CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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Foreword by **LISA DELPIT**

PROMOTING ANTI-OPPRESSIVE SCHOOLING THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The Central Role of Community

Banishment from the homeland, the diaspora of a nation, the exile of a people, and ongoing colonization—these are the legacies Minnesotans and Americans have left to Dakota people. What do these legacies mean to the hearts and spirits of Dakota people? Most of us do not care to think too deeply about them, because the difficulties of everyday living as colonized peoples would be infinitely more difficult if we dwelt in a place of inconsolable grief.

> —WAZIYATAWIN[1]

And maybe we need to leave the schools and go to the community.

> —JOE

In her scholarship on the liberation of the Dakota, Waziyatawin's work compels me to consider a question: How can we reform education without understanding the realities of the people we serve? And why are social justice and transformative leadership models not enough for cultural responsiveness? It is not enough to want to fight for equity; school leaders must establish structures that will infuse all forms of leadership with unique community cultural knowledge, epistemology, and perceptions. I hope that the vivid ethnographic portraits here allow us to move past loose definitions and vague

claims about culturally responsive school leadership. These narratives bring to life the theoretical and practitioner-based writings that predominate the field. And while I commend and honor our teacher-education colleagues for the work they have done with culturally relevant teaching, I am excited to be advancing the work on culturally responsive leadership. This book comes as we leadership scholars are still only at the beginning of our journey; others will certainly go above and beyond what is contained in this book.

In this final chapter, I summarize my data and findings and further theorize on the readings covered throughout the book. I argue that CRSL is not only necessary for critical self-reflection, but that it is the only way to attain schoolwide cultural responsiveness and equity-based reform. While culturally responsive teaching and policy implementation are important, they are simply not enough for comprehensive and sustainable culturally responsive schooling. In light of the provocative data in this book, I also argue that cultural responsiveness in schools will never be reached if leaders enact only traditional forms of leadership. Instructional leadership, transformational leadership, curriculum development, and professional development are all important school leadership functions, but they cannot continue to ignore the role that cultural responsiveness plays in each of these areas.

Traditional school leaders are often visible only within the school walls and at a few sporting events. This book pushes the role of the school leader deeper into the students' communities. This shift significantly expands traditional notions of school-community relationships: it not only requires a mutual presence, but also an engagement in and advocacy for community-based causes. Much of my earlier work and the work of other researchers all demonstrate how principals must regularly venture into communities, *on the community's own terms*.[2] Moreover, the nature of the relationship must begin with the community's interests (not test scores, grades,

or student behavior) at the heart of the agenda. And last, principals' advocacy for issues important to the community is the secret ingredient that will eventually give principals the credibility, rapport, and trust that they so often long for. Throughout this book, I have presented glimpses of both community members being present in school, and of school staff being committed to and present in community spaces. In this conclusion, I make a strong case that principals can offer better leadership when they have a strong connection with and reliance on community-based people, perspectives, epistemologies, and voices.

EFFECTIVENESS OF CRSL

I contend that CRSL practices are effective in promoting culturally responsive and sustaining schools. But this effectiveness looks different depending on the goals. So, for example, when the CRSL goal was to improve pedagogical practices for minoritized students, I shared data indicating how UAHS students said they connected with the content and classroom learning. But when the CRSL goal was to promote a critically self-reflective staff and school (i.e., organization), the result was that UAHS teachers and leaders consistently searched for and confronted issues of oppression in their school. And when the CRSL goal was to foster inclusive school environments, UAHS students said that they felt a sense of belonging and safety in school. While not the focus of this book, more traditional effectiveness measures were also positive at UAHS. For example, the UAHS enrollment rate hovered around 95 percent, the graduate rate was over 90 percent, virtually all UAHS students professed that they had plans to attend college after graduation, and years passed without suspensions. While these traditional measures tell part of the UAHS story, table 6.1 summarizes the effective CRSL behaviors and related outcomes highlighted in this book.

TABLE 6.1 Summary of effective CRSL behaviors and outcomes

CRSL behavior	Examples of outcomes
Critical self-reflecting (chs. 1–2)	• Regular conversations occur about racial oppression. • Equity data helps to lead reforms. • Community voice informs practice.
Promoting inclusive environment (ch. 3)	• Teachers don't accommodate disengagement. • Students don't feel overpoliced and disciplined. • Suspension/expulsion rates decrease.
Humanizing student identities (ch. 4)	• Students can comfortably identify as smart. • Stereotypes are pronounced, and thus combatted. • All identities are welcomed in all school spaces.
Promoting culturally responsive curriculum and instruction (ch. 5)	• Lesson plans/content are culturally responsive. • Community plays an active role in pedagogy. • Test scores and grades for students improve.

ESTABLISHING COMMUNITY CREDIBILITY, RAPPORT, AND TRUST

Trust between schools and Black, Brown, Indigenous, and other minoritized communities has traditionally been low due to historical and current practices of marginalization. When I taught in Detroit Public Schools, many of the teachers spoke of parents with suspicion and mistrust. On the other hand, parents often mistrust the school as well. In this study, the case of one parent, Nikki, exemplified the mistrust between schools and community. Here is a sample from my field notes and a quote from Nikki:

My field notes: Nikki has two daughters at UAHS. Last year, one of her daughters went to UAHS but returned to her traditional school this year. Within months, [this daughter] felt marginalized again and began to fall behind. When Nikki herself tried to visit the traditional school her daughter had returned to, they made her sign in to the office and wait for thirty minutes in order for her to see her child in class. By that time, that period's bell was about to ring, and the parent just left frustrated. She then started sneaking in the

back door of the traditional school to see her child in class, and then "signing in" as she exited the school. She explains:

> Joe tells you, "Come in, okay . . . anytime!" When I was at [the other schools], you gotta sign in, you need to call before you come. To me, if I need to call in before I come, you're hiding something, okay? You're hiding something and that was true over at [the middle school] or [the high school]. I always came into the school, but instead of signing in at the start of my visit, I would sign out, and secretly sign in when I left. I went through the back doors 'cause they would call a teacher up and say, "Miss [Henderson's] coming, here she come again." If my child is acting up and misbehaving to the point where you're gonna kick my child out, I wanna see her act up.

This statement from Nikki reveals a deep mistrust toward her daughter's traditional public school. Given schools' histories in contributing to the marginalization of certain communities, it is easy to see how minoritized communities may lack trust in their schools. Examples of marginalizing behaviors of districts, schools, and educators include these actions:

- Calling parents only when educators feel students are problematic
- Disciplining (i.e., shaming, referrals, suspensions, expulsions, court citations, arrests) minoritized students in disproportionate and oppressive ways
- Closing schools that are not profitable, even when they serve community needs
- Removing minoritized teachers and principals who are beloved by their communities (this has happened recently in communities such as New Orleans, but occurred across the country following the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* case)
- Disconnecting from/not caring about students' community life
- Using curriculum that does not represent students' lives

There are many behaviors like this that shape how communities view schools. But when, for example, Black students are suspended five or ten times more than White students (for the same offenses), it is hard for the Black community *not* to interpret this in light of community-based histories. This is precisely why I encourage schools to establish relationships that are not schoolcentric. Here are a few suggestions for school leaders to help improve their credibility, rapport, and trust with local communities:

1. Find out what is important to the community. Become involved with and advocate for these values even if they are not related to school. (Do not attempt to lead the effort; instead, follow the community.)
2. Use school resources to enable community members to have a constant presence in your school.
3. Use school resources to facilitate a nondisruptive presence of teachers and staff in the community.
4. Take an active antiracist and anti-oppressive stance, particularly on issues relevant to your students' community.
5. Be honest with students and families about how you (e.g., leaders, teachers, the school) have been complicit in oppression, and convey to them how you are trying to become better. Ask for their help.
6. Find ways to have a representative community voice; do not engage exclusively with the most vocal, visible, or engaged parents, or the most representative minoritized communities. This will take work and new strategies.
7. Publicly share your vision (in minoritized community spaces) for how you have listened to student and community perspectives, and how you have included these perspectives in school policy as well as classroom pedagogy and curricula.

SELF-DETERMINATION
AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

I realize that it may be controversial to suggest that we, as educators, should focus on community-based goals in addition to school-based goals. I have been criticized for not making student achievement the central goal for educators. However, I am not questioning the importance of student achievement, but rather how we get there! My central argument here is that by learning about and embracing community interests, and by humanizing students in school, educators *can* contribute to student achievement. How? Educators learn how to connect curricula and instruction with the lived experiences of students; they establish trusting relationships that are needed if students decide to stay and learn from them; they gain the support of community elders and learn what is important to them and their collective aspirations. Educators affirm student identity by having people from their communities in school. Educators and school leaders will then begin to be embraced by communities, and this rapport is grounded in trust. Hence, there is an added benefit of centering community-based perspectives in how we do schooling: we support the self-determination and empowerment of communities.

Scholars have identified ways that schools can be racist and that policy can be crafted so it continues to benefit only White interests and the schooling status quo. In the introduction and chapter 1, we learned that historical structures (i.e., leadership and policy) of oppression within and around schools persistently block educational opportunities for minoritized students and push them out of school. But we cannot *only* critique structures of oppression. I argue that educational leaders must pursue community-based goals that support communities' self-determination and community-based epistemologies; that is, leaders must consider how school policies and decisions will lead to a wholesome and dignified existence for the

collective minoritized communities they serve. In this way, these communities can become self-sustaining and have a role in determining what is in their own best interests. Obviously, healthy communities are good for schools, and schools that contribute to better minoritized communities can support stronger students. The examples below show how both schools and communities benefit from having self-determinizing communities:

- *More Indigenous/minoritized teachers.* When schools are able to identify (and help develop) teaching talent within minoritized and Indigenous communities, they get the minoritized teachers they always claim to seek. But this also leads to job restoration and growth within the communities they serve. If you have not recruited teachers directly from tribal colleges, Hispanic-serving institutions, and historically black colleges and universities, do not claim that you cannot identify diverse teaching talent.
- *More Indigenous/minoritized role models.* The presence of minoritized role models can help to improve overall school climates. This also gives communities a chance to influence how schooling happens, which again can lead to job growth for minoritized students and communities. If you have not reached out to local community-based organizations, do not claim you cannot find minoritized mentors.
- *Community financial empowerment.* While it is clear how financial empowerment will benefit minoritized communities, did you know that when parents have a stable, good income, students perform better in schools? Researchers Chiu and Khoo found this to be the case not only in Western countries, but across the globe![3]
- *Healthier communities.* Researchers have firmly established two important findings pertaining to health and communities.

One, healthier students learn much better. And two, when communities are marginalized or oppressed, the students and communities get sicker. For example, it has been well documented that racism not only leads to depression and other mental illnesses, but actually causes physical illness.[4]

- *Protected communities.* Issues such as the *mass incarceration* of Black men, *deportations* of Latinx and South Asian immigrants, and *banning* Muslims from immigrating to the United States all contribute to a fearful hysteria in some communities. It is necessary that all community members—including those who seem not to be directly impacted—*feel safe*. When educators advocate for the protection and safety of communities, students can feel safer and thus learn better.

ORGANIZING A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL: TWO INITIAL CHECKLISTS

Educational leaders should resist notions that they will ever create *completely* culturally responsive schools. Rather, they should think of this work as an iterative cycle of (a) constantly engaging in critical self-reflection and (b) implementing and/or reforming policies and practices that will make schools *more* culturally responsive. Here, I share two initial checklists that could help in this journey. These lists can be adjusted to meet your unique needs. First is a checklist of activities for the first three years of creating a culturally responsive school. Second, I list ways that school leaders can address common challenges faced in this work.

Checklist 1: Years 1–3 of Implementation

Listed on the following pages are key steps that should be taken to organize a culturally responsive school.

YEAR 1

- Complete a district (or school) equity audit that makes visible any inequities, identifies the sources of inequities, and connects the inequities to appropriate reforms.[5]
- After learning of the trends in your school/district, identify your role in contributing to the inequities (i.e., engage in critical self-reflection). Invite the community to partake in the conversation about these inequities.
- Identify policies that contribute to disciplinary or academic inequities in school.
- Identify practices that contribute to disciplinary or academic inequities in school.
- Establish systemwide (school or district) activities that cause critical self-reflection of all programs, departments, and practices.
- Identify equity partners in the building, invite them to join the work, give them the power to make binding changes, and enable them with the social capital and freedom to establish allyship (i.e., creating strategic alliances that work together toward equity and social justice) with other teachers.
  - Compose an equity team that is as representative of all school staff as possible. This includes leaders, teachers, support staff, office staff, parents, students, central district administrators, and others.
  - Establish a strong research component for both finding and conducting relevant research.
  - Get consensus on the role and responsibilities of the equity team.
- Establish an equity vision and common vocabulary for the school that highlights oppressive trends, equity, and cultural responsiveness.
- Examine how the local community has been marginalized over the years by the school and other official institutions (such as

judicial entities or law enforcement, social service organizations, under- or disinvestment by financial institutions, etc.); educate entire staff (including noninstructional staff) on this history.

- Allow teachers to spend four to six days per year in the communities they serve.
- Find spaces and times for parents and community members to have regular access to school facilities, and equitable input into policy making and reforms.
- Establish a five-year equity reform plan that will contribute to cultural responsiveness; have specific measurable one-year goals.
- Work with the union (or other legal stakeholders) to begin building a culture of accountability for equity data and cultural responsiveness that will be examined at the teacher level.

YEAR 2

- Complete an equity audit to monitor any changes in measures of equity in the building from year 1 to year 2.
- Institutionalize critical self-reflection activities.
- Institutionalize common language around cultural responsiveness, equity, and anti-oppressiveness.
- Identify diversity in community stakeholders (from across different communities and from within homogeneous communities); identify multiple ways of getting community voice, perspective, and epistemology at the center of school reform.
- Provide informational meetings on equity for the school board.
- Develop a protocol for hiring new staff that will be committed to cultural responsiveness.
- Look at school forms, tools, and documents and integrate equity components.
- Review roles and responsibilities of the equity team; ensure that schoolcentric perspectives are not muting community-centric perspectives.

- Establish a rotational method (how people will be transitioned on and off the team) and instructional method (ensuring that community-based ways of conveying knowledge are represented) of the equity team.
- Delegate a percentage of all regular meeting time to enhancing cultural responsiveness and equity.
- Begin building culturally responsive curricula and teaching techniques:
  - Begin to financially invest in and compile curricula resources.
  - Encourage at least one person from each curriculum team to join the equity team.
  - Establish mentoring and modeling structures that provide development for teachers who are struggling with cultural responsiveness.
- Have biannual critical self-reflection meetings; account for one-year goals.
- Begin to regularly discuss teacher-specific equity data.

YEAR 3

- Complete an equity audit to monitor any changes in measures of equity in the building from year 1 to year 3 and also from year 2 to year 3.
- Establish the capacity for school staff to continue conducting their own annual equity audit (without support from outside experts).
- Begin to establish a culture of equity accountability.
  - Have one-on-one meetings with teachers and staff members about their equity progress.
- Rotate equity team members (I suggest a two- or three-year term with 25 percent team turnover, but the rotational method should be one that makes sense for the school).

- Establish a community oversight committee of school decision making, which would review practices such as discipline, special education and gifted and talented referrals, grade retention, civic engagement, and so on (this should be primarily community-driven).
  - Rotate community oversight committees; choose a representative sample of the community members to represent the committee.

Checklist 2: Responses to Implementation Challenges

This checklist outlines ways that school leaders can address common challenges they may encounter as they promote culturally responsive school environments.

CHALLENGE: PUSHBACK FROM TEACHERS AND SCHOOL STAFF

Responses:

- Lead with data (perform equity audit).
- Invite staff to be part of the work.
- Push the agenda forward with staff who are supportive even without complete buy-in from all staff.
- Grow your team.
- Involve community members and students in discussion.
- In advance, develop and discuss responses to the most common types of emotional pushback: guilt, anger, denial, diversion, race-neutral talk, diversion to gender or socioeconomic status, and other ways that some staff may disengage from equity work.

CHALLENGE: PUSHBACK FROM THE SCHOOL BOARD OR COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Responses:

- Inform district administrators/superintendent of culturally responsive leadership vision.
- Enlist school board support.

- Invite school board members into community-led or student-led research projects.
- Discuss the histories of marginalization and oppression with school board members.
- Share current research that would help everyone contextualize the equity work.
- Develop and discuss responses to pushback in advance.

CHALLENGE: PUSHBACK FROM THE CENTRAL DISTRICT LEADERSHIP

Responses:

- Lead with data (perform equity audit).
- Share research-based scholarship.
- Partner with prominent allies in the community.
- Partner with students and parents.
- Discuss the histories of marginalization and oppression with school board members.
- Share current research that would help everyone contextualize the equity work.
- Develop and discuss responses to pushback in advance.

CHALLENGE: COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH DOING EQUITY WORK

Responses:

- Identify resources in Year 1 to confront financial challenges.
- Identify reforms not associated with costs, and begin there.
- Find other schools across the district that will partner in this work and share costs.
- Partner with community-based organizations and/or universities on projects that will improve cultural responsiveness and equity.
- Write for grant funding; approach local foundations to support the work.
- Incorporate cultural responsiveness and equity throughout all of the work that educators and leaders already do (but maintain designated days and times to discuss the work; both approaches are necessary).

PROPERLY HONORING
COMMUNITY-BASED EPISTEMOLOGY

Educators must be aware that they cannot "learn" community-based epistemologies. White teachers should not venture into Indigenous and minoritized communities to "learn about" the student. In other words, it is inappropriate to conduct research on communities. Research activities should be done with great care, and should be led by students, parents, and expert researchers. This is why I suggest that educators advocate for community-based goals: it gives educators a good reason and opportunity to enter and honor Indigenous community spaces. If teachers and principals do decide to venture into the community, they must do so in culturally appropriate ways. Here are just a few suggestions: (1) do not appropriate or attempt to lead the community's struggle, but feel free to support it; (2) decenter schoolcentric reforms; (3) give special reverence to the perspectives of community elders, but deeply honor the youth voices and views as well.

Does Everyone Deserve a "Redemptive Pathway"?

In a recent conversation with my colleague Dr. Peter Demerath (from the University of Minnesota), we discussed some of his racial equity work that happened in Falcon Heights, Minnesota—the city in which Philando Castile was killed by a police officer. After the shooting death of Philando Castile, the city of Falcon Heights established a racial justice commission that was supposed to lead conversations about how to reform policing, and racial bias therein. Dr. Demerath had some discomfort around one of the possible folks who was to also serve on the commission, and he discussed his discomfort with his colleague Kenneth Morris, a renowned attorney and expert. Morris responded to Dr. Demerath's discomfort by saying, "Peter, everyone deserves a 'redemptive pathway.'"

In my works in school districts across the United States, school leaders have held out a similar hope for all of their teachers: "But

Dr. Khalifa, I believe all of my teachers can change for the better." So the *education* "redemptive pathway" gives the opportunity for all teachers and staff to become "right," and to do better by their students; that is, to become more equitable and culturally responsive. I argue that we must believe in the redemptive pathway, and provide such a pathway to all educators. But I also believe that the lives of students and community members must be the deciding factor of when and how we reform schools. In other words, if after opening the redemptive pathway to a particular teacher to no avail— and after mentoring, and modeling, and having data-driven equity conversations about this person's practice and how his or her marginalizing practice is limiting the educational and life opportunities of, for example, Muskogee (Indigenous Native American) male students—the CRSL leader will eventually need to close the redemptive pathway and move in the best interest of students and communities.

"But My School Is Already All Black!": How to Respond

I often encounter educators and leaders in districts and schools that are predominantly minoritized. The conversations often follow a familiar course:

SCHOOL LEADER: But my school is already all Black; so how is this PD relevant to what we do?

MY RESPONSE: I am going to ask a series of questions, but please allow me to finish the questions before you respond because I suspect that you will have a single-word answer: Do you have non-Black teachers? And have *all* of your teachers received anti-oppressive and culturally responsive development? And is it not possible for types of oppression to occur on Black students attending a predominantly Black school? And if you feel the need to compare, can you not compare your

Black students with other students in nearby schools/ districts? And are you not aware that Black students who attend "all-Black schools" often live in communities that have experienced disinvestment, redlining, overpolicing, and so on?

SCHOOL LEADER: No.

MY RESPONSE: It is likely that your school may even need to engage this culturally responsive work more. And, unfortunately, it is also likely that your teachers may *think* they need it less. Thus, I suggest that you be even more intentional about community-based advocacy and outreach, for these students and communities can often be the most vulnerable.

SCHOOL LEADER: But I don't understand, Dr. Khalifa! What I'm saying to you is that we don't have an achievement gap. Our students are all Black!

MY RESPONSE: Should your school success be based on how closely Black students perform in comparison to White students? Or should you not aim for cultural responsiveness for your Black students, despite how they perform in comparison to White students? In other words, let's say for example that the suspension rates and academic achievement of your Black students are on par with nearby White students—does that automatically mean that they are not pressured to leave schools? Think of the dropout rate in your city as you answer that.

Does that mean that students are humanized, and that their self-determination and community-based aspirations are centered by your educators? Remember, culturally responsive schooling is about community engagement, relevant teaching and curriculum, and honoring students and their communities. All of this must be present in your school.

White Students as Reproductive Agents: How to Respond

I earlier mentioned that in one of the more recent equity audits, middle-school White students were espousing some White epistemology and racial bias that older Whites in the community were expressing. For example, some of the young White students were using deficit language to describe how the "new students" (i.e., migrant Latinx families who decided to stay because.of jobs at meat-packing plants and other industry) brought problems into the district. Some of the White students were repeating, almost verbatim, some of the establishment White stereotypical discourses about Black students always being resistant and disobedient. CRSL leaders, and particularly White CRSL leaders, must confront this in their schools.

CRSL school leaders must understand that in the absence of culturally responsive work, even in all-White schools and spaces, White racial frames of White supremacy and White dominance can easily be passed on.[6] Just as there is a need for CRSL work in all-Black schools, so too do all-White schools—or spaces within diverse schools—need this work. Not only can they benefit from US Indigenous, Black, and Latinx epistemologies and frames, but they can become aware of their privilege, and become allies in CRSL work. Many White students will go on to have access to power and positions in society that minoritized students will never have. They must engage in these efforts every bit as much as teachers, leaders, and minoritized students and communities. In sum, it is not about whether or not White students will reproduce things like privilege, access, and power, but about where and for whom they will reproduce.

FINAL VIGNETTE: INTERGENERATIONAL, COMMUNITY-BASED (ANCESTRAL) KNOWLEDGE

I conclude chapter 6 and this book with a description of one of my final visits to the community where this study occurred. The Wilson family invited me into their home with Joe, who had a long history

with the family. During the visit, Joe had a lively exchange with family members about the community's disposition toward "minority families," and about how the school "was on the side of the families." The conversation included a current UAHS female student (De'Janae), her mother (April), and grandmother (Helen)—all of whom had been Joe's students at the school. The mother and grandmother attended UAHS because they did not perform well in public schools, and because of their positive experiences and a sense of belonging at UAHS, they actually requested that De'Janae be sent to this school as well. The vignette illuminates Joe's presence in the community and the trust, rapport, and credibility that Joe had with those he served. Joe's support of community-based knowledge and experiences in school—what some scholars refer to as ancestral knowledge—helped him to understand the community and created community support for his school leadership. Below is an exchange between Joe, Helen and April. Occasionally De'Janae and her little brother De'ante add their thoughts:

JOE: When I got here, it was so bad for the Black families already here. They wanted to kick all of the Blacks and even Latinos out of the district. And when I came, I said, "I'm not having that!" And you've got to let me do what's in the best interest of these families, or I ain't coming.

HELEN: Yup. Because right around that time, Mike had gotten stabbed and Ron was murdered. So the schools just went crazy on us. They kicked me out and they have been doing that for the past thirty years.

JOE: Doing what?

HELEN: Trying to kick Black students out of the district at every opportunity they get. 'Cause when I had her [April] that was their excuse to try to get rid of me. But luckily you opened this school.

APRIL: Well, naw, it ain't only that. I didn't have her [De'Janae] until I left school, but they still kept pressuring me to leave the school too. It's like they hated seeing us but they had to deal with us. But UAHS was better for us—well, way better—because if we stayed at [the traditional high school] then it woulda been bad. I mean, even in the [traditional high school] they were always looking for ways to separate us out from the White students and I don't even know if they knew they were doing it.

JOE: Hell, they knew they were doing it because that's why they called me. But they also called on some of the other Black principals because some of them were part of the problem.

HELEN: Don't even go there! Some of them were worser than the White principals. It's like they had something to prove.

DE'JANAE: Yeah, the principal at [the public high school] was Black, but it's like he's not Black. I didn't like him, but all of the worse White teachers, like, really loved him.

JOE: But what do you think of our school? How could we make it better?

HELEN: Tell him the truth.

DE'JANAE: I like it; like, I can feel like I'm myself and don't have to always be stressed out and on edge. And they [the teachers] act like they care, and they want me there. Like, I ain't gonna lie, I don't like staying after school to finish my homework. But at [the public high school], I used to always be beefin' [at odds] with my teachers, but at UAHS I know y'all care about me so I don't mind y'all being a little harder on me.

DE'ANTE: Yeah, I'm gonna go there next year too. I hate my school now.

This exchange demonstrates the deep relationships that Joe had with those he served. But it also shows his insistence that the school was there to work for community interest and empowerment. Joe was not neutral in this regard; he was an advocate for issues and causes that community members themselves prioritized. This exchange also shows the power and effectiveness of CRSL for minoritized students' sense of belonging and academic success. In many schools, students choose to leave (dropout/pushout) because they face hostile climates and feel unwelcomed. The relationships that Joe had with students and families—which he invested in and encouraged his staff to have—actually changed the community's perception of this school. The students, who had previously been pressured out of the district's traditional schools, now identified as good students who wanted to go to college. Thus, when the positive, humanizing relationships were in place, UAHS students finished school more often, attained better grades, and went on to enroll in postsecondary learning institutions. And perhaps of equal importance, this vignette suggests that the narrative in the community—which informs how students view and engage with schools—had shifted. It now reverberated with what so many students said—"Joe and the teachers at UAHS actually care [about us, our families, our future]."

NEUTRALITY, COLONIZING LEADERSHIP, AND THE CONTINUED OPPRESSION OF OUR YOUTH

This passage between Joe and community members also demonstrates something that has to come to the forefront of school leadership discussions when it comes to serving communities. Communities already have histories and experiences that shape how they see schools. For minoritized communities, these experiences have often not been positive, and that explains why students and communities often mistrust schools and educators. The good news is that by interacting with communities in culturally responsive ways, school leaders can

promote new ways for schools and educators to serve communities. This will lead to new ways that parents, students, and communities experience, and view, schools.

Can Blacks Be Racist? Why Systems Matter

Scholars have found that Indigenous, Black, and Latinx principals lead in different ways than White principals, and in ways that are impactful to both minoritized students and White students. The research is very powerful because it suggests that school districts must use resources to recruit and develop principals from minoritized groups. But it is also important to note that school districts that support the status quo will attempt to find minoritized individuals who will lead schools in ways that maintain current conditions. This chapter's vignette suggests that, while Black principals were hired to deal with problems of racism in the district, some of those Black principals instead reproduced systems of White supremacy and oppression. Others are the true embodiment of culturally responsive leaders. Thus, if there are racist practices in a district, it is necessary that all principals confront racism. *No leader*, despite his or her race, can have a pass on CRSL work. White supremacy, racism, and other systems of oppression will continue to be reproduced if principals are not explicitly anti-oppressive and culturally responsive. In fact, Christine Sleeter and other scholars have discussed necessary attitudinal beliefs of teachers who are committed to cultural responsiveness and educational equity.[7] In figure 6.1, I use Sleeter's work to suggest a number of necessary attitudinal traits of school leaders who hope to be culturally responsive.

CONCLUSION

School leaders must come to terms with the historical experiences of the communities they serve. For many minoritized communities,

FIGURE 6.1 Attitudinal traits of culturally responsive school leaders

- **Courage:** Is willing to make leadership decisions knowing that central district administrators, school boards, union officials, or building staff may not be happy.

- **Connectedness:** Feels connected to community-based causes.

- **Humility:** Constantly looks for signs that she or he is reproducing oppression in the school; will take that information head on, and institutionalize the appropriate anti-oppression reforms.

- **Deference:** Constantly looks for ways to lead with community, and use community-based and Indigenous knowledge to inform school policy and reform.

- **Intolerance:** Refuses to accommodate any forms of oppression in school.

- **Distributive:** Is always looking for ways to shift power and set the agenda for school policy and reform toward not just staff, but community.

- **Decolonizing:** Constantly seeks ways to (a) find, critique, and confront historical oppressive structures, and (b) build/promote structures that embrace community-based epistemologies, behaviors, and perceptions.

- **Humanizing:** Is able to reflect on his/her own aspirations, but is also aware that students and communities have their own Indigenous/ancestral knowledge and aspirations (desires, dreams, and goals apart from those of schools); leaders are willing to place these community-based aspirations at the center of the conversations around school pedagogy, curriculum, and leadership.

these have been histories of oppression and unrecognized agency; schools have often been a part of historically marginalizing those communities. And now many of you are leading those very same schools. What does that mean for your leadership practice? The research in this book and others like it suggest that your leadership must be explicitly and actively anti-oppressive. I have urged here that you seek to understand how you may be continuously contributing to oppression in your schools. Anti-oppressive leadership practices require us to lead schools in ways that confront and resist racism, colonization, and other types of oppression—we know much on how *not* to lead schools. But anti-oppressive leadership, alone, still leaves

unanswered questions about how schools *should* actually be led. For that, I have turned to culturally responsive school leadership.

I have argued that culturally responsive principals have to institutionalize multiple practices, simultaneously. These are practices that many principals have likely *not* learned in their leadership preparation programs. Culturally responsive principals promote schooling practices that ask educators to engage in critical self-reflection and to constantly ask how they have been oppressive to students or communities. Culturally responsive principals also seek to understand—and encourage their teachers and staff to understand—the community's ancestral knowledge, experiences, and perceptions. Principals use this knowledge in multiple ways: to craft schools as a space inclusive of all students; to not only make school climates safe, but also to honor, humanize, and promote *all* student identities; and to build capacity to courageously move toward cultural responsiveness and institutionalize ways that educators use community-based and ancestral knowledge in their curricula and instruction.

But what about community? Community is central to my argument. Culturally responsive school leaders engage communities in nonexoticizing ways; they do not lead teachers in attempting to "train" or study communities; they do not reach out only with school-centric goals or negative news about students. Rather, they establish positive rapport and trusting relationships with communities; they use school resources to establish overlapping spaces wherein both school and community members are comfortable crossing those historical boundaries that have kept them apart; they use community epistemology and elders to craft and revise school policy for mentoring and for oversight of school practices; and perhaps most important, they resist the urge to be neutral or "official" as they enter communities and advocate for community-based goals. It is this way of leading schools in troubled times that will lead to both community empowerment and better schools.