

## Exploring Organizational Leadership for English Learner Equity

Rebecca M. Callahan  
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy  
Population Research Center  
University of Texas-Austin  
[callahan@prc.utexas.edu](mailto:callahan@prc.utexas.edu)  
(512) 471-8347

Anysia P. Mayer  
Department of Advanced Studies  
California State University at Stanislaus  
[apmayer@csustan.edu](mailto:apmayer@csustan.edu)

Anthony H. Johnson  
Department of Advanced Studies  
California State University at Stanislaus  
[Ahjohnson57@csustan.edu](mailto:Ahjohnson57@csustan.edu)

Claudia Ochoa  
Department of Educational Leadership & Policy  
University of Texas-Austin  
[Claudia.ochoa@utexas.edu](mailto:Claudia.ochoa@utexas.edu)

**Words:** 10883

**Tables:** 1

**Figures:** 0

### **Acknowledgements:**

This work was supported by the National Science Foundation, Discovery Research K-12 (DRK-12 1503428), Design Technology in Engineering Education for English Learner Students (Project DTEEL), PI, Callahan, R.M., Co-PI, Crawford, R. In addition, the authors were supported by grant P2CHD042849, *Population Research Center*, awarded to the Population Research Center at The University of Texas at Austin by the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development. Opinions reflect those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the granting agencies.

### **Suggested Citation, APA7:**

Callahan, R.M., Mayer, A.P., Johnson, A., & Ochoa, C. (Forthcoming). Exploring organizational leadership for English learner equity: Teachers' and leaders' understandings of culturally responsive practices through professional development. *Leadership & Policy in Schools*, vv(ii), pp-pp.

### **Abstract:**

In this study, we explore leadership practices in a dual-language elementary school led by three leaders of color committed to the ideals of cultural responsiveness. We employ an organizational leadership lens informed by culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and teaching (CRT) theory. Insights suggest that school leaders and teachers faced considerable challenges that appeared to stem from disparate understandings of how to achieve equity for EL students—challenges that ultimately prevented successful enactment of CRSL within the existing organizational infrastructure. We suggest that the lack of explicit processes of critical consciousness defined the school culture and accountability pressures limited CRSL.

### **Author Bios**

**Rebecca M. Callahan** is an associate professor in Educational Leadership and Policy at the University of Texas Austin. Her research examines the intersection of education and language policy as it relates to the academic preparation of immigrant, language minority adolescents in the transition from high school into young adulthood.

**Anysia P. Mayer** is a professor in Advanced Studies at California State University, Stanislaus. Mayer's current research agenda centers on educational policies and school reform strategies that improve access and equity for underserved students with a focus on creating socially just schools.

**Anthony H. Johnson** is an associate professor in Advanced Studies at California State University, Stanislaus. Johnson's work focuses on educational administration and the development of critically conscious leaders who possess the capacity to reimagine and reform schooling to create an equitable educational experience for all students.

**Claudia M. Ochoa** is a Master's candidate in Educational Policy and Planning in the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy. She currently works as a college completion program coordinator supporting first-generation college aspirants from middle school through college completion. Her research interests are centered on emergent bilinguals and their college access patterns.

## **Exploring Organizational Leadership for English Learner Equity**

### **Abstract**

In this study, we explore leadership practices in a dual-language elementary school led by three leaders of color committed to the ideals of cultural responsiveness. We employ an organizational leadership lens informed by aspects of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL) and teaching (CRT) to interpret interview and observational data collected during the implementation of an equity-oriented engineering program for English learner (EL) students. In the midst of attempting to implement this school-research partnership, pre-existing tensions between the school's leadership and instructional culture rose to the forefront, offering the opportunity to analyze the data with this particular intersectional lens (organizational leadership and CRSL). Thus, subsequent data analysis focused not on program implementation but rather the existing challenges present in the school. Insights from our data suggest that both school leaders and teachers faced considerable challenges that appeared to stem from disparate understandings of how to achieve equity for their EL students. Ultimately, these challenges prevented leaders' successful enactment of CRSL within the existing organizational infrastructure. We suggest that the lack of explicit processes of critical consciousness defined the school culture and that accountability practices limited leaders' ability to implement CRSL.

## **Exploring Organizational Leadership for English Learner Equity**

### **Introduction**

Leadership and equity scholars describe equitable, socially just schools as inclusive and integrated, working to eliminate disparities in achievement for all (Hakuta, 2020; Young, 2011). Equitable schools offer all students, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability or linguistic status, opportunities to engage in rich academic content (Welton et al., 2019)—opportunities that are essential to improving student achievement in meaningful ways.

Importantly, equitable, socially just schools integrate into their communities with purpose (Capper, 2019; Khalifa et al., 2018) and center on culturally responsive teaching (CRT) and school leadership (CRSL) (Khalifa et al., 2016). In their review of the literature, Khalifa and colleagues find that,

“culturally responsive leaders—like antioppressive, transformative, social justice leaders—will challenge teaching and environments that marginalize students of color, and they will also identify, protect, institutionalize, and celebrate all cultural practices from these students” (2016, p. 1278).

Culturally responsive leaders are both aware of and attend to the unique context of their school community. By integrating the cultural conditions of the local context into their practice, culturally responsive leaders build trust and authentic engagement with school staff and families (Santamaría & Santamaría, 2015). For English learner (EL<sup>1</sup>) students, families, and teachers such engagement is key to ensuring language acquisition alongside rigorous content area learning.

---

<sup>1</sup> English learner (EL) refers to those bilingual youth who are identified, upon entry into US K-12 schools, as needing linguistic support services to access academic content on grade level.

In the present study, we use an organizational leadership lens to explore how the school leaders and teachers at one dual language elementary school interpreted and enacted culturally responsive practices towards the goal of EL achievement. Specifically, the present study draws from a larger, multi-year, multi-site intervention and research project designed to broaden achievement and equity for EL students. This study focuses on one high minority, bilingual K-5 elementary school in a southwestern urban center. The partnership between a local university and a neighboring school district was established by researchers, teachers, and school leaders who engaged in the work because they were committed to improving EL equity through instructional practices (Hurie & Callahan, 2019). We pose the following guiding questions:

- (1) In what ways did the school leaders' practices and perceptions of culturally responsive ideals align with teachers' practices and perceptions of the same?*
- (2) How did aspects of the existing organization influence the enactment of culturally responsive ideals?*

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this study we employ an organizational leadership lens to examine the ways that individuals, structures, and organizational cultures interact to shape how CRSL is enacted in a particular context (Hopkins & Woulfin, 2015; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Marion & Gonzales, 2013). Schools are complex organizations where competing mechanisms of structure, agency, and culture continuously act on one another in all aspects of their work (LeChasseur et al., 2016; Lowenhaupt & Reeves, 2015). As organizations, schools consist of individuals who can choose whether or not to exercise agency, defined as their knowledge, skills, and willingness to act within the organization (Mayer et al., 2015). Agency, in turn, is shaped by four constructs: infrastructure, culture, values, and context. School infrastructure (i.e., instructional routines,

testing protocols, staff evaluation processes) defines agency vis-à-vis the definition of formal roles outlined in the organization's policies and procedures (Scott, 2007). School organizational culture comprises the norms and values of the school that can also influence individual actors' behaviors within the school (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2020). To this end, an individual's values, such as their critical consciousness (Gay, 2000), determine their willingness to act. Organizations also function within a larger context that, while external, exerts pressure that individuals actors must address as they do their work (Marion & Gonzales, 2013). Research suggests that policies and programs are filtered through a mediating system of structure, culture, and agency during the implementation process, resulting in substantive changes from the original intent (Mayer et al., 2015; Mayer et al., 2013). We use this lens to frame how the context-specific structures, culture, and agency at the district and school levels affected the ways that school leaders enacted, or were able to enact CRSL at their school.

### **Review of the Literature**

Currently, EL students comprise ten percent of the K-12 US student body. However, EL students often have fewer opportunities to engage in rigorous academic content than their more English proficient peers (Johnson, 2019), especially in STEM (NASEM, 2018). In response, national organizations such as the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) and the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) have charged school leaders with leading for equity to improve EL students' educational experiences. To frame the current inquiry in which our participants navigated leading for equity, we present culturally responsive perspectives in both school leadership and instruction.

### **Culturally Responsive School Leadership**

School leaders play an important role in the implementation of culturally responsive practices in the school and in the classroom. For teachers to enact equity oriented practices, research suggests that school leaders must not only possess but also act on and express certain knowledge and understanding related to leading for equity (Brown et al., 2011; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). CRSL empowers school leaders to ensure equitable instruction for all students and foster teachers' CRT capacity (Shields, 2010; Young, 2011).

Khalifa (2018) outlines four pillars of practice in CRSL: critical self-consciousness, instructional leadership, development of a culturally responsive school culture, and connecting with the community. *Critical self-consciousness* requires that, like their teachers, school leaders must undertake the difficult internal work of reflecting on and unearthing their own biases and mindsets that may reify colonizing norms and white privilege (Buehler, 2013; Picower, 2009; Young, 2011). In CRSL, *instructional leadership* entails not only ongoing supervision of classroom practices but also consistently modeling the culturally responsive behaviors, pedagogies, and ideals expected of teachers. It falls to school leaders to identify, acquire, and support culturally responsive professional development (PD) and curriculum to build teachers' CRT capacity (Riordan et al., 2019). To *develop a culturally responsive school culture*, school leaders must recognize and address a wide range of marginalizing behaviors including gender bias, xenophobia, homophobia, classicism, and racism (Capper, 2019; Scanlan & López, 2012). Educator behaviors such as blaming students and parents for poor academic performance, refusing to recognize race and culture, and justifying classroom and school practices that treat some groups unfairly produce an inequitable school culture (Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Theoharis, 2010). Developing an equitable school culture depends on the leader's agency, time, and autonomy to consistently address inequitable behaviors and attitudes that, when normalized,

can define a school's culture (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Mayer et al., 2013). *Connecting with the community* entails recognizing the cultural wealth of the school's communities and developing meaningful partnerships with parents and community leaders. Such partnerships are mutually beneficial as community members bring expertise and advice to teachers and leaders, enabling them to advocate on behalf of the families they serve (Mehan & Chang, 2011). These four pillars of practice are fundamental to ensuring equity and access for all students, but especially ELs.

Research suggests that while leaders often value aspects of CRSL, they may face challenges in their implementation (Capper, 2019; Welton et al., 2019). For example, instructional leaders might accept or overlook deficit thinking from their teachers (García & Guerra, 2004). Likewise, school leaders must negotiate competing policies from their district office and the state that contradict their efforts to support the implementation of equitable practices (Mayer et al., 2015; Timar, 2004). These authors apply concepts drawn from the broad field of organizational theory (i.e., structure, culture, and agency) and apply them to educational contexts and the work of leaders in particular. In this work, we link the constructs of CRSL to those in organizational theory because as Bush (2015) notes, leadership models tend to apply organizational theory with and without attention to agency, infrastructure, values, culture, and context. Like Ishimaru and Galloway (2014), we seek to expand understanding of the dynamic process of leadership by applying organizational theory via a case study in a particular school.

### **Fostering Equity through Culturally Responsive Ideals**

Moving from the school into the classroom, we turn our attention to EL instructional practices. Traditional EL instructional models often prioritize English proficiency over academics in a way that can jeopardize EL students' academic growth (Hamann & Reeves,



2013) as most mainstream classroom teachers teach EL students STEM content in English with little, if any pedagogical reinforcement (NASEM, 2018). However, research on the bilingual problem-solving advantage (Bialystok, 1999; Cushen & Wiley, 2011) suggests that EL students and other bilinguals, constantly analyzing their worlds from two perspectives, may be predisposed to benefit from an engineering systems approach to thinking. Too often, EL instruction is framed with a deficit perspective, focused on what students lack (English proficiency), rather than the resources, linguistic and otherwise, that they bring to the classroom (Bartlett & García, 2011). EL educators sometimes express what could be termed a “savior complex” (Green & Dantley, 2013) or fall prey to the “*pobrecito syndrome*” (Berzins & López, 2001), in which they take pity on, rather than hold high academic expectations for the EL students in their charge. In contrast, a culturally responsive resource orientation toward EL education optimizes bilinguals’ linguistic and cultural strengths, e.g., the ability to negotiate two languages and two cultures from a young age (Callahan & Obenchain, 2013; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). In particular, EL-focused PD that weds cultural responsiveness with content area instruction has the potential to address educators’ perceptions of their EL students (Callahan, Sampson, et al., 2019). Researchers and practiced educators know that it is not enough to simply employ ‘good teaching’ and expect EL achievement to improve (de Jong & Harper, 2005); educators’ expectations, values, and ideals are also important.

Best practices for teaching EL students have much in common with those outlined in the literature describing culturally responsive ideals and practices (Sleeter, 2012; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Employing terms such as *equity pedagogy* (McGee Banks & Banks, 1995), *culturally relevant pedagogy* (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b), *social justice pedagogy* (Giroux, 1992), and *culturally responsive teaching* (Gay, 2000), equity-oriented scholars refer to a set of teacher

dispositions, pedagogical practices, and curricula that seeks to liberate, educate, and transform communities of students from minoritized groups. A critical consciousness is the primary disposition needed for teachers to create equitable classrooms (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011; Gay, 2000). Educators with a critical consciousness are aware of ways that their racial, ethnic, class, gender, and linguistic identities impact how they think and act. Part of critical consciousness is an ability to reflect on assumptions and critique ways of thinking using a lens that questions power, privilege, and social norms.

A teacher with a critical consciousness is disposed to thinking about equity in terms of advocacy, social change, and providing students with what they need to be successful (Ladson-Billings, 1995a, 1995b). Culturally responsive ideals associated with equity include building on the linguistic and cultural assets students bring to the classroom, differentiating instruction based on students' needs, teaching critical knowledge construction, and connecting curricula to students' communities in ways that allow students to understand their lives outside the classroom (Giroux, 1992; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995; Sleeter, 2012). Finally, the curriculum should integrate and support students' cultural and linguistic heritage, critical ways of thinking, social justice ideologies, and represent multiple perspectives (Gay, 2000; Lucas et al., 2008; McGee Banks & Banks, 1995). Research suggests that these practices may improve the academic achievement and attainment for students from minoritized groups (Milner, 2011). Improving equity for EL students necessitates a careful integration of CRSL with classroom practices described above.

## **Methods**

### **Site Description: Context, Considerations, and Positionality**

As noted earlier, the present study is part of a larger, federally funded project in which a university-based research team developed, piloted, and implemented an inquiry-based, linguistically rich engineering program designed to increase EL students' STEM participation. Employed in the local university's college of education, the PI (Callahan), a former bilingual educator, has worked extensively with local school districts to increase educational equity for bilingual, EL students. The PI and her team identified Consuelo Garcia Elementary School (CGES) as a potential partner due to its high concentration of EL students and its leaders' commitment to linguistic equity. Notably, the project produced a collaboration centered on the school's goals for linguistic enrichment and equity.

In the year preceding project implementation, The PI met with both Principal Harris, a charismatic African-American woman with over ten years of school leadership experience, and Assistant Principal (AP) Paz, a Latinx man in his third year as a school leader, about the potential to expand academic equity for EL students. AP Paz took the lead on bilingual and EL-focused issues, such as the proposed project, although he himself did not hold bilingual certification. These school leaders found the project's goal, to expand EL students' educational equity in STEM, to align with their campus-specific goals of student engagement and cultural responsiveness. The campus was geographically close to an elite magnet high school that rarely accepted CGES applicants and the collaboration offered the potential for change. While initially enthusiastic, prior to committing to the project, Harris and Paz consulted with their colleague, AP Thompson—an African-American woman in her sixth year as a school leader—and several teacher leaders to ensure broad commitment to the project.

During the initial stages of collaboration, the PI documented the equity-focused elements of the school organization and culture as the school leaders discussed ways that they were

implementing CRSL, especially the potential to leverage the community outreach goals. For example, AP Paz noted the connection of the school to its local community, key to leading for social justice and equity (DeMatthews, 2016), when reporting how the school disseminated information to parents as well as the general public:

*Strong campus community has to start with communication....social media...we do Facebook, we do Twitter...the campus website ...We also have call outs [robocalls], we have stickers...we have every form of avenue of communication we can think of ... it's about having information available in a parent's native language... I'm for the most part bilingual- so is our parent support specialist- so us being able to talk to our families in Spanish is very important because roughly 80 percent of our students come from Spanish speaking homes... Something we try to do is embrace culture. Oftentimes, education in a sense does push a predominantly white culture.... Hispanics might have one month, African Americans might have one month and that's sufficient. ...For us, we try to do more and try to involve... that cultural piece ... and yes it [education] is to push us ...but that doesn't mean we're going to push out your culture, your values. (AP Paz).*

Here, this focus on culture and community engagement is one example of how the school leaders appeared poised to enact the ideals of cultural responsiveness. The PI and school leaders alike hoped that the collaboration would support these efforts.

While the present study is decidedly not a program evaluation, we offer details of the program itself in order to contextualize the research. To begin, the PI and her team provided five days of paid, school-wide PD to teachers at the end of the summer, as well as ongoing PD and classroom support throughout the year, focused on culturally responsive best practices for EL students as described previously. The school leaders strongly urged all teachers who taught math

and/or science (n=24) to engage in the training and implementation processes, resulting in nearly 95% participation (22 of 24 teachers). During initial conversations about project implementation, Principal Harris and AP Paz both expressed their intent to participate in the PD along with their teachers; however, at the time of the training both found themselves committed to new teacher onboarding at the site and in the district office (Fieldnotes: April, 2017; August, 2017). This was not entirely surprising as the PI often observed these school leaders challenged with competing demands—from teachers and from the district office.

### **School Site and Participating Educators**

Enrolling more than 650 students, CGES employed 27 teachers in grades K-5, 60 percent of whom held bilingual certification. Although most of the teachers were bilingual or ESL certified, they described varying degrees of in-service PD on language development, several reporting none since they began teaching, making the project's focus especially relevant. For some teachers, certification was over ten years prior (See Table1, interview participants).

CGES enrolled a higher share of Latinx (80 percent) and African American (18 percent) students than did its parent district (58 and eight percent respectively). In addition, nearly all CGES students qualified as Economically Disadvantaged (94 percent), and nearly 70 percent were EL-identified at the time of the study. CGES offered both a one-way Spanish-English Dual Language Education (DLE) and an English as a Second Language (ESL) strand. The stated DLE program mission was to educate students in a multicultural learning environment and encourage learners to celebrate diversity and become responsible global citizens. The DLE program sought to help EL students excel academically while becoming bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural. In the district's 50/50 DLE model, English was used to teach Math, and by extension, Engineering.

<<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>>

**Data Collection**

As part of a larger, federally-funded study, the data collection process spanned three years and followed a multi-site case study protocol; data used in the present study overlapped with data collected around the program implementation conducted by the PI and colleagues. Data included semi-structured interviews, both individual and focus group, as well as field notes and classroom observations. The semi-structured interview format allows the researcher to ask open-ended questions and, when appropriate, probe further relative to the participant's description of the phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Mason, 2004). CGES data collection consisted of 25 individual and four focus group interviews, 27 classroom observations, and field notes collected throughout the project duration at the site. School leader interviews occurred at the culmination of the research partnership and the protocols explored site-based efforts to foster equity-oriented practices as well as school leaders' perceptions of the project implementation. Teacher protocols centered on teachers' perceptions of, beliefs about, and instruction of EL students; teacher interviews were collected between April, Year 2 and August, Year 3.

**Data Analysis**

Multiple data sources offer a thick description of how our participating school leaders and teachers described their own practices as well as their expectations for and beliefs about CRSL. We used an organizational leadership lens to explore how the organization influenced school leaders' and teachers' framing and enactment of culturally responsive ideals. In order to optimize the unique and robust data collected in the process of the larger study, the PI, Callahan invited the paper's coauthors to explore the leadership implications that had begun to emerge in the data. In particular, the linked teacher and school leader data offered a unique opportunity to explore some of the challenges facing leaders of color in linguistically and socially diverse

schools. The team includes Callahan as well as two additional school leadership scholars, one of whom is African-American, a former principal, and former ELD teacher (Johnson). In addition fourth author, Ochoa, a Latina outreach coordinator and graduate research assistant, has worked with the local immigrant community served by CGES. This team's combined expertise added depth to the analysis and expanded the administrative perspective throughout the data analysis process.

First, we transcribed and reviewed the entire corpus of data. Second, independently, then in collaboration, we employed inductive qualitative comparative analysis (Cho & Lee, 2014) to code interview data for concepts related to CRSL and CRT. Next, we met to compare, discuss, and align emergent themes across teacher and school leader data. We then used these schemata to re-examine the data comparing teacher and leader data by theme. Multiple data sources, as well as both independent and collaborative analytic techniques contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of our findings (Saldaña, 2015).

## **Findings**

Here, we organize and present our findings around three key dimensions: *instructional supervision, organizational design, and school culture*. In the following sections, we examine school leaders' and teachers' understanding of CRT in the contexts of instructional supervision, organizational leadership, and culture.

### **Instructional Supervision, Accountability, and Cultural Responsiveness**

The role of instructional leader was one organizational construct that created a context in which teachers' and leaders' practices in relation to cultural responsiveness were at odds with one another. For school leaders, the larger state and district accountability context emerged as a critical, if not all-consuming challenge related to their attempts to support their teachers to enact

cultural responsiveness. In fact, this theme magnified our school leaders' concerns about the interplay between student social class and accountability pressures. Our data suggest that the school leaders' relative lack of knowledge about bilingual and EL programming (compared to their teachers), as well as the research and theory underlying these models, may have limited their ability to fully engage their bilingual faculty. Many of the teachers interviewed (N=11), especially those whose values aligned with the project's goals, expressed frustration that the principals were not using their role as instructional leaders to expand instructional equity via cultural responsiveness. Instead, the teachers saw the school leaders as prioritizing compliance with district-prescribed classroom practices that ran counter to these ideals.

Located in a relatively poor area of the district, CGES was under greater state and district scrutiny than schools in the more affluent parts of the district, as evidenced by the school's ongoing engagement in a formal campus improvement plan with the district (Fieldnotes, April 2017; school and district website). Prior research has found that school leaders who operate under a top-down management model as we observed, have little or no autonomy to enact their own leadership agendas much less buffer their teachers from district mandates (Mayer et al., 2013). In fact, school leaders and teachers both expressed frustration at the administrative team's inability to protect classroom instruction from these external pressures.

For example, all three school leaders acknowledged that the pressure to prepare students for state and district assessments resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum taught at CGES. Here AP Paz refers to state content standards that limited the EL engineering program implementation.

*Unfortunately, how many [state content standards] are tested and within that, the importance of the [state] test results. I mean, I get it, we have to have some type of performance standard, but when we have so many different pieces that have to be taught*



*that unfortunately [for] campuses like ours, where we're monitored just because our students are performing slightly lower, and we have to have certain prescribed curriculum that has to be taught that. That's a hindrance. (AP Paz)*

In the quote that follows AP Thompson appeared to describe her leadership role as being responsible for enforcing mandates regarding district testing, curriculum delivery, and instructional time. In fact, all three school leaders relayed the importance of enforcing strict limits on teachers' use of instructional time. They required that all teachers teach 90 minutes of math and 90 minutes language arts daily; science, history, PE, music and art were all secondary. Only once all other content was covered, could the teachers consider adding in engineering.

*District expectations are the biggest [challenge] because they are very... what's the word; Precise. Some of the things have the curriculum allocate this much time for this ... this much time for that... So those district expectations... limit some of the things that we're able to do. We try to get creative, we try to be as flexible as we can, but sometimes those pieces really, it makes it difficult for us to be flexible ...Because the district sends it to us, and I'm pushing it out to you [the teacher] and I am holding you accountable for that because we [the administrators] are being held accountable for that. So it makes it... hard for us to have autonomy in that area. This is ...the law, this is what we're doing. Not necessarily law, but this is ...what's being told, so this is what we're pushing out. There are some times where we can bargain for some different things, but that's on our end...but then we have to explain why... what we're doing it for; but even with that, there is still not a whole lot of wiggle room (AP Thompson).*

In this excerpt, we call attention to the pressure that AP Thompson feels she must exert on her teachers to follow district mandates in relation to the challenge of implementing CRT. She

struggled for a word and then settled on “*precise*” to describe how teachers must organize their instructional time. Likewise, she uses the term “*law*” to portray how the central office exerts its authority to demand that both teachers and leaders comply. The connotations of rigidity and demand in her word choice merit consideration.

The participating teachers, however, seemed to perceive the school leaders’ choice to enact instructional leadership by focusing on ensuring teachers’ adherence to top-down mandates as being at odds with CRT implementation and their students’ needs. At one point during data collection, the Kindergarten team discovered that their peers at other district schools were not required to implement test preparation drills like they were.

*What we've heard from other kinder teachers [is] that they're not required to do [test prep] ... When we brought it to our administrators, they said...not every school is required to do the same thing, which is obviously an equity concern. .... We've started pushing back a little bit more, asking things like what's the purpose, what's the reason? Why are we pushing standardized assessments for certain schools and not others? ... [test prep] pushes against the learning community and [students'] ability to explore in a more authentic way. (Ms. Winters, Kindergarten)*

Like AP Thompson, Ms. Winters identifies the district policy to closely monitor and limit the curriculum implemented in low-performing schools that serve linguistically, ethnically, and racially diverse students as an equity concern. She describes how her Kindergarten team pushed back against the school leaders’ focus on test preparation to advocate for instructional equity for all their students. The school leaders’ inability, if not unwillingness to protect their students (and teachers) from what the teachers perceived to be inequitable instructional mandates appeared to have defined the school leaders as ineffective instructional leaders in the teachers’ eyes.

Despite CGES's rich linguistic diversity, noted earlier, AP Thompson deferred to the school site bilingual coach rather than enacting the role of instructional leader for her EL students. In fact, she noted that, "[for the] past couple of years, we've had a bilingual coach who's ... helping to pull it together...we try to make sure that we're all ... on the same page as far as our modeling classes, doing the same type of programming But like I said, at least past few years we've had a bilingual coach who's helped..." Later in the interview AP Thompson candidly discussed the challenges she faced as an instructional leader in this context,

*I think from a district level, knowing what program they want us to follow, in bilingual education what model are we actually following? What exactly are we doing? That's been a challenge... We've kind of gotten to the point where it's like, oh, okay, this is what's going to be best for our children, so we're going to focus on doing things this way because it's really kind of hard to know exactly. Yes, there's a lot of fluctuation in that. And so it's really hard to know exactly what. I'm going to be honest, if ...there were a test, I would not pass it right now. I mean I just don't know because they keep changing. And then you have people [teachers] who are not, they're not all trained the same because the expectations [from the district] keep changing. You have some who were trained in this last program that we had, and it's great and they want to do that. But then you have others that are coming in... but it's not even being offered. So how are they supposed to know what to do with the kids? So that makes it really hard. But that's again, that's at the district levels. It's kind of hard to maneuver that.*

In contrast, AP Paz drew on his prior experience as a science coach in an English-only school to provide instructional leadership in science, noting,

*So it's really us developing the support within. Luckily I did a lot of work in my former school within the science curriculum, so I help with our fifth grade teachers when we do planning and when we look at our backward design models to ensure that when we have our common assessments, they've already taken into account what the [state standard] looks like and how it's tested, fortunately, to understand ... what kind of hands-on experience are we gonna get our kids, not worksheets, what 3D piece... that's where they're going to learn the most ... engaged in [the] hands on piece and then taking that 3D and going to 2D to understand what is it going to look like when it's tested.*

However, the bilingual- and ESL-certified teachers, who expressed important knowledge and opinions about how to enact the program's culturally responsive ideals in their classroom contexts reported being unable to share this knowledge with their school leaders in a way that might support EL students' learning. In fact, participating bilingual and ESL certified teachers expressed frustration with the school leaders who, from their perspective, did not fully understand how to support them as they sought to implement aspects of CRT. The participating bilingual teachers in particular reported feeling defeated, having to constantly challenge their school leaders in order to ensure that their bilingual EL students would experience the curricular and instructional equity guaranteed them under federal law (Callahan, DeMatthews, et al., 2019; Callahan & Hopkins, 2017).

*Sometimes you have to advocate for things that are common sense...I understand why some teachers just give up because it really is an uphill battle and you want the best for your kids, but ...your administrators are fighting you [and] other teachers don't understand or don't even have the background, language acquisition [they] think that it's a...one size fits all and it's not that way. (Ms. Trejo, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, bilingual)*

Like Ms. Trejo, other participating teachers expressed concerns about their site leaders' sparse foundation in bilingual programming and CRT. In fact, both bilingual and ESL teachers called out a lack of EL instructional leadership in particular. Mr. Muñoz noted that,

*It's been a challenge because ... none of our administrators have had bilingual education either in college, as a major, or were bilingual teachers... it's a challenge for our campus to ...have strong bilingual education or dual language programs. It's not to say that you can't be strong if you're not a dual language teacher or have [a bilingual] background, but I think maybe it [the bilingual program] wasn't a concern...at our campus it's been more of a literacy [focus].*

Adding later, “*So ...how do we make sure that ... they're teaching...our L1 to strengthen the L2? ... I think a lot of that has to do with the administrative role, being able to go into these classrooms, these bilingual classrooms to make sure that teachers are implementing dual language with fidelity.* (Mr. Muñoz, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, bilingual)

In particular, teachers stressed the importance of fully developing students' primary language (L1) to facilitate second language (L2), English, learning. Here, he reflected several teachers' concerns that their school leaders did not fully understand how to ensure linguistic fidelity.

Like Ms. Trejo, Mr. Muñoz expressed frustration grounded in his bilingual and EL training. These teachers understood that the district mandates enforced by their school leaders stood in stark contrast to what they knew to be sound CRT pedagogy and practice. According to both teachers, the school leaders seemed to lack empirical and theoretical grounding in CRT, bilingual, or EL pedagogy, which may have influenced how these administrators chose to enact their role as instructional leaders. Our data suggest instructional leadership at CGES was further defined by external pressures to enact the state and district accountability mandates.

## **Organizational Leadership**

### ***Leadership outside the Classroom***

Khalifa (2018), Ishimaru and Galloway (2014), Hopkins and Woulfin (2015), and others suggest leaders must create organizational structures, or infrastructure to address equity issues in schools. PD is a critical aspect of school infrastructure as it can help teachers acquire and sustain equity-oriented instructional practices such as CRT to meet the needs of all students. If teachers are to adopt culturally responsive ideals and practices, they must have time to collectively examine their instructional practices and biases. Ultimately, school leaders must create an infrastructure that allows teachers time to engage in ongoing self-reflect through PD, one pathway to critical consciousness. From an organizational leadership perspective, our data suggest that the school leaders' ideas about the infrastructure necessary to support CRT implementation did not match those of their teachers.

When the partnership began, school leaders were optimistic about their ability to support their teachers to engage in the culturally responsive ideals of the EL engineering program. However as the year progressed, the research team observed how the school leaders were required to spend much of their time communicating and enforcing district mandates during teachers' collaborative PD time. The administrative team was also keenly aware of the stress the state and district accountability system put on teachers. The first element of their organizational solution to these stressors was to engage in distributive leadership, positioning teachers as experts, tasked with providing PD for one another. For their second element, the school leaders chose to devote the little non-instructional time remaining to attend to teachers' emotional needs, ensuring for example, that teachers were not only well fed, but also compensated for any work above and beyond the school day. Our data suggest that school leaders' attention to distributive

leadership and teachers' emotional needs seemed to come at the expense of the cultural, contextual, and programmatic concerns that the teachers expressed in our interviews. In fact, our data suggest that a significant mismatch existed between school leaders' organizational priorities and teachers' desires to enact the culturally responsive ideals of the EL engineering program.

### ***School Leaders' Perspectives on Distributive Leadership***

Principal Harris reported that she leveraged collaborative meetings to involve staff and the community in programming and decision-making. She also discussed her attempts to elicit staff input on ideas; however, in closing, she referred back to a top-down management model.

*It's important [to] listen to the teachers and everybody has a voice because you can come up with an idea, but if you don't have the support of the staff, you really can't move it forward. ...So, I incorporate [the] staff ...whenever I come up with [a] program I make sure I have grade level representation at the meetings. As the principal you have to make sure that you collaborate and that you allow your staff's voice to be heard, as well as the students, because at the end of the day, this is all for them. To come up with this program and they don't, they're not interested in it; what does the ideal school look like for you? Programming-wise ....instruction-wise? So it's important to have all the stakeholders involved in that and to listen and to learn and, and to grow. I don't have all the answers and I'll tell them every day, I don't have all the answers at all [I] make mistakes ... Sometimes that the decisions I'm going to make, [I'll make] on my own. I will listen to your input, but the end of the day I'm going to make the final decision. I really don't have any pushback from that because nine times out of 10 I have included them in everything.*

In addition she stressed how important it was to compensate teachers for their time:

*I value their time. ... You know, the teachers don't get paid a lot, so if I'm asking them to do something extra, I will either offer to pay them or offer to feed them or I'll try to get it done during the day. I ask them what time works best for you. (Principal Harris)*

In terms of PD, all three leaders mentioned their organizational efforts to present teacher-led PD in a positive light, reporting that they felt it to be a productive experience for teachers.

*So, the district provides... training for ELLs, but then we also had Mr. Muñoz ... who's a teacher of the year... He came up with a PD where he met with a group of teachers and asked the,... they talked about different strategies for ELLS and how (they) should be incorporated in the classroom and they did learning walks and evaluated each other....So that was something that was done... They can also seek out district (PD) as well, or they can bring (PD) and talk to the faculty about it. (Principal Harris)*

Here, AP Thompson reported that the teachers really enjoyed peer-led PD, saying she encouraged her teachers to go out and learn something new in order to teach it to their peers. In fact, she framed teacher-driven PD in such a way as to suggest that it fostered teacher autonomy.

*We do a lot of things where teachers go out, they find things of interest to them and they bring it back to the staff. 'Hey guys, I really want to do this PD because this is what I learned and I think it's great'. We have a couple of teachers who are all about the technology and they bring back some amazing stuff, [they] turn it around to their colleagues. The teacher will say ... "This is something that I've seen. This is what it looks like in my classroom. Come by and visit'. And they love that. Like they're saying this is cool and this is how it looks in our classroom and this works with the kids that we service. So those are the types of things that we encourage. (AP Thompson)*

Likewise, AP Paz discussed a recent teacher- and counselor-led PD on teacher self-care, noting:



*We have also tried to get ...self-care to our teachers, especially at times that are stressful close to Christmas break or winter break, I should say, or spring break, when emotions are heightened for everyone... the stress level goes up. When you're giving self-care to teachers (that) really helps in the classroom. ....Just last week (lists four teachers and support staff)... pitched in to do a giant self-care day right after [state testing] for our teachers ... making sugar scrubs, making weighted neck socks that had...rice and aroma and how it can really be relieving the stress on your shoulders. They made pancakes. They just did lots of little things to... promote self-care for teachers and really just say- "we're almost there, take care of yourself, let's finish". And so it was an amazing day. [The] Staff was so happy ... we were happy as admin because we even went in and did it with them to .... I mean, that's something we believe in in our admin team...what we call being in the trenches. ...We don't want to be an admin team that's not visible, we want to be there with them, experiencing the things to show them, hey, you know, we're, we're all in this together. (AP Paz)*

Ultimately, allowing teachers to take the lead in choosing PD topics minimized the chance that culturally responsive ideals would be addressed and critical consciousness would be fostered. In addition, AP Paz concluded by stating the school leaders' desire to be 'in the trenches' with their teachers; however, as the following section will show, teachers found it difficult to rectify how one can both be a peer and enforce district mandates.

### ***Teachers' Perspectives on Distributive Leadership***

With the following quotes, we show how the teachers did not seem to share the school leaders' positive views about the potential of teacher-led PD. While Principal Harris suggested that teacher-led PD was effective at changing teachers' practice, Mr. Muñoz, who led the PD, did

not. Instead, he suggested that the school leaders did not do enough to support his CRT-oriented PD efforts and attributed his lack of success to the absence of a collaborative inquiry culture.

*I interviewed [Principal Harris] and talked about it and ...we talked about maybe partnering, but ... it fell through for my project to work in that area because ...I didn't have much buy-in from teachers to... allow me to come into their classrooms and observe them. I think ...it's a culture too... you need to build the culture of being, of accepting people coming in to observe you. And I think as far as... what I worked on this past year, my project, it was focused on literacy and... high yield strategies for ELLs. (Mr. Muñoz, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, bilingual)*

Another teacher, Ms. Trejo, suggested that while structures for collaboration were in place and teachers had time to work together; she felt that collaborative time was not used effectively. Her sentiments seemed to be diametrically opposed to those expressed by the school leaders. Rather than using the time to self-reflect and develop equitable instructional programs, she reported that teachers discussed test preparation practices instead. Rather than finding value in time for collaboration, she expressed discouragement with the school leaders.

*I've shared interactive activities to do with the team, but it gets really disheartening, ... you start questioning ...what's the point of me even meeting, me coming to these planning meetings when the things that I know are not best practices are... promoted? ....It's a waste of my time because I'm not going to be doing 50 page packets. It's boring, and I know that's not the best way for kids to learn, and yet I'm expected to come to the collaboration meetings. Then, when I do contribute ideas and when I share materials, it's too much work for people.... I used to have a sense of responsibility for how other teachers are doing, but at the end of the day that's really not my job, that's not my*

*responsibility. I'm responsible to do the best job that I can for the students that are in my classroom.* (Ms. Trejo, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, bilingual)

Unfortunately, in the area of infrastructure our data suggested notable differences between teacher and administrator perspectives. For the most part, the school leaders were more positive than their teachers about the effectiveness of their practice in supporting CRT implementation. The leaders prioritized providing opportunities for teacher autonomy as the primary vehicle of organizational support. These decisions left teachers like Mr. Muñoz and Ms. Trejo feeling discouraged and unsupported. Our data also suggest that teachers and administrators had similar perspectives on the negative impact of the district's top-down mandates and accountability pressures on the leaders' ability to change the organizational dynamics of the school.

### **School Culture and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

CGES, like all other organizations, had a pre-existing culture or context at the time the research team introduced the CRT-based EL engineering program. Both teachers and leaders had to negotiate aspects of the pre-existing culture as they sought to implement culturally responsive ideals. School leader data suggest that they understood the value of providing teachers with asset-oriented PD, especially as one connected to students' home culture, and this drove their interest in the project. In turn, teacher data suggest that they were largely driven by the prospect of engineering for their EL students. While many initially described feeling intimidated by the project, once they participated in the PD, they wanted their students feel the same level of success and empowerment they themselves had experienced. That said, implementation was not without challenges; several teachers expressed frustration with the lack of time allotted for the engineering lessons. Most importantly, however, our data suggest the school context was largely accountability-oriented; academic achievement was valued over and above community cultural

wealth. Data also suggest that school leaders interpreted their instructional leadership to consist of district policy enforcement rather than focused on culturally responsive ideals, an orientation that seemed to contribute to a context where most teacher-leader interactions took on a supervisory rather than collaborative tone. With this in mind, we turn now to our data exploring culture and CRT in this particular school context.

### ***School Leaders' Understanding of Culturally Responsive Teaching***

As cultural responsiveness was central to the EL engineering program, interviews explored participants' views of and experiences with CRT. Data suggest that school leaders' definitions of CRT and culture did not necessarily align with those of the project or their teachers. Rather, their responses suggested that they might not have been well versed in what CRT looks like in the classroom.

In the following quote, AP Paz described how he understands CRT; he framed the state standards as the curricular starting point and suggested small adjustments to make the curriculum more engaging for the students. He suggested that a teacher could implement CRT by using an actual student's name in a standardized test question, or by using the name of a local restaurant to connect the curriculum to the students' community. In closing, he mentions Ms. Trejo as an exemplary teacher in terms of social justice and CRT.

*We didn't necessarily break it down in the content, so much more teaching styles in a sense and kind of ways to adjust teaching styles to students... So I'd really look at the [state] standards to be able to figure out, you know, how you could ensure that this is very responsive. Just having a student's name within the question ...makes them feel a certain way and ... it's fun for them.... understanding those pieces and how that content can relate to them or how they can be a part of it would be something that, you know, we*

*definitely would try to change. It's more engaging for them. I would say Ms. Trejo is definitely is very progressive in her style. Even in her job interview, you know, she mentioned social justice and I pushed back on her just to really get a feel if she was really sincere or not, and she was able to do that and speak to it very well and it, it's been more than breathtaking to walk into her class and see that piece of, you know, understanding our kids and, and not feeling sorry for them, but having empathy and... continuing to push them to do better and provide support. It's amazing. (AP Paz)*

In another example, AP Thompson echoed AP Paz's comment about the importance of teachers not enacting the *pobrecito* syndrome before discussing her understanding of CRT. Her definition of culture was relatively specific, framed as a set of behavioral norms, phenotypes, and socioeconomic status. AP Thompson noted that while she identifies as African-American, her socioeconomic situation as a child was not the same as that of her students. Here, she seemed to suggest that while she might look like some of her students, she might not have a complete understanding of their culture because her childhood was one of relative economic privilege.

*My job [as an educator] is to say, "I understand where you're coming from....I know you have all of this going on, but I can't change that...but, what I can do is give you more support.... So for me, being culturally responsive is being aware of...those cultural norms for where that child is coming from, what that looks like, know what it means, and then provide the support that you need to... get them where they need to go with whatever those cultural norms that they are dealing with happen to be. I tell people all the time, "Culture [is not] all just based on the color of your skin or where you live." Because a lot of these kids... did not grow up like I did, so I don't have the same culture. I grew up with two... working parents... when I went to school, somebody was there to see me out*

*and when I got home in the afternoon, guess what, somebody was there to make sure I was safe and had something to eat; they don't have that. (AP Thompson)*

Our school leaders tended to frame their personal histories as a point of reference for how they defined culturally responsive practices. Although AP Thompson suggested that she wants her staff to be sensitive to students' needs, she did not mention any particular pedagogical practices aligned to CRT. Likewise, while both suggested that a savior complex would be inappropriate, their statements seemed to suggest deficit perspectives of their students' backgrounds, especially the absence of any attention to EL students' potential assets. For example, AP Thompson seemed to imply that students who do not have a traditional family structure live in unsafe environments.

Principal Harris described cultural responsiveness in teaching math or science as follows:

*So when you're teaching kids about ... financial literacy, why is that important? [You're] relating it to things that they're interested in, like clothes or shoes or video games, right? [You're] creating word problems that incorporate those types of things in there..... Or even taking them after they've learned about culture, financial literacy...to a setting where they would ... take the information that they've learned in the classroom and put it in their real world... taking them to Footlocker or Game Stop. Bringing the banks to them and understanding why it's important to have a bank account and not just hold money ...in a shoe box in your room. Because some of our parents don't feel comfortable ... putting money in a bank account. (Principal Harris)*

In her interview, Principal Harris defined culture in terms of what is interesting to the students outside the classroom, not necessarily students' race and/or heritage language. Asserting that the students frequent middle class oriented stores, she seemed not to recognize the reasons why parents might not have a bank account, suggesting instead a belief in meritocracy. A meritocratic

perspective here would seem to suggest that institutions such as banks are equally accessible to all families regardless of race, social class, or immigration status.

To this point, in response to a question about her colleagues' overall cultural awareness, Ms. Trejo described a one-on-one interaction in which a member of the administrative team displayed what she perceived to be a striking lack of cultural awareness.

*I think that this was out of ignorance, not malintent, but [one school leader] commented about... "these lovely costumes"... someone's wardrobe from a different culture isn't a costume... I just kind of sat there, didn't really say anything. The administrator was just like, oh my gosh, no, it's not that, you know, their, their, um, outfits or dresses or whatever, synonym. (Ms. Trejo, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, bilingual)*

Later in her interview, when describing the challenges facing her campus in ensuring equity for bilingual and EL students, Principal Harris reported that,

*I think for our... bilingual students it's an advantage and then sometimes a disadvantage, right? Because for our students that are bilingual, that can speak both English and Spanish, I always tell them, you are set; ... you have an advantage, you can go get a job. For somebody that only speaks English...you would probably get the job over them because you can communicate with a wider range of people and you should embrace that and not feel ashamed because you're speaking Spanish or because you have an accent.*

In this quote, Principal Harris framed bilingualism both positively and negatively, suggesting that students' linguistic repertoires were relevant to their lives outside of and after the classroom, with the negative aspects of bilingualism related to social stigmas around accents. Notably, Principal Harris did not mention any academic benefits to bilingualism, and her response lacks

any mention of potential structural inequities that may be present on her campus that could limit EL students from fully accessing academic content.

### ***Teachers' Understandings of Culturally Responsive Teaching***

Several teachers suggested that some of their colleagues ascribed to racial stereotyping that reinforced a deficit perspective, while others thought that the accountability culture eclipsed school leaders' attempts to develop equity. For example, Ms. Winters (Kindergarten, ESL) noted

*I ... work to foster independence in my scholars I think that that is a big part of equity. A lot of times, people walk into our building and see the color of our kids' skin and think that they are not capable of being independent...That's really a bold statement, but it's what a lot of people think and it's really, really frustrating ... Even within our campus, I know there are teachers that believe that and act that way towards the students in my classroom and that's a struggle. And so...I try to make sure that [my students] have the tools that they need to prove people wrong, that they are capable of making decisions and showing that learning is a place that they can be successful, and they are-- every day.*

Ms. Winters' views aligned with the project's goals for fostering high academic expectations for EL students; however, she reported that her colleagues were not like-minded, that some teachers held racial/ethnic stereotypes that shaped their beliefs about their students' academic abilities. Referencing struggle, Ms. Winters suggested a school culture that belied an underlying deficit perspective wherein EL students must work harder than their English dominant peers to prove that they deserve access to academically challenging curriculum, too.

As the state and district accountability culture so heavily influenced the leaders' actions, the project's equity focus seemed to have had little effect on the school culture.



*I mean if your leadership doesn't see value or take the time to have those conversations with faculty, then I can see why many people don't bother, especially when they're busy doing other things or when there's so much pressure for students to perform on certain tests. So why teach science when that is not going to be tested? I'm going to focus on math and writing. (Ms. Trejo, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade, Bilingual)*

Ms. Trejo made two important points in this statement. First, she interpreted the lack of active effort by school leaders to promote cultural responsiveness as a sign that they did not value the equity-oriented program or EL students. While our data suggest that the school leaders did in fact value equity, their actions and behaviors often focused on testing rather than instructional rigor. Teachers expressed feeling that school leaders could have done more to actively promote collaboration and inquiry. Second, this quote highlights how the school's de-facto culture was informed by the district's top down management style and broad emphasis on testing. Like the school leaders, Ms. Trejo affirmed that the testing culture influenced how teachers allocated their instructional time. In this case, she implied that while teachers might value the EL engineering program, they would not actively implement it because it did not align with the state and district accountability efforts. In the following quote, Ms. San Miguel likewise described the school culture in terms of teachers' willingness to collaborate and create novel lessons,

*This is the fourth school that I am at, and ... it has a different mindset than the other schools where I have taught. I have noticed that. In the other schools that I've been, teachers are always trying to do, "oh, let's create this. Let's do that." And everybody's trying to make it fancier or, or better or like there is this drive in teachers to think outside the box and do more. I don't see that here unfortunately. So yeah, the mindset, I can see it*

*here. It's like, no, this is the way that I've been [teaching] ... I just want to go back there.*

(Ms. San Miguel, Kindergarten, bilingual)

Likewise, the following quote from another bilingual teacher alternately complements and contrasts with Ms. Trejo's perspective. Here, Ms. Enriquez reported that the teachers had the freedom to implement project lessons, but that as a group they were unified in their commitment to test preparation, suggesting that teacher autonomy can lead to a lack of collaboration.

*I feel like everybody has the choice and freedom to implement their lesson plans as they want to...so the campus community ...is strong in the sense that we know there's some .. things we have to do as a group, testing, but ... how you implement your lessons is really up to you. And sometimes that doesn't lend itself to enough collaboration where, "Oh, how did you do this or how can we fix this?" Or sharing materials and other ideas.*

*You're really just trying it out yourself.* (Ms. Enriquez, 1<sup>st</sup> grade, bilingual)

One possible explanation for the teachers' disappointment in their leaders is that they may have held different expectations for the type of support for CRT practices that the leaders might provide. Our data suggest that teachers interpreted the administrators' choice of the EL engineering project as in support of culturally responsive ideals, while administrators simply saw the program as a way for teachers to learn some new science and math activities that might have had some connection to students' lives.

## Discussion

Insights from this study reveal that aspects of the existing school organization interacted with individual actors' agency to mediate school leaders' attempts to foster CRSL (Author2, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016). Over the course of the project, it became apparent that existing organizational structures limited teachers' ability to enact CRT, much less reflect in the ways

necessary to develop critical consciousness (DeMatthews & Izquierdo, 2018; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2020). In order to enable teachers to enact equitable practices, the school leaders would have needed to change existing organizational structures and prioritize CRSL in the face of district accountability pressures (Khalifa, 2016). Lastly, external pressures from the district occupied any space that the school leaders might have used to develop CRSL within the school.

## **EL Equity through Culturally Responsive Teaching and Leadership**

### ***Culturally Responsive Organizational Leadership***

Ultimately, our findings suggest that while our focal leaders may have been aware of the unique context of their school community as indicated by their willingness to engage with the project, they did not necessarily enact their agency to attend to this unique context to foster culturally relevant ideals and practices. Notably, we found little alignment between teachers' and leaders' understandings of cultural responsiveness, a mismatch that resulted in teachers and leaders working towards separate goals—enactment of culturally responsive pedagogies on the one hand and compliance with the district's accountability metrics, on the other.

We acknowledge that the participating school leaders juggled competing demands on their time and energy. State and district mandates endlessly emerged that required the school leaders' attention and prevented them from enacting CRSL in a way that would support their teachers to implement equitable practices. It is noteworthy to recognize that these pressures emerged the first day of the summer PD, when the three leaders reported they would be unable to attend any of the sessions. It was during the summer PD that teachers began to create a common understanding of culturally responsive and equitable practices for instruction. In short, the teachers began to develop a culture separate from their school leaders. This was the first of several instances we observed that contributed to the mismatch between teachers' and leaders'

goals. District-imposed demands on the school site (i.e., mandating instructional time for test preparation) further reduced the school leaders' autonomy, such that even if the school leaders had possessed the willingness and capacity for CRSL, they lacked the time and autonomy to do so. To foster culturally responsive practices, leaders must facilitate and model reflective behaviors; they must possess, prioritize and act on their knowledge as it relates to equity. Here, we revisit Khalifa's (2018) four pillars of CRSL: critical self-consciousness, instructional leadership, developing a culturally responsive culture, and connecting with the community.

**Critical Self-Consciousness.** As with the participating teachers, little to no evidence emerged to suggest the dispositions or unique leadership practices that would lend towards advocating to liberate members of the minoritized EL student community (Gay, 2000). The contrast between the school leaders' espoused values and their (in)actions shows how competing forces demanded they prioritize other aspects of school leadership (Schein, 2004). Leaders and teachers together must do the same critical internal work to unearth the biases and mindsets that reinforce the status quo. Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) suggest that critical consciousness is the primary disposition necessary for teachers to create equitable classrooms. So, while teachers easily discussed the external barriers that prevented them from implementing the program, the teachers and leaders together needed to engage collaboratively in the internal work required to recognize they were working at cross purposes. This internal, reflective work of developing an equity mindset is essential if educators hope to dismantle the organizational structures that perpetuate educational inequity and reach critical consciousness.

**Instructional Leadership.** Drawing from Khalifa (2018), we suggest that CRSL at the organizational level would have increased considerably if school leaders had monitored classrooms on a daily basis and modeled culturally responsive behaviors rather than choosing to

enact traditional top-down leadership roles understood to be the norm in this particular district context (Riordan et al., 2019). Other researchers find that in contexts, like this southern state, where assessment dominates the organizational culture of schooling, a culture of compliance prevails. In a compliance culture actors often vacillate between espoused and enacted values (Schein, 2004). In addition, external policy demands placed on the school leaders may have limited their agency, causing them to accept or overlook potential deficit thinking from their teachers (García & Guerra, 2004). To this end, modeling CRSL behaviors could have helped the school leaders and their teachers develop a mutual understanding of supports necessary to enact equitable instruction and culturally responsive ideals.

**Developing a Culturally Responsive School Culture.** When school leaders engage in an ongoing process of recognizing and addressing marginalizing behaviors, they cultivate a culturally responsive culture. Our school leaders could have taken the opportunity to engage in the summer PD, allowing them to collaborate with their teachers to build a more responsive school culture (Capper, 2019; Scanlan & López, 2012). In this study, teachers expressed frustration with school leaders' enforcement of district policies that contradicted culturally responsive ideals. By creating systems in the school to allow for greater engagement, the leaders could have reduced teachers' frustration, and in doing so, improved the school climate.

**Connecting with Community.** While all three school leaders were well intentioned (i.e., AP Paz' earlier discussion of outreach) ultimately, the EL engineering program's focus on equitable instruction faltered without a clear, shared ideal of community engagement. Possibly due to the lack of supportive organizational infrastructure, this resulted in a missed opportunity to gather expertise from families and the community (Mehan & Chang, 2011). Broader

community feedback may have provided a catalyst for change and/or garnered support for the work being done inside of the school.

### **Conclusions & Implications**

In conclusion, we suggest that state and district factors, exacerbated by certain contextual conditions of the school and its infrastructure, mediated the impact of our project. Most notably, a lack of any explicit systems to foster critical consciousness defined the school's daily activities. Developing critical consciousness would both prompt and allow teachers and school leaders to examine their respective practices and biases. District pressures around testing (i.e., curricular narrowing, the policing of instructional practices) resulted in a school infrastructure inhospitable to fostering culturally responsive ideals (Weiner & Woulfin, 2017; Woulfin, 2016). Developing critical consciousness would both prompt and allow teachers and school leaders to examine their respective practices and biases.

As researchers, it was our initial hope that CGES stakeholders (teachers, school leaders) by virtue of their diverse backgrounds and commitment to bilingual EL instruction would be aligned in the core aspects of CRT and CRSL. In fact, we found no lack of effort or intent by either group as they worked diligently to serve all students, EL and otherwise, on their campus. However, the two groups lacked shared goals regarding EL achievement; while both clearly desired greater equity, there was no clear path forward to achieve it. While these organizational conditions are not uncommon and likely existed prior to the study, as researchers we recognize that we may have also contributed to this mismatch by offering PD that did not require school leaders to participate (although they were invited). Their absence precluded the opportunity to develop a shared understanding of cultural responsiveness and EL equity.

The insights presented here have implications for leadership in high-minoritized schools. Leaders attempting to implement CRSL should first identify existing challenges within a school's infrastructure and cultural conditions that may limit their agency and their teachers' agency. By definition, CRSL challenges the status quo; as a result, school leaders will want to continuously address these any issues as they emerge. Our work points to the importance of a mutually developed critical consciousness and coherent organizational systems in order to counterbalance toxic external pressures. Lastly, incorporating other stakeholders (families, community members) would provide additional expertise, perspectives, and support to sustain the program and implement change.

We conclude that until one is truly able to understand and embody equity in terms of cultural responsiveness, one cannot truly embrace an equity culture to eliminate disparities through action. Additionally, until school leaders as well as teachers are given the time, space, and support to develop critical equity consciousness we should expect little, if any, true change.

**Table 1: Interview Participants**

<b>Last Name</b>	<b>First Name</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>Bilingual*</b>
SanMiguel	Bella	K	F	Latinx	1
Winters	Michaela	K	F	White	0
Enriquez	Veronica	1	F	Latinx	1
Correa	Kathy	2	F	Latinx	1
Durante	Kimberly	2	F	White	1
Preston	Anna	3	F	White	0
Trejo	Alicia	3	F	Latinx	1
Zapata	Laura	3	F	White	0
Cuellar	Manuel	4	M	Latinx	0
Nieto	Rosa	4	F	Latinx	1
Muñoz	Jonathan	5	M	Latinx	1
Harris	Vivienne	Principal	F	African-American	0
Paz	Peter	VP	M	Latinx	0
Thompson	Sheneka	VP	F	African-American	0

\*Bilingual indicates bilingual certified teacher in a bilingual-instruction classroom.



### References

- Bartlett, L., & García, O. (2011). *Additive Schooling in Subtractive Times: Bilingual Education and Dominican Immigrant Youth in the Heights*. Vanderbilt University Press.
- Berzins, M. E., & López, A. E. (2001). Starting Off Right: Planting the Seeds for Biliteracy. In M. Reyes & J. Halcon (Eds.), *The Best For Our Children: Critical Perspectives in Literacy for Latino Students* (pp. 81–95). Teachers College Press.
- Bialystok, E. (1999). Cognitive Complexity and Attentional Control in the Bilingual Mind. *Child Development*, 70(3), 636–644. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8624.00046>
- Brown-Jeffy, S., & Cooper, J. E. (2011). Toward a Conceptual Framework of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: An Overview of the Conceptual and Theoretical Literature. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 38(1), 65–84. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23479642>
- Brown, K. M., Benkovitz, J., Muttillio, A., & Urban, T. (2011). Leading Schools of Excellence and Equity: Documenting Effective Strategies in Closing Achievement Gaps. *Teachers College Record*, 113(1), 57–96.
- Buehler, J. (2013). ‘There’s a problem, and we’ve got to face it’: how staff members wrestled with race in an urban high school. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(5), 629–652. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2011.646256>
- Bush, T. (2015). Organisation theory in education: how does it inform school leadership? *Journal of Organizational Theory in Education*, 1(1), 35–47.
- Callahan, R. M., DeMatthews, D. E., & Reyes, P. (2019). The Impact of Brown on EL Students: Addressing Linguistic and Educational Rights Through School Leadership Practice and Preparation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 14(4), 281–307. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775119878464>
- Callahan, R. M., & Hopkins, M. (2017). Using ESSA to improve secondary English learners’ opportunities to learn through course taking. *Journal of School Leadership*, 27(5), 755–766.
- Callahan, R. M., & Obenchain, K. M. (2013). Bridging Worlds in the Social Studies Classroom: Teachers’ Practices and Latino Immigrant Youths’ Civic and Political Development. *Sociological Studies of Children and Youth*, 16, 97–123.
- Callahan, R. M., Sampson, V., & Rivale, S. (2019). Activating Bilingual English Language Learners’ Strengths in Science: The Pedagogy of Argument Driven Inquiry (ADI). In L. C. de Oliveira, K. Obenchain, R. Kenney, & A. Oliveira (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching the Content Areas to English Language Learners in Secondary Schools*.
- Capper, C. A. (2019). *Organizational Theory for Equity and Diversity: Leading Integrated, Socially Just Education*. Routledge.
- Cho, J. Y., & Lee, E.-H. (2014). Reducing confusion about grounded theory and qualitative content analysis: Similarities and differences. *The qualitative report*, 19(32), 1.
- Cushen, P. J., & Wiley, J. (2011). Aha! Voila! Eureka! Bilingualism and insightful problem solving. *Learning and Individual Differences*, 21(4), 458–462.
- de Jong, E. J., & Harper, C. A. (2005). Preparing Mainstream Teachers for English Language Learners: Is Being a Good Teacher Good Enough? *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 32(2), 101–124.
- DeMatthews, D. E. (2016). Competing priorities and challenges: Principal leadership for social justice along the US-Mexico border. *Teachers College Record*, 118(11), 1–26.

- DeMatthews, D. E., & Izquierdo, E. (2018). The Importance of Principals Supporting Dual Language Education: A Social Justice Leadership Framework. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 17(1), 53-70. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1282365>
- DeMatthews, D. E., & Izquierdo, E. (2020). Leadership for Social Justice and Sustainability: A Historical Case Study of a High-Performing Dual Language School along the U.S.-Mexico Border. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 25(2), 164-182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2019.1704629>
- Galloway, M. K., & Ishimaru, A. M. (2020). Leading Equity Teams: The Role of Formal Leaders in Building Organizational Capacity for Equity. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 25(2), 107-125. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2019.1699413>
- García, S. B., & Guerra, P. L. (2004). Deconstructing Deficit Thinking: Working with Educators to Create More Equitable Learning Environments. *Education and Urban Society*, 36(2), 150-168. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124503261322>
- Gay, G. (2000). *Culturally responsive teaching: Theory, research, and practice*. Teachers College Press.
- Giroux, H. A. (1992). *Border crossings: Cultural workers and the politics of education*. Routledge.
- Green, T. L., & Dantley, M. E. (2013). The Great White Hope? Examining the White Privilege and Epistemology of an Urban High School Principal. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 16(2), 82-92. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458913487038>
- Hakuta, K. (2020). A Policy History of Leadership Dilemmas In English Learner Education. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 19(1), 6-9. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2020.1714665>
- Hamann, E. T., & Reeves, J. (2013). Interrupting the Professional Schism That Allows Less Successful Educational Practices With ELLs to Persist. *Theory into Practice*, 52(2), 81-88. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405841.2013.770325>
- Hopkins, M. B., & Woulfin, S. L. (2015). School system (re)design: Developing educational infrastructures to support school leadership and teaching practice. *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(4), 371-377. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10833-015-9260-6>
- Hurie, A. H., & Callahan, R. M. (2019). Integration as Perpetuation: Learning from Race Evasive Approaches to ESL Program Reform. *Teachers College Record*, 121(9).
- Ishimaru, A. M., & Galloway, M. K. (2014). Beyond Individual Effectiveness: Conceptualizing Organizational Leadership for Equity. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 13(1), 93-146. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2014.890733>
- Johnson, A. (2019). The Effects of English Learner Classification on High School Graduation and College Attendance. *AERA Open*, 5(2), 2332858419850801. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2332858419850801>
- Khalifa, M. A. (2018). *Culturally responsive school leadership*. Harvard Education Press.
- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally Responsive School Leadership. *Review of Educational Research*, 86(4), 1272-1311. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383>
- Khalifa, M. A., Khalil, D., Marsh, T. E. J., & Halloran, C. (2018). Toward an Indigenous, Decolonizing School Leadership: A Literature Review. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 55(4), 571-614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18809348>

- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (2nd Edition ed.). Sage Publications.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995a). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into Practice*, 34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405849509543675>
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1995b). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal*, 32(3), 465-491. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00028312032003465>
- LeChasseur, K., Mayer, A., Welton, A., & Donaldson, M. (2016). Situating teacher inquiry: a micropolitical perspective. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 27(2), 255-274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2015.1021818>
- Lewis, A. E., & Diamond, J. B. (2015). *Despite the best intentions: How racial inequality thrives in good schools*. Oxford University Press.
- Lowenhaupt, R., & Reeves, T. (2015). Toward a Theory of School Capacity in New Immigrant Destinations: Instructional and Organizational Considerations. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 14(3), 308-340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15700763.2015.1021052>
- Lucas, T., Villegas, A. M., & Freedson-Gonzalez, M. (2008). Linguistically Responsive Teacher Education: Preparing Classroom Teachers to Teach English Language Learners. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 59(4), 361-373. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022487108322110>
- Marion, R., & Gonzales, L. D. (2013). *Leadership in education: Organizational theory for the practitioner*. Waveland Press.
- Mason, J. (2004). Semi-structured interview. In M. Lewis-Beck, A. E. Bryman, & T. F. Liao (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of social science research methods* Sage Publications.
- Mayer, A., Woulfin, S., & Warhol, L. (2015). Moving the center of expertise: Applying a communities of practice framework to understand coaching in urban school reform. *Journal of Educational Change*, 16(1), 101-123.
- Mayer, A. P., Donaldson, M. L., LeChasseur, K., Welton, A. D., & Cobb, C. D. (2013). Negotiating site-based management and expanded teacher decision making: A case study of six urban schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 49(5), 695-731.
- McGee Banks, C. A., & Banks, J. A. (1995). Equity pedagogy: An essential component of multicultural education. *Theory into Practice*, 34(3), 152-158.
- Mehan, H. B., & Chang, G. C. (2011). Is it wrong for us to want good things? The origins of Gompers Charter Middle School. *Journal of Educational Change*, 12(1), 47-70.
- Milner, H. R. (2011). Culturally relevant pedagogy in a diverse urban classroom. *The Urban Review*, 43(1), 66-89.
- NASEM. (2018). *English Learners in STEM Subjects: Transforming Classrooms, Schools, and Lives*. <https://doi.org/10.17226/25182>
- Picower, B. (2009). The unexamined Whiteness of teaching: how White teachers maintain and enact dominant racial ideologies. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 12(2), 197-215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320902995475>
- Riordan, M., Klein, E. J., & Gaynor, C. (2019). Teaching for Equity and Deeper Learning: How Does Professional Learning Transfer to Teachers' Practice and Influence Students' Experiences? *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 52(2-3), 327-345. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2019.1647808>
- Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. (Third ed.). Sage.
- Santamaría, L. J., & Santamaría, A. P. (2015). Counteracting Educational Injustice with Applied Critical Leadership: Culturally Responsive Practices Promoting Sustainable Change

- [educational leadership, diversity, case study, New Zealand, United States]. 2015, 17(1), 21. <https://doi.org/10.18251/ijme.v17i1.1013>
- Scanlan, M., & López, F. (2012). ¡Vamos! How school leaders promote equity and excellence for bilingual students. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 583-625.
- Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership*. Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Scott, W. R. (2007). *Institutions and organizations: Ideas and interests*. Sage.
- Shields, C. M. (2010). Transformative Leadership: Working for Equity in Diverse Contexts. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(4), 558-589. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x10375609>
- Sleeter, C. E. (2012). Confronting the Marginalization of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. *Urban Education*, 47(3), 562-584. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911431472>
- Suárez-Orozco, C., Abo-Zena, M. M., & Marks, A. K. (2015). *Transitions: The development of children of immigrants*. NYU Press.
- Theoharis, G. (2010). Disrupting injustice: Principals narrate the strategies they use to improve their schools and advance social justice. *Teachers College Record*, 112(1), 331-373.
- Timar, T. B. (2004). School governance and oversight in California: Shaping the landscape of equity and adequacy. *Teachers College Record*, 106(1), 2057-2080.
- Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). Preparing culturally responsive teachers: Rethinking the curriculum. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 53(1), 20-32.
- Weiner, J., M., & Woulfin, S. L. (2017). Controlled autonomy: novice principals' schema for district control and school autonomy. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 55(3), 334-350. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-03-2016-0032>
- Welton, A., Diem, S., & Carpenter, B. W. (2019). Negotiating the politics of Antiracist leadership: The challenges of leading under the predominance of whiteness. *Urban Education*, 54(5), 627-630.
- Woulfin, S. L. (2016). Duet or Duel? A Portrait of Two Logics of Reading Instruction in an Urban School District. *American Journal of Education*, 122(3), 337-365. <https://doi.org/10.1086/685848>
- Young, E. Y. (2011). The Four Personae of Racism: Educators' (Mis)Understanding of Individual Vs. Systemic Racism. *Urban Education*, 46(6), 1433-1460. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085911413145>