings. I provided a detailed description of the research steps with a thick description of the setting, participant selection, the process for obtaining informed consent, the data collection process through interviews, and data analysis. I examined the data trail by revisiting this description through the process of reflexivity. Reflexivity enabled me to document notes and critically analyze them to remove any biases.

Dependability

Dependability in qualitative research means there is reliability in the data collection instruments used, and they produce consistent results across multiple data collections regarding analysis and reporting (Burkholder et al., 2020). I used triangulation and sequencing of methods to establish the dependability of the research study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I created the rationale for the study and ensured alignment with the design to answer the research question. I used three administrators not associated with the study to test the reliability of the interview protocol and triangulate the data collected across multiple participants. A solid research design was followed throughout the process to maintain the dependability of the processes and findings.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings and interpretation of the study are free of unacknowledged researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Through reflexivity, I explored how my biases and prejudices influenced my interpretations of the data and mediated their influence on the research study. Implementing triangulation,

researcher reflexivity, and external audits are strategies that I used to establish confirmability. Additionally, I worked with fellow doctoral students to share a thick description of each step taken between the low-level and high-level codes that resulted in thematic analysis and solicited feedback on the emerging themes based on the presented data. This process establishes confirmability by noting that other researchers would arrive at the same conclusion (Burkholder et al., 2020).

Ethical Procedures

Qualitative research is centered on relationships. The relational inquiry examines the relational dynamics between researchers and participants and the participants' experiences concerning the phenomena central to the study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). It becomes imperative to frame the relational aspects in terms of ethical considerations. Ethics requires attention to the study's procedural, relational, and sociopolitical aspects (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The researcher's positionality is part of the ethical landscape of the study because it influences the production of academic knowledge based on the researcher's understanding of how a phenomenon is socially constructed. Working in the field that is the focus of the study can bring biases, which increases the need for specific ethical procedures when interacting with the study's participants.

I obtained IRB approval from Walden University, # 06-01-23-1084462, before conducting the research and collecting data. When conducting the research, I adhered to the U.S. federal regulations, guidelines, and ethics codes for working with human participants in a research study. Once IRB approval was granted, I safeguarded participants by obtaining a signed consent form and putting procedures in place to protect

participants' identities and the school system where the study was conducted. Burkholder et al. (2020) explained that the IRB evaluates the informed consent form as a procedure to minimize the risk to participants. Additionally, the participants were identified in the study by using P1 and AP2 and role titles instead of by name to add further protection. Identifiers were assigned based on the order in which signed consent forms are returned.

During the recruitment process, participants were provided with an informed consent form that included an overview of the study, the purpose of the study, agreement forms, and a section that speaks to the voluntary nature of their participation. Participants were informed of the use of anonyms to protect their identities as well as the permanent destruction of their data should they elect to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants' data were stored in a file that was passcode protected and destroyed 5 years after the study's conclusion. The study district was protected by refraining from including its name or any identifying information about the site.

Summary

The scope of this study focuses on the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices in a U.S. Mid-Atlantic state. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The methodology section detailed the procedures for conducting this study. A basic qualitative study design was used with semistructured interviews to collect data from elementary principals and assistant principals to gain an understanding of the strategies

and behaviors they used when supporting teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices. Convenience sampling with purposive sampling criteria was used to recruit participants who are state-certified administrators and had a minimum of 2 years of experience working with diverse school communities. A self-designed interview protocol provided consistency throughout the interview process. Each participant received a copy of the transcribed interview to review for accuracy if they wish. Additionally, the interviewees were asked if the transcript reflected and resonated with their experiences and to review my initial interpretations of their data to note if there was anything they would like to clarify before I finalized my data analyses.

In the next chapter, I will describe and discuss the results of the study. Chapter 4 will begin with an introduction where I restate the purpose, research questions, and chapter organization. I will also describe the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. Chapter 4 will conclude with a summary.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who support teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The gap in practice was the inconsistency of strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals to support teachers in their use of culturally responsive practices. Although prior literature offered extensive research on culturally responsive practices and school discipline, there was not much research on the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals when supporting teachers practicing culturally responsive discipline in the classroom. The following research question guided this study: How do elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school system describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices?

I gathered data via one-on-one Zoom conferencing interviews to answer the research question. Chapter 4 includes the research findings from this study. In Chapter 4, I present the data collection and analysis processes while emphasizing trustworthiness and explaining the results that answer the research question. A thorough description of the setting, data collection process, and analysis method are provided. I address how the study results relate and pertain to Bass's transformational theory and Khalifa's CRSL model. Potential implications of this basic qualitative study include enhanced culturally responsive practices across the schools in the study site district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers.

Setting and Demographics

The study took place in the United States in a Mid-Atlantic school district serving approximately 130,000 students, with about 45% classified as economically disadvantaged and 70% receiving free or reduced meals. The study was open to state-certified elementary principals with a minimum of 2 years of experience working in diverse schools. The eight participants selected represented eight culturally diverse elementary schools in the district. I emailed a partner organization agreement to the school district's research and evaluation department and submitted a request to conduct research packet to the same department. Once approved, I emailed 40 potential participants the invitation to take part in the study. Although I hoped for more, eight responses were received from individuals interested in participating in the study. These eight participants were emailed the consent form, and they replied to the email with the words, "I consent." After receiving consent, I scheduled one-on-one Zoom interviews at dates and times that were conducive to each participant's work schedule. There were no changes in personnel, budget cuts, or other trauma that affected the interpretation of the study results.

The participants were seven principals and one assistant principal from elementary schools in the study site district. Seven of the participants were female, and one was male. Although the male participant had the least amount of tenure, he was very research oriented, and his responses were often tied to published works. Four participants had master's degrees, and four had doctoral degrees in education. Two participants had more than 10 years leading at their current schools. All participants had at least 2 years of

tenure, meeting the criteria for participation in this study. The demographics of all participants by gender, position, education level, and tenure in administration in terms of years are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic Information for Participants

	Gender	Position	Education level	Tenure (years)
Participant 1	Female	Principal	Master's	7
Participant 2	Female	AP	Doctorate	26
Participant 3	Female	Principal	Doctorate	18
Participant 4	Female	Principal	Doctorate	23
Participant 5	Male	Principal	Doctorate	6
Participant 6	Female	Principal	Master's	9
Participant 7	Female	Principal	Master's	10
Participant 8	Female	Principal	Master's	15

Note. AP = Assistant principal.

Data Collection

A semistructured interview guide that I created was used to gather data to address the study's research question. The data collection process consisted of interviews with seven elementary school principals and one assistant principal held via a one-on-one Zoom video conference system. The interviews took place at the convenience of the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. All interviews were conducted during the course of 2 weeks.

I recorded the Zoom video conferences and used a backup audio recording system to capture participant responses. I saved the video conference and audio recording to my password-protected laptop. To ensure the validity of the responses, I also recorded participants' verbal responses in the field notes of the interview guide for comparison when analyzing data (see Appendix). All interviews were completed following the same

protocol that consisted of seven interview questions and probing questions asked as needed. I used a transcription service, Transcribe.com, to transcribe all interview recordings for data analysis. The only challenge during the data collection process was finding time to schedule the interviews while competing with Back to School Night and the opening of school activities.

Data Analysis

During data analysis, I used an inductive approach to move from coded units to larger representations of categories and themes. In the beginning, data were analyzed without any preconceived categories or themes. After completing all the interviews, each Zoom recording was downloaded and transcribed through the transcription service. I then reviewed each transcript for accuracy while listening to the audio recording to make any edits. Once completed, I emailed a copy of the edited transcript to each participant to provide feedback if they wished. After ensuring the transcripts captured the participants' voices accurately, I read each transcript several times and began coding the data. I analyzed the qualitative data collected from the elementary school principals and assistant principal through thematic coding, specifically using in-vivo and pattern coding. Thematic analysis in qualitative research involves the researcher examining a set of data for patterns in the meaning to make sense of emerging themes (Burkholder et al., 2020). First- and second-cycle coding were conducted to move inductively to thematic analysis.

First-Cycle Coding

During the initial coding process, I read each transcript and looked for words that were used by multiple participants in their responses. I highlighted words and phrases to

examine their meaning in relation to the research question. The following terms emerged: *understanding, relationships, modeling, conversation, engagement, sensitivity, reflective, treatment, partnership, family structure, supporting, proactive, climate, cultural assumptions, capacity process feelings, and cultural behaviors*. During in vivo coding, I began looking for regularly occurring phrases in each transcript that participants stated in terms of actions, strategies, and practices (see Saldaña, 2021). I noted that several participants discussed interactions using the terms *intentional, restorative circles, cultural nuances, cognizant of practice, and book studies*. Once all actions and strategies were identified, I examined the conceptual framework to check for any alignment between the CRSL model and the four domains of transformational leadership theory. The first-coding cycle generated similar concepts and understandings between participants, as represented in Table 2.

Table 2*Codes, Categories, and Themes Used in Data Analysis*

Codes	Categories	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships • Engagement • Understanding cultural nuances 	Interactions between individuals	School leadership practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflective practice • Conversations • Consideration • Equitable treatment 	Cultural sensitivity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairness • Understanding backgrounds • Communication • Sensitivity 	Individual consideration	Fair and sensitive communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting student differences 	Courageous communication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural knowledge • Reciprocal relationships 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling • Coaching • Perceptual Conversations 	Building teacher capacity	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unpacking discipline data • Book studies • Article studies 		Professional development

Second-Cycle Coding

I conducted the second-cycle coding to examine patterns in responses that were then organized into categories. During data analysis, excerpts from the transcripts were selected and reviewed for frequency of terms or concepts. I examined the excerpts across participants to evaluate the patterns of understanding or similarities on perspectives. These excerpts were then coded as phrases when they occurred more than two times across interview questions for participants. Phrases that emerged were *building strong relationships, courageous conversation, reflective practice, modeling fairness, cultural background knowledge, understanding cultural nuances, equitable treatment, reciprocal practice, transparent communication, teacher capacity, professional development, professional learning communities, and perceptual conversations*. Building relationships was frequently discussed by each participant. The interactions that were coded during first-cycle coding evolved into a descriptive category labeled building strong relationships. Strong relationships enabled principals to obtain buy-in from teachers when modeling sensitive communication, participating in coaching conversations, and modeling fairness that supported student differences.

Moving inductively from coded to larger units, categories, and themes required the alignment of the patterns with transformational leadership theory and the CRSL model. Additional coding revealed larger categorical representations, such as cultural sensitivity, courageous conversations, and building teacher capacity, as disaggregated in Table 3. After an extensive review of the codes, categories, and literature related to the

conceptual framework, I aligned the categories with the themes of school leadership practices, fair and sensitive communication, and professional development.

Table 3

Themes Aligned With Research and Conceptual Framework

Categories	Themes	Transformational leadership theory	Culturally responsive school leadership model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions between individuals • Cultural sensitivity 	School leadership practices	Idealized influence/ individual consideration	Inclusive school environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual consideration • Courageous communication 	Fair and sensitive communication	Individual consideration	Critical-self awareness
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building teacher capacity 	Professional development	Inspirational motivation/intellectual stimulation	Teacher preparation

Theme 1: School Leadership Practices

Transformational school leadership involves leaders using the techniques of individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, and idealized influence to support and transform the members' actions in an organization (Flynn, 2021). These four techniques were indicated throughout the participants' interview responses. Participants made comments about their behaviors and strategies used that influenced their leadership style. Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasized that individualized consideration refers to the degree to which the leader gives support and empathy to followers by listening effectively to their concerns and acting as a coach and mentor. Participant 2 shared that she focused on ways to help the teacher understand the cultural needs by listening to teachers when sharing responsive discipline practices.

Participant 3 discussed modeling culturally sensitive language and practices when interacting with faculty, students, and parents.

Communication was a frequently used term to discuss leadership styles by participants. Principals discussed communication in terms of listening to cultural perspectives, personal experiences, and necessary actions for an inclusive environment. Participant 8 discussed the importance of having dialogue around what is happening in the classroom by reviewing discipline data trends. Participants 6,7, and 8 emphasized the importance of having conversations about teacher perceptions of the demographic or cultural group most impacted by exclusionary discipline practices. Participant 5 shared the importance of having a visible presence in the building to collect data to discuss during periodic check-ins with teachers requiring additional support on what is developmentally appropriate for students through a cultural lens. These courageous conversations fell under the domain of intellectual stimulation because teachers were learning to view their cultural understanding and student interactions in a different light.

Theme 2: Fair and Sensitive Communication

The second theme was directly addressed in the literature review under equitable school leadership. Equitable school leadership involves developing culturally responsive relationships within the school community (Rodela & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2020). All participants in the current study discussed the importance of building relationships and the sensitive nature of communication when cultivating relationships. Participant 3 discussed working together to disrupt the negative discipline practices that may be attributed to teacher perceptions about a particular cultural group. This was described as

working through various communication channels to hear altering perspectives to develop a resolution that is in the best interest of the students. Participant 4 emphasized fairness and understanding by ensuring the consequence fits the action carried out by the student. According to the participants, equitable leadership requires collaborative communication between the principal and teachers, with a strong relationship being the foundation.

Equitable treatment that does not diminish a student's feelings or cultural background was discussed by five of the eight participants during the interviews. Participant 1 noted the role school leaders have in supporting teachers' understanding of cultural nuances they may witness in the student population. Further discussion from Participants 1, 4, 5, and 6 expressed how communication must be sensitive and respectful of cultural backgrounds. Participants 6 and 8 shared that fairness comes in the ability to have everyone treated on an even playing field but also remaining cognizant of students' individual needs. Participant 7 explained the need for conversations on empathy to support teachers' development of culturally responsive practices. Participants had varying entry points for communication with teachers, but they all connected under the idea of communication being fair and sensitive.

Theme 3: Professional Development

The second pillar of the CRSL model is culturally responsive curricular and teacher preparation (Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals have a responsibility to build teacher capacity, and often, professional development is the means by which teacher capacity is built. Leadership practices that develop teachers require some level of intellectual

stimulation. Participant 3 discussed the importance of professional learning communities to address the needs of the faculty. They reported that the experience of working through book studies and article reviews was beneficial in helping teachers develop their cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding. Participant 4 stressed how the critical conversations held within the professional learning communities supported teachers by listening to their needs, perspectives, and challenges in dealing with student discipline.

There was an overwhelming consensus regarding professional development around the importance of modeling. The participants expressed that principals should model communication tactics, empathy, and a layered approach to de-escalating challenging behaviors. Participant 5 discussed the need for contractors to come into the schools to provide professional development on culturally responsive teaching and discipline practice to ensure teachers truly understand how it looks. Participant 6 highlighted the importance of principals not having all the answers and being transparent about working through this transformation with the staff. Several participants discussed having an awareness of practice and understanding of what it means to deal with different cultural groups.

To further create a connection to the study, I aligned the themes to the research question and the conceptual framework in Table 4. The conceptual framework was comprised of two components: Bass's transformational leadership theory and Khalifa's CRSL model. The interview protocol had subsequent questions aimed at answering the research question. The data collected were aligned to each component of the conceptual framework based on the categories that aligned to the emerging themes. The categories of

interactions between individuals and cultural sensitivity aligned with the theme of transformational leadership practices. Leadership practices can influence others in the organization. Idealized influence requires leaders to model ethical behavior that assists in gaining respect and trust from followers. Two aspects of idealized influence are the leaders' behaviors and the elements that are attributed to leaders by followers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Principals saw their behaviors as influential and used professional development as a strategy to intellectually stimulate teachers to provide individual consideration to diverse learners (Table 4).

Table 4

Themes Alignment With Research and Conceptual Framework

Research question	Subsequent questions	Themes	Transformational leadership theory
How do elementary principals in a Mid-Atlantic school district describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices?	What leadership behaviors can principals display that demonstrate culturally responsive discipline practices?	Transformational leadership practices	Idealized influence
	What are some strategies or actions principals use to model culturally responsive discipline practices when dealing with students removed from the classroom?	Professional development	Intellectual stimulation Individualized consideration

The alignment of the research to the second component of the conceptual framework, culturally responsive school leadership, is demonstrated in Table 5. The categories labeled courageous conversation and individual consideration aligned with the theme of fair and sensitive communication. Bass and Riggio (2006) explained that inclusive environments are sensitive to cultural differences through actions and dialogue.

Effective school leaders consider the cultural backgrounds of teachers when coaching, mentoring, and building their capacity. In return, teachers may use the model presented by the principal when dealing with colleagues and students. Principals are responsible for supporting teachers' keen understanding of the inequitable factors that adversely affect diverse members of the school (Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa et al. (2016) noted that having this keen understanding allows principals to envision and create an inclusive environment for marginalized students.

The principals interviewed explained how they used communication to provide teachers with strategies to become more culturally sensitive and responsive in their interactions with students. Some key terms and phrases stated by principals were *coaching, colleague-to-colleague discussions, cognizance of practice, listening, critical conversations, refraining from unfairness, and reciprocal treatment*. These key terms were most evident across all participants when asked the first subsequent question in Table 5. Principals explained that the first step in developing teachers' culturally responsive practices began with the communication of expectations and cultural awareness. Additionally, principals noted the importance of having their own critical self-awareness of the cultural needs of their buildings to be able to display leadership practices that guide and support teacher development (Table 5). Therefore, the professional development of principals was discussed as a necessity before school leaders can effectively support teachers in intentional professional development on culturally responsive discipline practices.

Table 5*Themes Alignment With Research and Conceptual Framework*

Research question	Subsequent questions	Themes	Culturally responsive school leadership
How do elementary principals in a Mid-Atlantic school district describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices?	As a school leader, how do you foster the development of teachers in becoming more culturally responsive in addressing student discipline?	Fair and sensitive communication	Culturally responsive and inclusive school environment
	How do you keep abreast of the growing cultural needs of your school and work to support teachers in meeting the behavioral needs of diverse learners?	Professional development Leadership practices	Critical self-awareness

Discrepant Cases

As I analyzed the data, no discrepant cases were recognized. Principals voiced similar descriptions of strategies and behaviors used. The terminology used to explain a particular strategy may have varied, but continuous coding revealed the alignment between what different participants shared when interviewed. Multiple data readings allow the researcher to move from a more unstructured reading to analysis which reveals patterns and discrepancies that may clarify interpretations (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Through multiple reading of the transcripts and a review of the audio recordings, discrepant cases were not prevalent.

Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The research question was, How do elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school system describe their strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices? I have summarized my processing of the results from the eight interviews with elementary principals and assistant principals in this section of the chapter.

Based on the results from the interviews, the participants shared similar descriptions of the strategies and behaviors used when supporting teachers who are using culturally responsive discipline practices. All participants described culturally responsive practices as understanding cultural backgrounds and using that understanding as the foundation to guide equitable leadership practices. Five participants stressed the importance of relationship building with staff to guide the work around culturally responsive practices. One participant stated, "When establishing relationships, leaders must have empathy regarding teachers becoming overwhelmed. They should visit classrooms to work with behavior challenges or support the class while the teacher disciplines students." Being a visible presence goes a long way in building a supportive relationship with teachers. Participant 6 explained that supporting teachers in the classroom helps them to "leave the defensive bubble when engaging in coaching conversations." According to Participant 4, being in the classrooms "enables you to see and understand the teacher's stress which can later promote transparency in a

conversation.” There were no differences expressed regarding the importance of building strong relationships.

Data gathered during the interviews fell within the following three themes: (a) School leadership practices, (b) Fair and sensitive communication, and (c) Professional Development (Table 2). Participant 1 described one leadership practice as modeling a reciprocal relationship. This resembles the old adage of treating others the way you want to be treated or what you put into the world is what you receive. During a meeting with a teacher, Participant 1 stated, “You are the model. You are the exemplar. How can I ensure that the students respect you and support you with that? And how do I help you build the relationships?” Understanding that relationships are a give and take, teachers must also understand what is developmentally appropriate. Participant 5 discussed courageous conversations involving support for teachers in understanding what is developmentally appropriate for students to refrain from “punishing kids for being kids.” Focusing on building strong relationships was at the forefront of leadership practices for school leaders (Figure 1).

Another leadership practice discussed was modeling cultural awareness and working to dismantle cultural assumptions. Participant 3 shared a story about a classroom visit where a student complained about being called a derogatory term. The term was stated during an interaction between two students belonging to different ethnic groups. The students were satisfied with handling it physically; however, the principal conducted a minilesson on the history of the derogatory term, the equivalent of the derogatory term in the other ethnic group and dismantled the cultural assumptions each cultural group had

about the other. Later that day, the principal met with the teacher to review how the situation was handled during the classroom visit. The meeting became a coaching session explaining the importance of the lesson on cultural awareness and enabled the teacher to see beyond what would normally be documented as a behavioral infraction.

Communication was a frequent leadership practice for all participants. Building strong relationships to grow culturally responsive practices requires a specific type of communication. Through inductively moving from coding to categories, fair and sensitive communication emerged as a theme. Three principals referenced fairness, respect, and cultural sensitivity when describing their communication with teachers. Participants 3,4 and 8 spoke directly about fairness and equity. Participant 8 noted, “Giving individual consideration for differences involves fairness by not leaning toward negativity when dealing with a particular subgroup.” Participant 3 expanded on the notion of fairness by stating, “We must provide equitable treatment for all learners, adults included.” Both participants expressed the importance of understanding the cultural differences of varying subgroups and respecting those differences. When holding courageous conversations with teachers, principals helped teachers see the cultural differences and provided support to promote sensitive interactions. Modeling sensitive communication during courageous conversation was one leadership practice that supported transforming teachers’ behavior in dealing with culturally diverse students. Participant 4 discussed supporting teachers in understanding the individual child and ensuring any consequence is applicable and fair for the student. Overall, principals agreed that having cultural awareness and empathy are key to being fair and sensitive.

Participants 2 and 5 stressed the sensitive nature of communication taking place. Participant 2 discussed how the sensitive nature of communication could stretch beyond elements of ethnicity into socioeconomic status, and fairness must guide the decision-making process when enacting discipline. Helping teachers note the cultural nuances and remain sensitive in how they communicate their understanding with students was something Participant 5 stressed. Cultural assumptions can have an effect on fairness teachers apply to situations. Participant 3 acknowledged the role of principals in working with teachers on dismantling cultural assumptions and giving each student individual consideration when addressing discipline concerns. Participant 3 stated, “Teachers must refrain from acting upon assumptions about cultural groups. Principals can support them through modeling dismantling assumptions, modeling respectful conversations, and holding courageous conversations with teachers when statements are made based on cultural assumptions.” Five participants expressed that conversations are a form of sensitive communication because many of the beliefs or assumptions held by teachers may have been with them since childhood.

Professional development was the final theme that emerged from the interview data. Utilizing learning walks and maintaining a visible presence in the building were leadership practices that principals used to keep a pulse on the growing needs of the faculty and student body. Understanding the needs of the teachers provides principals with the opportunity to align proper professional development to grow teacher leaders and transform teacher practices. When asked about professional development, Participant 8 stated the following:

Principals just really have to develop and sponsor professional development. This can take the form of presentations, reading and discussing articles, and staff book studies, just to sort of make sure staff are even aware of what those (culturally responsive) practices are. Principals need to really model the language used in culturally responsive communication and model decisions that display what cultural responsiveness really looks like.

Participant 6 discussed how school leaders should use strategic, intentional steps to support culturally responsive discipline practices. Classroom visits will provide evidence of how teachers and students respond to one another. This participant used data collected during the visits to determine professional development needs to increase teachers' capacity around cultural awareness and crisis/behavioral management.

Four participants discussed systemic training on implicit bias. About two years ago, employees received a one-day professional development on implicit bias. Each school had to appoint an equity lead teacher responsible for continuing the work throughout the school year in the building. Four of the eight participants had equity lead teachers involved in some form of professional learning community that focused on implicit bias and cultural awareness. One principal in a school with a student population of over 80% Latino and African American spoke about conducting a book study with the staff on educating Black and Brown boys based on the need observed in classroom visits and learning walks. The book study sparked a discussion on reciprocal treatment elevating teachers' understanding of how their behaviors affect students' reactions toward teachers. Book studies and article reviews aligned with intellectual stimulation in the

transformational leadership model and critical self-awareness in the culturally responsive school leadership model.

Participant 7 highlighted the important role the leadership team plays in gaining buy-in from the staff on transforming discipline practices. The participant stated, “The work starts with the leadership team. A strong team is necessary. You need to have a team that buys into the work so that you develop a guiding coalition to support the work.” Members of the leadership team oversee the daily progress throughout the building by engaging closely with teachers who are doing the work from the strategically planned professional development. Additionally, the leadership team can report observations and wonderings from working directly with teachers in the building. In this model, professional development is ongoing, with new strategies being added as needed based on data in the building.

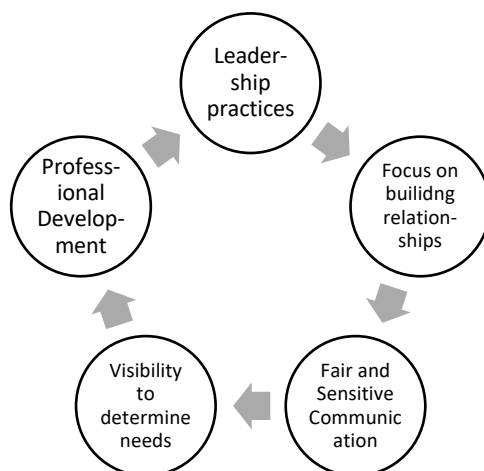
Figure 1 illustrates how the three emerging themes interacted continuously in a cyclical fashion propelled by building relationships and principals being visible. Leadership practices and behaviors were most effective when relationships were built with teachers. A strong relationship between the teachers and the principal enabled influential leadership practices. Idealized influence occurs when there is a form of respect and trust develops between the principal and teacher. Relationships require communication.

Participants interviewed found that fairness and sensitive communication were established when working on cultural awareness to transform teacher discipline practices. Being transparent in communication allows teachers to process their thoughts and actions

around culturally responsive practices and become more open to adaptation. When principals have built this relationship with teachers through communication, classroom visits are no longer viewed as observational opportunities but rather as supportive visits that enable leaders to obtain data on professional development needs. Participant 7 stated, “We just need to be more intentional regarding ongoing professional development.” Working through this cyclical motion is continuous in building and maintaining teachers’ culturally responsive discipline practices.

Figure 1

Interaction of Emerging Themes



Evidence of Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a qualitative term that explains the degree of confidence the researcher has in the resources and methods used in the study (Burkholder et al., 2020). Researchers want to use collection methods to yield the most relevant and trustworthy data for answering the research question(s). I used various strategies in this study with the understanding that the results and recommendations from this study may inform

professional development to enhance culturally responsive practices across the schools in the study district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers.

Credibility

Fostering trustworthiness in a study requires credibility, which means that given the presented data, the findings of the study are believable (Burkholder et al., 2020). To determine credibility, strategies such as peer debriefing, member checking, triangulation, and reflexivity are used (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Only strategies that are most appropriate for the study should be used when establishing credibility. Member checking and triangulation were used to establish credibility in this study. The participants were asked the same interview questions, which provided information for the research question about the strategies and leadership behaviors used when supporting teachers using culturally responsive discipline practices.

Researchers must maintain fidelity to participants' experiences and words that are represented in transcripts documenting the interview. A transcript review of each interview was conducted to ensure a genuine articulation of participants' experiences were captured to ensure the trustworthiness of the data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Member checking was obtained by providing copies of the transcribed interview to participants and by soliciting their feedback on my initial interpretations of their data to ensure an accurate representation of what they intended to say (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). After reviewing the transcripts, participants did not request any changes. Triangulation was used by examining the claims made by the eight principals and assistant principals through their responses. The recordings were transcribed using a transcription service.

Next, I used in vivo coding for first-cycle coding, followed by pattern coding. The data from all participants were analyzed to develop emerging themes across responses during thematic analysis. Validity or trustworthiness was established through the convergence of information from multiple interviews.

Transferability

Transferability or external validity relates to the extent to which the findings are generalizable (Burkholder et al., 2020). Transferability was established through the purposeful selection of elementary principals and assistant principals can be easily replicated in another setting using the criteria of being state certified with a minimum of 2 years' experience working with a diverse population. In addition, a detailed description of the research steps with a thick description of the setting, participant selection, the process for obtaining informed consent, the data collection process through interviews, and data analysis was provided. The principals selected were leaders in diverse schools with varying ethnicities. Although this should not impact the ability to replicate the study, it is worth noting.

Dependability

Dependability means there is a reasoned argument for the data collection methods, and the data are consistent with the argument (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I used triangulation and sequencing of methods to establish the dependability of the research study (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The rationale for the study was created and aligned with the design to answer the research question. Using three administrators not associated with the study to test the reliability of the interview protocol and triangulate the data collected

across multiple participants provided a dependable instrument for data collection. A solid research design was followed throughout the process to maintain the dependability of the processes and findings. This strategy is important because it reassures the readers of the trustworthiness of the data and the possibility of similar results if replicated.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings and interpretation of the study are free of unacknowledged researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Through reflexivity, I explored how my biases and prejudices influenced my interpretations of the data and mediated their influence on the research study. I worked diligently to disassociate any of my biases from being a school leader myself. Implementing triangulation, researcher reflexivity, and external audits are strategies that I used to establish confirmability. Reading the interview transcripts multiple times enabled me to see information through a different lens each time without allowing any of my professional opinions to play a role in data collection. Confirmability was also ensured by sharing the transcripts with participants and soliciting feedback to confirm an accurate capture of their perspectives.

Summary

I used this basic qualitative study to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who support teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The research question examined how elementary school principals in a Mid-Atlantic school system describe their strategies and behaviors. The research question was aligned with Bass's transformational leadership theory and

Khalifa's CRSL model. I learned that elementary principals use several strategies and behaviors to support teacher's using culturally responsive discipline practices.

Participants expressed the importance of communication and self-reflection before embarking on growing and developing teachers' cultural awareness.

Based on the interview responses, strong relationships between the principal and teachers promote the trust factor necessary to have the courageous conversations required to transform thought processes around student discipline. Data support principals' genuine desire to support teacher growth in using culturally responsive discipline practices, but many stated the need for additional professional development and support groups amongst principals in doing this work. Based on the trustworthiness discussed in this chapter, the data collected are dependable, credible, transferable, and confirmable. In Chapter 5, a more detailed discussion of the study's findings is provided, as well as the limitations of the study and researcher recommendations based on the collected data.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. I sought to discover the behaviors and strategies used by elementary principals when supporting teachers tasked with disciplining diverse students in a culturally responsive manner. By gaining a better understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by principals, district leaders may provide additional support to principals that will enhance culturally responsive practices across the schools in the study site district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers.

The findings of this study indicated that elementary principals used two approaches to support teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices: (a) professional development to build teacher capacity and (b) transparent communication to enhance culturally responsive practices. In terms of professional development to build teacher capacity, principals used various resources and entry points to develop teachers' cultural awareness and understanding of how to engage with diverse learners when managing behaviors.

The participating elementary school principals provided teachers with background knowledge about the students they serve, customs that are popular in cultures prevalent in their specific building, and resources to help with de-escalating behaviors that interrupt instruction. Despite being committed to supporting teachers, several participants reported

feeling challenged in building teacher capacity while working through the culturally responsive process themselves.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this chapter, I interpret the findings of this basic qualitative study in the context of the conceptual framework along with a comparison to what has been found in the peer-reviewed literature described in Chapter 2. The conceptual framework for this study was created using Bass's transformational leadership theory and Khalifa's CRSL model.

Key Finding 1: Professional Development to Build Teacher Capacity

Principals are tasked with building teacher capacity, and one means to achieve this goal is through targeted professional development. Brion (2023) emphasized that school leaders working with diverse adults must understand the role culture plays in professional development by taking it into consideration when providing sessions that are continuous and collaborative. Culturally responsive leaders undergo professional development to help them hone their culturally responsive practices to lead their staff in the culture shift of becoming more culturally responsive when dealing with students and families (Thompson & Brezicha, 2022). Elementary principals in the current study acknowledged the need to increase their own capacity before they could grow the mindset of teachers and transform classroom practice. This was critical self-awareness of the leaders' cultural intellect as well as an acknowledgment of the ability to enact idealized influence on the teachers. Principals must be confident in their knowledge base and resourceful when providing targeted professional development for teachers.

Professional development must be ongoing to increase the capacity of teachers and principals (Thompson & Brezicha, 2022). In this study, several participants referenced the introduction of systemic professional development on implicit bias without a concise plan to execute it in each school. Elementary principals were at different levels in their understanding of culturally responsive practices, which resulted in principals rolling out a myriad of different types of professional development to build teacher capacity. In some schools, professional learning communities were the avenue to build teacher capacity. Professional learning communities allow all members to engage in learning together regardless of ones' entry point, and teacher leadership supports the development of professional learning communities (Paletta et al., 2020). In the current study, some participants utilized their equity lead teachers and leadership team to continue building teacher capacity after professional development sessions.

While all participants had some form of leadership practices and behaviors to increase teacher capacity, those who included discipline data reviews in their professional development saw the benefits of intellectual stimulation. They reported that teachers began to discuss cultural practices and look for alternate solutions to classroom discipline with diverse learners. Brion (2023) discussed how using the adult learner's culture when planning targeted professional development can help with transferring learning from the training setting to the classroom. Culture affects the implementation of learning transfer, and to optimize adult learning and its implementation, it is essential that school leaders understand the role culture plays in professional development (Brion, 2022). In support of these findings, Shengnan and Hallinger (2021) indicated that individually held cultural

beliefs influence one's understanding of how culture guides practices highlighting the need for professional development to build teacher capacity on culturally responsive practices.

Key Finding 2: Transparent Communication to Enhance Cultural Practices

Being transparent in communication was perceived as a strategy that enhanced cultural practices. According to the participants, teachers were more receptive when communication was transparent and clear. This finding aligns with the results of a study on teacher leadership and communication among diverse colleagues in which Green (2019) noted that a primary obstacle to progress was intercultural communication because many colleagues struggled in their communication around a particular goal to improve student experiences. Participants in the current study discussed being transparent about their level of cultural competence and vocalized how they are working through implicit bias to become stronger leaders.

Additionally, communication aligns with two elements of the transformational leadership theory: individualized consideration and inspirational motivation. According to Bass and Riggio (2006), individualized consideration requires that principals keep the lines of communication open and listen intently with empathy. This behavior builds trust and respect between the principal and the teacher. Likewise, communication is vital to the leadership style that uses inspirational motivation to inspire followers to engage with the vision and bring forth change. Participants discussed being transparent in their coaching conversations to influence teachers to adopt alternate discipline practices. Influential leadership encompasses strategies that promote operational change. The

interaction between principals and teachers defines how the school performs, which is crucial for initiating change (Greimel et al., 2023). According to Sisson (2022), demonstrating caring and effective cross-cultural communication is a desired approach to building relationships. Several participants in the current study explained the importance of strong relationships as a key factor in teachers being receptive to courageous conversations regarding the use of alternate cultural discipline practices.

Finally, participants agreed that the work on culturally responsive practices should be intentionally part of building teacher capacity. According to Green (2019), effort and intentionality are necessary for intercultural understanding, and schools must foster equitable communication that invites, validates, and values all members of the school community. The CRSL model includes a discussion about teacher preparation and inclusive school environments. Inclusive school environments derive from cultural practices that are welcoming to all members of the school community. Current study participants explained that teachers' awareness of cultural practices develops through transparent communication. Culturally responsive practices are supported by leadership behaviors that display clear and frequent communication with realistic expectations (Scribner et al., 2021). Ultimately, participants in the current study agreed that remaining transparent in communication with teachers allowed the development of trust, which fostered the openness to altered approaches to culturally responsive practices.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study were the sample size and the risk of researcher bias. The study was limited to eight participants from the same school district. Of the eight

participants, only one was an assistant principal. Although I had hoped for a balance of principals and assistant principals, it was not easy to obtain full participation and participants were reminded of the option to opt out at any time. The findings are mainly the result of principal perspectives. The second limitation was the risk of researcher bias. As a school administrator, I made sure not to interview participants I had a direct relationship with to ensure previous interactions did not create a bias about the interview data captured. I utilized strategies of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to strengthen the overall trustworthiness of the study.

Recommendations

In this basic qualitative study, I explored the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who support teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. My first recommendation is that elementary principals conduct research on Khalifa's CRSL model when preparing professional development opportunities for teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. The model embraces the importance of soft power, the ability to attract and opt-in, as opposed to hard power, the ability to coerce (Banwo et al., 2022). When elementary principals understand the power struggle involved in transforming a school's culture for diverse learners by supporting teachers' growth around cultural practices, disproportionate exclusionary practices may decrease. Khalifa et al. (2016) explained that effective leaders must be capable of promoting and sustaining environments that support the development of good teachers. When principals create an inclusive culture that encourages critical self-awareness and is

sensitive to the backgrounds of all participants, equitable discipline practices may increase.

Cobanoglu (2021) noted that teachers' cultural intelligence levels and principals' skills in managing diversity predict the transformational leadership of principals. According to elementary principals in the current study, communication managed through strong relationships is a major factor in understanding one's cultural intelligence and perspective. My second recommendation is that further research be conducted on Bass's transformational leadership theory with an emphasis on intellectual stimulation. Transformation is challenged when there is limited background knowledge of the elements impacting the current operational behaviors of the organization. Participants in the current study acknowledged that the training on implicit bias touched the underlying surface of individual understanding of unconscious practices. Gaining an appreciation for diversity as an elementary principal and teacher may support actions that give credence to individual consideration when enacting culturally responsive discipline.

Implications

This basic qualitative study may lead to positive social change by helping principals understand leadership behaviors that support culturally diverse schools and guide professional development to support teachers in building a more culturally responsive school. Potential implications of this basic qualitative study include enhanced culturally responsive practices across the schools in the study site district and more equitable discipline referrals by teachers. Furthermore, there are implications for principal preparation programs to provide learning opportunities on effective leadership

practices in diverse settings as several participants in the study expressed the need for a greater understanding of how to support teachers' culturally responsive practice.

Empirically, when principals are knowledgeable about culturally responsive discipline practices, teachers' capacity can be increased through the intentional professional development of effective discipline strategies for diverse learners. As a result, exclusionary discipline practices may decrease, generating increased time spent on instruction for all students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the strategies and behaviors used by elementary principals who are supporting teachers' use of culturally responsive discipline practices. Ezzani (2021) explained that educational leaders have the power to unsettle or reinforce societal systems of oppression for marginalized students. Elementary principals who take the initiative to be reflective in their practice through the process of critical self-awareness are better prepared to assist teachers in providing individualized consideration to diverse students. Principals who exercise reflective practice can dismantle the systems of oppression for diverse students.

Principals in the current study expressed the desire to increase culturally responsive leadership practice while recognizing their need for more professional development to effectively support teachers. Participants were transparent about their entry points and comfortability with culturally responsive practices. Although the behaviors and strategies used by each principal varied, all were geared toward building strong relationships with teachers to garner an understanding of best practices to create

inclusive school environments. Bass's transformational leadership theory and Khalifa's CRSL model provided the basis for this research study. The three themes drawn from interviews with principals and assistant principals were transformational leadership practices, fair and sensitive communication, and professional development. The findings of this study can help principals support teachers in the development of strong relationships through transparent communication with a focus on intentional professional development aimed at building teacher capacity on the topic of cultural responsiveness.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Date:
 Time:
 Interviewee Code:
 Location of Interview:

Interview Components	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	<p>Good afternoon,</p> <p>I am Tracie Connelly. Thank you very much for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your participation in this research study is critical to the study's success, which can support recommendations for positive social change on culturally responsive practices in schools. Your responses will help us understand the role of principals in supporting teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices.</p> <p>The interview has been scheduled to last approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Although you have provided consent, please let me know if I ask a question, you do not wish to answer or want to stop the interview. At that time, I will stop the interview. All data will be appropriately destroyed and discarded. The interview will be digitally recorded, and I will take notes. I will share a copy of the transcript to review for accuracy and to ensure it captures what you want to say. To maintain confidentiality, your identity will not be included in any of my documents. The study may be published, but I will not use identifying markers such as name, school district, and school site.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you have any questions? • Are you ready to begin?
Question 1	<p>What do culturally responsive discipline practices mean to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide examples... <p><i>Probing question:</i> How do you define culturally responsive practices?</p>
Question 2	<p>What leadership behaviors can principals display that demonstrate culturally responsive discipline practices?</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide examples. <p><i>Probing question:</i> What are some strategies or actions principals use to model culturally responsive discipline practices when dealing with students removed from the classroom?</p>
Question 3	<p>In your current position, what experiences have you had in supporting teachers in becoming culturally responsive in how they manage student discipline?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible story • Give me an example. • Challenges or barriers experienced
Question 4	<p>As a school leader, how do you foster the development of teachers in becoming more culturally responsive in addressing student discipline?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give me an example.... • Share a story of when..... <p><i>Probing question:</i> What role does the leadership team have in supporting teachers' culturally responsive discipline practices? Professional development?</p>
Question 5	<p>What are some systems in place in the school district to support principals with culturally responsive practices in their schools? Culturally responsive discipline practices in their schools?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide some examples of..... <p><i>Probing question:</i> What, if any, strategies are included in the district discipline policy or code of conduct that addresses culturally responsive practices?</p>
Question 6	<p>How do you keep abreast of the growing cultural needs of your school and work to support teachers in meeting the behavioral needs of diverse students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of actions/steps taken...
Question 7	<p>What are some of your ideas on ways principals can better support teachers in their use of culturally responsive discipline practices?</p>
Closing	<p>Thank you for your time and participation. Is there anything else you would like for me to know or add to your responses?</p>

	<p>In about a week, I will send a copy of the transcript via email. You may make corrections to the transcript to ensure your thoughts, perspectives, and ideas are accurately captured. Again, thank you for your participation.</p>
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