A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: HOW BLACK LEADERS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLES IN THE SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR STUDENTS

Ray Williams

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: HOW BLACK LEADERS PERCEIVE THEIR ROLES IN THE SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR STUDENTS

by

Ray Williams

A Dissertation

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this work to my grandmother, Nancy Lee Harris, who taught me that no matter how much you accumulate, or how famous you get your name will allow go further than you ever do. She was the strongest woman I ever knew, and to this day her values of working hard, and believing in God still live within me today. I always wanted to make her proud of me which is why I dedicated this symbol of the hardest I ever had to work in my life to her.

I love you grandma
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First, I would like to thank the ten leaders who made this research study possible. I am incredibly thankful because many of these leaders were in the beginning phases of in-person schooling for the first time in over fifteen months, so they were swamped. Second, they shared very personal and intimate thoughts and life experiences that gave this research the breadth and depth it needed. Third, I have to express my gratitude to the leaders who not only permitted me to interview them but took the time to give me advice and offer readers that would help me further myself on my journey to becoming a school leader.

Next, I want to thank those who proofread and edited my document. The list is too long to name off names, but I thank everyone that dedicated their time and energy to helping me during this process. I have to give my advisor and mentor, Dr. Steven Nelson, a large amount of credit. In the beginning, he told me this would be a long process, and I told him I am not the most intelligent student, but I would work hard. Dr. Nelson gave me the guidance and motivation to see this process to the end, and he also introduced me to my new passion, Critical Race Theory, and Critical Consciousness. Dr. Nelson is one of the most respected and educated professional men I have ever met, which is one more reason I did not want to fail.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family. My wife for talking to one on the phone all those nights when I had to drive back and forth between Memphis and Fulton. My father used to ride to Memphis with me and sit in the car because he knew I was tired after working and training all day, even though he had to be up at 3 am the next day to be
ready for work. Also, keeping me motivated when I had to start over from scratch after a complete crash and burn in my pre-proposal.

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Abstract

Paulo Freire (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed explained how his theory of critical consciousness could liberate the low-income Brazilian workers. Freire's theory was that his people should be able to see their culture in their education and be equipped with the tools to analyze the world around them and find their sources of oppression. This research study uses Roderick J. Watts’ theory of Sociopolitical Development (SPD) is a branch of Freire's critical consciousness theory. This research study examines the critical consciousness of ten (10) Black urban school leaders by utilizing a semi-structured interview process to explore their educational and life experiences. This process reveals how their past experiences help them build and shape the school communities they supervise and help prepare Black students to navigate and negotiate oppressive forces in their world. Last, utilizing the thematic analysis to categorize and code the data collected allowed common themes to be developed. These codes illustrated the elements that these ten leaders viewed as oppressive forces that their school communities must overcome and how they teach their students to handle such oppressive forces later in life.
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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

Shaun is a 17-year old student attending Banneker High School in Atlanta, Georgia, with several choices regarding his future. Shaun is being raised by his grandparents, who continuously remind him that education is his way to a better life. Like many teenagers in the 21st century, he does not like school and feels that his best way out of his circumstances is to play football and basketball with hopes of one day playing professionally. Even though Shaun is a good student with a 3.0 average, he struggles with standardized testing and is considering the junior college route to postsecondary education. Shaun's team performed well during the regular season and lost in the semi-finals of the playoffs. Shaun injured his knee during his final game and lost all of his college offers. Shaun became depressed because he felt his opportunities for success were gone. However, Coach Young, the 11th and 12th-grade assistant principal and position coach, takes Shaun under his wing. Shaun realized that his education should not be his backup plan. Coach Young recognized Shaun's potential and mentors him by introducing him to players from his neighborhood. Shaun was shocked to discover that some of the men attended college and earned master's degrees. Through this, Shaun learned that these men, with similar financial backgrounds, used athletics to pursue degrees. He also found out that most of these men had great careers that allowed them to take care of their families and give back to their communities. Armed with a new outlook on his situation, Shaun applied to Georgia State University and planned to walk on to the football team. Even though Shaun is a fictitious person, in my current career, I coached several players that were Shaun-like.
In my current career, which requires recruiting high school athletes, I have access to high schools and high school students throughout the state. First, I noticed schools in the northeastern region (predominately white) of the state had more resources and better teacher retention rates than those located in the Delta region (predominately Black). More than half of new teachers in the Delta region left the profession within five years (Mississippi Department of Education, 2015). In 2017, the Mississippi Department of Education acknowledged the critical shortage of teachers in the Delta Region by offering more alternate route opportunities for teaching certification (Mississippi Department of Education, 2017). According to Sablan (2018), the teacher shortage disproportionately impacted the Delta region and exemplified school funding issues where schools in Black communities lack the financial, human, and physical resources founds in other regions of the state.

Days after this conversation, I tried to conceptualize the information within the context of school leadership. Freire (1968) said that as long as the oppressed remain unaware of the causes of their condition, they fatalistically "accept" their exploitation (p. 46). Research and educational data suggest that Black communities have very little input in their children's education (Dixson, Buras, & Jeffers, 2015; Nelson et al., 2019). This statement suggested a systemic cultural prejudice that became operationalized in social policy and everyday institutional practices, giving way to the process(es) of dehumanization (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Freire (2018) explained dehumanization impacts those whose humanity has been stolen and those who have taken it.

Furthermore, Dumas and Nelson (2016) suggested that prejudice signifies negative attitudes that can lead to discrimination. Dehumanization is the construction of
the other as not human, as less than human, and therefore undeserving of the emotional and moral recognition accorded to those whose shared humanity is understood (Dumas & Nelson, 2016). Research suggested that as Black and leaders of color face profound obstacles in positions of authority and thrive by drawing upon their racial and ethnic identity (Ospina & Foldy, 2009).

In education, many discourses were created about the Black community. This research study examined the discourse of the need for Black leadership in urban communities. There were almost as many different definitions of leadership as persons who have attempted to define the concept (Bass, 1990). Northouse (2019) contended that there were four components of leadership: process, influence, the group context, and goals. First, leadership is a process. This means that anyone classified as a leader must understand that all team members or employees are not the same. Second, a leader must have influence. A leader must possess the ability to inspire team members or employees into action. Third, leadership occurs within a group context. An effective leader most often can lead a large group of people towards a common goal. Last, a leader is aware that goal attainment is a part of the leadership process. For this research study, leadership is defined as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.

The central aim of this research study was to explore how Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students? The subtopics of this study involved how Black school leaders utilized critical consciousness theory to empower students/teachers/community members and described the experiences of interest convergence in leadership. According to Albritton (2012), Black school leaders must
understand the sociopolitical policies and practices that oppress Black men and women. This research was focused on the way schools leaders used Critical Consciousness (CC) in leading schools in urban communities. Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1973) defined critical consciousness as, "learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality" (p. 35). Paulo Freire (1973) developed the concept of critical consciousness in Brazil, which he found oppressive to large segments of the population and, particularly the poor. Freire (1973) observed that oppression was reflected in high rates of functional illiteracy; lack of critical literacy to read social conditions that perpetuate injustice and marginalization among the oppressed, such as the inequitable distribution of resources and access to opportunity. The two core elements of CC were critical reflection and critical action (Watts et al., 2011). Critical reflection referred to the process of people coming to see critically the way they exist in the world (Freire 2018). This included perceptions of contradictions, such as recognition that the U.S. is a resource-rich and democratic country characterized by systemic and pervasive economic inequalities. Critical action is the behavioral element of CC and referred to measures designed to counter or respond to injustice in a liberatory manner (Watts et al., 2011). Critical consciousness was initially developed to understand how oppressed or marginalized people read their world, and subsequent scholarship almost exclusively applied this framework with oppressed or marginalized populations (Jemal, 2017). Although this was not a historical analysis, it drew upon the existing literature on critical consciences, critical leadership, social identity theory, and how these theories intersected with education.
The more radical the person is, the more fully he or she enters into reality so that, knowing it better, he or she can transform it. This individual is not afraid to confront, listen, and see the world unveiled. This person is not scared to meet the people or enter into a dialogue with them. This person does not consider himself or herself the proprietor of the history of all people or the liberator of the oppressed. However, he or she does commit himself or herself, within history, to fight at their side (Freire, 2018, p. xx).

This study explored how Black leaders perceived their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students. This study allowed school leaders in urban communities the opportunity to express how they deconstructed and challenged the inequities that existed in their community. Critical consciousness (CC) comprised critical reflection and critical action components (Diemer et al., 2016). In recent years, scholars in the United States built on Freire’s (YEAR) framework to explore how youth develop and incorporate an awareness of structural inequality and oppression into their understanding of economic and social realities (Diemer & Li, 2011).

There were apparent disparities in education, and this investigation sought to uncover how ten Black leaders address disparities. Mathews et al. (2020) mentioned aversive racism, a modern form of racism that avoids outright white supremacy while more insidiously rationalizing white dominance. According to Critical Race Theory scholars Dumas and Nelson (2016) and Yosso (2005), new educational policies were often formulated to highlight the shortcomings of Black students and the leaders that serve them. Acknowledging that racism still exists in today's educational system, this study investigated Black leaders’ professional experiences.
Background of the Study

According to W.E.B Du Bois (1968), "the problem of the 20th century will be the problem of the color line" (p. xx). Subsequently, race continued to be a fault line in the American modern-day educational system (Alexander, 2010; Amurao, 2002). DuBois (year) was accurate in his prediction because, in present-day education practice and praxis, racism still exists in each facet (administration, staffing, curriculum, and discipline policies). Omi and Winant (1994) implied that social factors were inserted in a structure permeated with racial meanings that affect how we comprehend, explain, and act in the world. They indicated that despite its uncertainties and contradictions, the concept of race plays a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world in which we live (Omi & Winant, 1994). Theorists argued that education was used as a tool of oppression to teach Black people that their culture is inferior to the dominant White culture (Freire, 2018; hooks, 1981; Woodson, 1990). Critical consciousness was initially conceptualized and developed as a pedagogical method to foster Brazilian peasants' ability to (1) read the economic, political, historical, and social forces that contribute to inequitable social conditions and (2) become empowered to change these conditions (Friere, 1973; Friere, 2018). Recent research suggested that higher critical consciousness among youth was related to improved mental health, better occupational outcomes, and increased participation in more traditional types of civic engagement such as voting (Diemer & Blustein, 2006; Diemer & Li, 2011; Zimmerman & Zahnisz, 1991). This study utilized critical consciousness to represent the readiness and ability to see how power and privilege were at work to systematically advantage some while disadvantaging others (Radd & Kramer, 2016). This practice was essential because inequality and
oppression resulted from social constructions. They were perpetuated and maintained through dominant ideologies that portrayed systems, institutions, practices, and discourses as rational, natural, logical, fair, and right (Blanchett, 2006). Still, these philosophies and discourses contained contradictions and inaccuracies (Hernández et al., 2005). It demanded that leaders identify (potential) unintended consequences, underlying assumptions, unspoken belief systems, and values. It further required that leaders investigated who held power, how it was used, by which individuals and groups, and with what effect, and further, who is dismissed and relegated as power is wielded for other purposes and benefits. In all these investigations, the leader must filter the inquiry through essential questions about who would benefit, who was disadvantaged in each scenario, and where various groups' interests converged and diverged.

According to Kohli et al. (2019), whites believe they are superior. U.S. education reinforced this ideology while simultaneously internalizing self-hatred within Black students. Black school leaders educate Black students and teach students that there is cultural wealth in the Black community (Yosso, 2005).

Because communities and individuals are all significantly impacted by race, it is only logical to assume leadership is as well (Yanow, 2009). For all these reasons, Black administrators in urban education often focus on organizational trends that amplify the social identity of the communities they serve (Saz-Carranza & Ospina, 2010). The school climate these leaders cultivate helped us understand how individuals and communities resisted, or in some cases transformed, these inequities (Yosso, 2005). Consequently, Hogg and Van Knippenberg (2003) acknowledged that most work on leadership overlooked the fact that leaders lead groups of people and are also members of these
groups. Brewer and Gardner (1996) further suggested that groups authorized those most prototypical to be their leaders, particularly when group members have reliable group identification. In essence, critical consciousness represented the capacity to reflect and act upon one's socio-political environment critically (Kieffer, 2008). This means learning to see, in the mundane particulars of ordinary lives, how history works, how received ways of thinking and feeling serves to perpetuate existing structures of inequality.

Black school leaders turn systems of oppression into useful mechanisms for constructive change (Alston, 2007). These leaders were exquisitely aware of the importance of perceptions in an order where race matters; they transformed awareness into strength because they were attuned to how others viewed them (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Diemer et al., 2010). Black leaders were also concerned with the collective interests of people of African descent. They understood that African Americans relied on social rather than economic resources and coalitional strategies rather than individual power since they tend to have access to fewer resources (Carlton-LaNey, 2001).

Sites of Research

In the southeastern region of the United States, Atlanta, Georgia, and New Orleans, Louisiana, are heralded as the meccas of Black education. According to Kruse (2005), Atlanta experienced a significant surge in the Black population after the emancipation of Black peoples in the South. Most Black families wanted their children to receive an education which led to Atlanta having a substantial population of educated Black people. In addition to being two cities excelling in Black education, they are also two cities enriched with Black culture and history. According to Yosso (2005), various
forms of capital were nurtured through cultural wealth, including aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital. These forms of capital drew on the knowledge Black students bring from their homes and communities into the classroom. CC is a psychosomatic construct that unites remote aspects of adult meaning-making with more public elements of adults’ actions in the broader social world (source). Freire (2018) observed that as oppressed peoples' thinking about and understanding their social conditions developed, their views of society also developed. This was one of the primary reasons Freire (1973) emphasized allowing CC to intersect other areas to allow oppressed people to challenge and deconstruct societal oppression (e.g., art, dance, theatre, music).

A Critical Consciousness approach to education involved a commitment to develop schools that acknowledge the multiple advantages of the Black community to serve a larger purpose of struggle toward social and racial justice (Yosso, 2005). A critical approach to discourse analysis looks for various forms of power, offering a way to describe, interpret, and explain social relationships related to who possesses power and how it is used (Rogers & Mosley, 2006). Gee (2005) states that discourse analysis should always be critical because language-in-use is still part and parcel of, and partially constitutive of, specific social practices. Social practices often times have implications for inherently political things such as status, solidarity, the distribution of social goods, and power.

The vision statements of both school districts selected for this study advocate the development of elements that lead to a growth in cultural capital: civic, social, economic success, community, and family engagement. This research study examined how past life
experiences of ten Black leaders motivate them to build their school communities. The
school leader's perspective is essential because racism overtly shaped U.S. social
institutions (Yosso, 2005). Likewise, Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) suggested that the
knowledge of the upper and middle classes was considered capital valuable to a
hierarchical society. Bourdieu's (year) described cultural capital as a condition that
contributes to students from higher socio-economic backgrounds to success and make
greater educational gains when compared to their counterparts raised in households with
fewer economic resources. This enabled individuals from higher socio-economic
backgrounds to maintain their class positions and legitimated the dominant views they
typically held. Therefore, leaving no space in the current school climate/culture for Black
students to express themselves. Cultural capital is intertwined with significant cultural
practices in DiMaggio's (year) interpretation. The particular traits, tastes, and styles
constitutive of cultural capital are arbitrary, in the sense that status honor may be
connected with any quality shared by a multiplicity (Lareau & Weininger, 2003). CC
allowed leaders to express how their environment allowed students to voice their
opinions and express themselves.

These cities have rich histories of Black activism and leadership. For example, the
Atlanta Negro Voters League, formed in 1949 with the backing of powerful Black
financial interests. Black leaders such as John Wesley Dobbs and Austin Walden gained a
level of political power that would have been unthinkable in more rural sections of the
Deep South (Kruse, 2005). In a movement in the late 1980s, protests ramped up at School
Board meetings to remove the names of slave traders, enslavers, and Confederate figures,
at more than 40 schools, most of which predominantly enrolled black student (Sanburn,
The protests were led by Carl Galmon and Malcolm Suber (Maton, 2008). Watts and Flanagan et al. (2009) noted that critically conscious leaders sought opportunities to develop awareness and skills that facilitate effectively addressing issues of social injustice, such as engaging in difficult dialogues that may cause discomfort. This was a vital intended skill of CC because it teaches Black communities how to recognize, resist, and reform systems of oppression and discrimination.

Statement of the Problem

The problem that this research study attempted to explore was the narrative of how do Black leaders perceive their roles within the sociopolitical development of their students? This research sought to address the research question by examining the critical consciousness of school leaders. Critical consciousness (CC) was the focal point of this research study because CC can vary from person to person based on their lived experiences. Educational reformers have long claimed school leadership is a crucial component of any education reform, secondary only to the very act of teaching (Leithwood et al., 2004). There is no such thing as a neutral educational process. Education either functions as an instrument used to facilitate the integration of the younger generations, or it becomes "the practice of freedom" (Freire, 2018, p. xx). Leaders of schools in urban communities attempt to foster a school climate that allows students to develop an awareness of the present system, which teaches them how to deal critically and creatively with reality (Freire, 2018).

Critical Consciousness pedagogy is defined as levels of consciousness and action that produce a potential for change at one or more socio-ecosystemic (e.g., individual, institutional) levels (Jemal, 2017). Black school leaders must have high levels of
transformative potential that critically reflects on the conditions that shape/her life and actively work with themselves and others to change problematic terms (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002; Jemal 2017). This phenomenon was selected to describe how Black leaders navigate the educational system. Critical consciousness, or its derivative transformative potential, can be used to inform the structure and content of urban education to address oppressive conditions for those most impacted (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Freire (2018) determined that people needed to think critically about oppressive realities and challenge unequal social conditions to reclaim humanity.

Personal Significance

This study was significant because it allowed school leaders to voice their feelings about leading schools in underfunded and under resourced communities. This study will display the pressures leaders experience from both external and internal factors. Lastly, this study how different leaders get similar results, creating a school environment that fosters Black students' growth and development.

Theoretical Significance

This research study petitioned the narrative that most Black leaders function in the same matter. This study attempted to contribute to the ideology that Black leaders' CC levels vary based on their lived experiences and upbringing. CC research produced several frameworks concerned with how marginalized people contend with their social conditions and development agency to address and overcome structural constraints. CC shared theoretical ground with the construct of psychological empowerment, the process by which people and communities work to gain mastery over issues of concern to them (Rappaport, 1987). Empowered outcomes include perceptions of control in relevant
domains, decision-making, and problem-solving skills (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991). Thus, CC and psychological empowerment focus on critical reflection, agency, and critical action (Watts et al., 2011). The distinction is emphasized with empowerment focusing more on the agency and action components. CC highlights the awareness of structural injustice and taking action to change systemic inequality (Diemer, 2009).

Additionally, research indicated that each areas of critical consciousness are associated with improved occupational and educational outcomes. Diemer and Blustein (2006) found that urban adolescents with higher levels of critical reflection had greater clarity and stability in their vocational goals, interests, and talents. Besides, those with higher socio-political efficacy placed greater importance on work, had better attitudes towards work, and were more effective in their career planning and more connected to their occupational futures. A coalescing base of theoretical and empirical scholarship suggested that CC was a powerful resource for marginalized youth and associated with higher levels of school and extracurricular engagement as well as postsecondary plans (Luginbuhl et al., 2016; McWhirter and McWhirter, 2016; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). CC enabled researchers to compare how different leaders utilize the two components of the theoretical framework. The first component, critical reflection, referred to the youth's ability to analyze current social realities critically and recognize how social, economic, and political conditions limit access to opportunity and perpetuate injustice (Mustakova-Possardt, 1998). The second component of critical consciousness, critical action, described the extent to which individuals participate in individual or collective action (SOURCE). According to Diemer et al. (2006), previous research has operationalized these components of critical consciousness about the community and societal domains.
Critical consciousness should apply to any system involved in youth. CC also recognized that these leaders were not all the same, and varying life experiences contribute to the creation of their consciousness. A further complexity of CC was that it may manifest in nuanced ways due to individual experiences with the marginalization of various identity-based intersectionalities. That is, one might develop a high level of CC in one area of life (e.g., critical reflection and action regarding race-based inequities) while having relatively lower levels of critical reflection and action in another (e.g., gender-based inequities).

Youth learn the principles of democracy and their place in society through the proximal settings in which they are embedded such as families, classrooms, and schools (Diemer et al. 2009; Mustakova-Possardt, 1998; Valaitis, 2002). This research study sought to explore how Black leaders employed CC as a tool to be more effective leaders.

Critical consciousness developed within the specific contexts that shaped and constrained individual lives (Freire, 2018). It follows that levels of CC vary not only from person to person but also within an individual across different domains, depending on the kinds of marginalization that people experience (Galston, 1989; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Practical Significance

Critical consciousness served as an essential source of human agency among people who face marginalizing structural conditions and more limited access to opportunity (Freire, 2018; Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1997). This research study examined how Black leaders problematized issues around them. The benefits of this research study to the educational community could include how to help educators use their CC competencies to impact student achievement and outcomes. This was an important part of
being a leader because schools were more diverse than ever. School leaders serve students from various backgrounds and identities such as Black/White binary, LGBTQIA, ability, and home life.

Problematization is a way to challenge accepted explanations for those phenomena assumed as reasonable and logical in daily life, but which make people's lives difficult, painful, or unfair (Montero, 2009). Problematization is an entire process; one cannot be partially problematized or problematized now and then regarding a specific issue. It is a process happening within relationships (Freire, 2018; Montero, 2009). Problematization begins when a question or action induces doubt about a specific version or explanation for a fact or event in everyday life. This could be called the "trigger effect", a critical analysis process of that circumstance (Diemer, 2009; Montero, 2009). Therefore, problematizing leads to a subprocess of denaturalizing what has been defined and imposed as the natural way for things to be. It is the consideration of something created according to specific interests as if it were essential. This entails breaking some habits deeply socialized and some deeply embedded beliefs (Montero, 2009).

CC allows Black leaders the opportunity to display the critical analysis of their environment, but it also allows a glimpse of how their beliefs and background aid them in their decision-making. According to Montero (2009), problematizing questions are specific to each group situation and discussion; there cannot be a standard sort of question. Problematizing questions may be posted within the dialog at any moment. They do not have a fixed moment; they should seize the opportunity when verbal or action discourses show the presence of ideas that maintain privileges, oppression, and exclusion (Friere, 2000). CC can also encourage dialogue between leaders and the people they
serve. Montero (2009) and Diemer (2009) suggested facilitators should not monopolize the discourse. They should allow opportunities to speak to every participant and never impose their viewpoints, although they have the right to present them. Both the participants and the external or internal agents facilitating discussions should depart from the notion that all people have opinions, that knowledge can be of different kinds and is present in all people, and that everyone has feelings. CC is vital because specific structures are inherent in education that do not have to be taught and are accepted by society. Problematization sensitizes, denaturalizes, and establishes the cognitive and affective bases necessary to motivate changes, thus inducing concrete transforming actions (Freire, 1973).

The object of problematization is the circumstance, fact, or mode of knowing to produce stereotyped explanations or versions perpetuating certain conditions affecting specific groups or individuals (Montero, 2009). CC has the potential to alter the developmental trajectories of both marginalized youth and their communities, who disproportionately experience oppressive social structures, including limited access to educational and health-related resources (Garcia Coll et al., 1996). Specifically, CC may mitigate the degree to which these contextual barriers translate to less favorable educational and health-related outcomes. (Diemer et al., 2016). In terms of individual outcomes, marginalized youth with higher levels of CC has been shown to have higher levels of mental health (Zimmerman & Zahniser, 1991), academic engagement and achievement (Cabrera et al., 2014), enrollment in higher education (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013), career development in adolescence (Diemer et al., 2010), attainment of higher-paying and higher-status occupations in adulthood (Diemer et al., 2009), and practice
healthier sexual decision-making (Campbell & MacPhail, 2002). The practical mechanisms that link the development of CC to these desirable outcomes include improved skills in strategic thinking, communication, and increased social capital via relationships with fellow activists (Kirshner, 2007), and a better understanding of structural barriers and more agency to negotiate them, increasing capacity to resolve developmental challenges despite societal constraints (Luginbuhl et al., 2016).

Purpose Statement

This study aims to examine how Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical developments of their students.

Research Question

1. How do Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students?

Organization of the Study

The study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter one serves as an introduction to the research question: "How do Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students?" Chapter two included a review of literature and previously conducted research about the topic. The methodology, chapter three, provided an overview of the case study method. Additional information provided included a description of the setting, participant selection process, and how the study was conducted. Chapter Four contained the findings. Chapter Five included a discussion of the results, their relationship to existing research, implications for practice, and identifiable topics for further study.
Conclusion

Youth's critical consciousness was essential from a societal perspective, as it can play a central role in addressing unjust systems, challenging marginalization in society, and promoting positive community development (Montero, 2009). Freire (1973) referred to this ability as critical consciousness (CC) and built a social movement for literacy and empowerment around it. This research study explored how the experiences of these Black leaders impacted their work as educators. This research study seeks to examine how Black leaders play an intricate role in the development of students and help preserve or even empower communities.
Chapter Two

Introduction

History of Critical Consciousness

Brazilian philosopher-educator Paulo Freire saw a problem in his people being educated. Freire did not like the ideology of his people’s culture, background, and lifestyle being excluded from their education. Freire’s (1970) work on critical consciousness emerged primarily from his experiences as a literacy educator for adult laborers in Brazil. A growing body of theoretical and empirical scholarship described adolescence as a necessary period for the development of critical consciousness. Specifically, adolescence was theorized as a period in which individuals actively seek out new understandings of the world and their role in it (Erikson, 1968). According to Freire (1970), the children of the parents living in poverty were not being educated to allow the holistic growth of a human being. The exploration included recognizing the effects of sociopolitical forces such as racism and poverty upon their lives and communities (Coll et al., 1996). Freire coined the term conscientização to refer to an individual’s engagement in reflection and action upon the world to transform it. The development during adolescence of formal reasoning and abstract thinking skills increased young people’s capacity to engage in critical reflection by strengthening their ability to recognize and understand the causes and consequences of sociopolitical forces (Harrell, 2000; Hughes & Bigler, 2010; Quintana, 2008; Seaton, 2010). Adolescence also represented an opportunity for growth in young people’s feelings of political agency and engagement in critical action. Adolescents often possessed greater autonomy than children (but not yet the responsibilities of full adulthood) to participate in a variety of forms of civic and political engagement such as protests, demonstrations, boycotts, and
political advocacy (Arnett, 2014; Frumkin & Jastrzab, 2011; McAdam, 1986). Freire did not believe in the "no excuses" teaching model; he believed that students should learn from teachers and contribute to the classroom learning environment (Seider, 2021). Therefore, the traditional education system framed Freire’s position as controversial on the development of critical consciousness in the classroom. Freire suggested that a teacher should not be viewed as the gatekeeper of knowledge, but a classroom was a space where knowledge and life experiences could be shared between the teacher and pupil. His education model suggested teachers had a role in initiating their students into developing criticality and teachers had a responsibility to themselves and their profession to develop as critically reflective practitioners (Benade, 2016).

Freire (1970) argued that to overcome the situation of oppression, the oppressed must first know that they are being oppressed, then must critically recognize its causes so that through transforming action, they can create a new situation. In other words, one of Freire’s (1970) goals was to help facilitate people living in poverty to advocate for themselves. One of the unique aspects of Freire’s approach was in the act of liberating people; he allowed them to do it in their way. Additionally, Freire (1970) discovered that his students were motivated by their determination to understand their social conditions and take action to transform them. As a result, Freire (1970) used multiple conduits to liberate Brazilian workers and students: art, dance, music, literature, and other cultural aspects of Brazilian life to form resistance.

Critical consciousness has three main components: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. First, Freire’s (1970) critical reflection concept referred to the ability to name and analyze forces of inequality. It extended beyond basic knowledge
and encompassed an ability to analyze the root of oppression as situated in structural and institutional forces. This analytical tool revealed to oppressed and marginalized communities the source of their oppression and created space to question inequities. According to Gordon (2013), awareness of systemic racism entailed recognizing how particular policies, laws, and cultural practices can advance or obstruct the success of particular racial/ethnic groups over others. Second, political efficacy was the internal belief that one can affect social change. This sense of agency was a critical component of sociopolitical development as it helped move individuals or collectives from knowledge (social analysis) to a willingness and desire to act. This component of critical consciousness was most important because one of the primary aims of any system of oppression was reinforcing the narrative of the dominant group. For example, in America white privilege and white supremacy can be found in all major American institutions: housing, education, policing, military, health care. Third, Freire's (1970) concept of critical action referred to an individual's actual engagement in events and activities intended to challenge these oppressive forces and structures. This action can take a wide range of individual or collective forms. According to Freire (1970), these three processes must take place for liberation to happen, but there must also be a driving force behind these processes. Freire suggested that critical curiosity motivated the individual. Freire (1998) contended that critical curiosity was necessary for an actual praxis, or mutually reinforcing relationship between social analysis and societal involvement, to occur. For Freire (1970), critical curiosity (or epistemological curiosity) expressly referred to a deep desire to learn more about issues of power, oppression, and inequality and a willingness to question and engage critically with one's beliefs and dominant society (Shor, 1992).
Freire (1998) argued that curiosity presupposed social analysis, but that such critical curiosity would also lead, "to an awareness of the world but also to a thorough, scientific knowledge of it" (p. 66) that would ultimately result in individuals, “not only... adapt[ing] to the world but especially [intervening] to recreate, and to transform it” (p. 66).

Critical Consciousness in Urban Education

Critical consciousness was vital in urban education and the Black community because white supremacy and racism were so deeply rooted in American society (Dumas, 2016). America must be viewed through a critically conscious lens to understand what the Black community has endured (Shawn Ginwright, Roddrick Watts, Matthew Diemer, and Scott Seider). Critical consciousness allowed marginalized communities to pinpoint the source of their oppression and empowered them with the ability to combat oppression. According to Yosso (2001), the five fundamental tenets of critical race theory were counter-storytelling, the permanence of racism, whiteness as property, interest convergence, and the critique of liberalism. In order to truly critically reflect on the world around you, there must be an understanding of the five tenets of critical race theory. This understanding permitted communities to compare their oppression or inequities from contemporary and historical lenses. Freire (1970) posited that engaging in critical reflection was necessary for individuals to guide their critical action appropriately. Strong critical reflection skills may motivate and direct social action among young people (Diemer & Rapa, 2016).

Urban education is a victim of this country's denial of resources in Black communities. Therefore, having critically conscious leaders in schools that cater to Black communities was essential for the growth and development of Black students. For youth
from marginalized racial and economic groups, critical consciousness was associated with a host of positive outcomes, including school motivation and engagement (O'Connor, 1997), resilience (Ginwright, 2010), occupational attainment (Rapa, Diemer, & Ba~n~ales, 2018), civic activism (Watts, Diemer & Voight, 2011), and voting behavior (Diemer & Li, 2011). Watts (2011) and Seider (2020) conducted studies with high school students, examining their critical consciousness levels. They discovered that critical consciousness served as an antidote to oppression by replacing marginalized adolescents' feelings of isolation and self-blame for challenges they encounter with a sense of agency and engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice. Critical consciousness served as a form of "psychological armor" for youth against the adverse effects of oppressive social forces such as racial injustice (Phan, 2010). Therefore, the leadership Black students were exposed to was vital to their sociopolitical development. Clark (2019) defined sociopolitical development as the process of understanding and taking action against systems of oppression, which was associated with crucial outcomes for youth.

In urban education, a leader's critical consciousness informed instructional practices and contributed to the dismantling subjective discipline and community programs. Watts and Flanagan (2007) created a sociopolitical development model that worked well with Black students. Their model consisted of four distinct yet related components: 1) social analysis; 2) agency; 3) opportunity structures; and 4) societal involvement. Leaders in urban education may consider students’ homelives which may be financially stable or where students work to help support the household. A handful of empirical studies offer support for this proposed reciprocal relationship: critical
reflection, critical action, academic achievement, self-esteem (Diemer et al., 2017; Hope & Jagers, 2014).

Black leaders in urban education often have similar life experiences as their students. Therefore, subjectivity in discipline is lessened because a leader who can empathize with their students will look deeper into students' behavior. For example, a leader who grew up in poverty may have a better understanding or be more conscious about particular types of students. Instead of harsh discipline, the leader may offer the student mentorship to help. According to Dumas (2016), Black students [male] are often seen and treated older than they are. Additionally, Dumas (2016) suggested Black boys and girls received disproportion punishment when compared to their peers of other races and ethnicities. A growing body of research indicated that white teachers were often intimidated by Black students. CRT research indicated that the more a student is subjected to discipline at school, the more likely they will not graduate high school (Dumas, 2016). Leaders with high critical consciousness know the value of self-advocacy and advocate for themselves. Freire (1970) noted that motivation was a significant component in youth development. As long as students feel their voice matters, they can affect change and be viewed as equals. Black culture was framed as an enemy of education, and traditional schooling models often approve policies to punish students for displaying too much Black culture in schools (Watts, 2011). Therefore, critically conscious leaders must create opportunities and spaces through curriculum and programs to expose their students to their history. One of Yosso (2005) six forms of cultural capital is resistance capital, which has its foundations in communities of color, coincide with Black leaders working to incorporate Black history, imagines and examples of Black
success, or de-stigmatizing the negative connection between Black culture and education in their student's everyday curriculum.

Why Critical Consciousness is Important in Leadership?

Communities of color were often victims of deficit research, which framed urban education as an enemy of education. One way to counteract this type of research was by having Black leaders in place with high levels of critical consciousness. These leaders typically knew the strengths and weaknesses of their school communities and the areas in which their school serves. This knowledge allowed Black school leaders the ability to create school communities in which students will not only grow academically but also as activists against oppression (Diemer, 2017; Watts, 2011). There is a growing body of scholarship on youth sociopolitical development, the processes by which individuals come to understand, analyze, and take action against systems of oppression (Diemer et al., 2017; Watts & Flanagan, 2007). This same body of research also acknowledged that Black students exposed to leadership with high levels of critical consciousness scored higher on the Critical Consciousness Scale (Diemer, 2017). According to a study conducted by Clark and Sieder (2020), adolescents exhibited positive, significant, linear growth in curiosity over four years attending high schools with missions that included goals around fostering youth sociopolitical development. This study focused on marginalized youth attending sociopolitically oriented schools; one might reasonably speculate that the programming and practices at these schools contributed to adolescents' growth in curiosity by taking advantage of their developing interest in questions of power, inequity, and injustice (Clark & Sieder, 2020). Leader's critical consciousness
may directly affect the sociopolitical development of students in oppressed and marginalized communities (Diemer, 2020; Erikson, 1968; Watts, 2011).

Another advantage of high critical consciousness in leaders was that they often attempt to avoid high discipline and low reward educational models. For example, Freire (1970) advocated collaborative school and classroom environments. He contended that the teacher could learn just as much from the student. Freire urged educators to focus on generative themes, by which he meant topics that evolved from the conversations and questions of students themselves (Shor, 1992). These conversations allowed students to see the power of their voice and strengthen the relationship between educators and students.

Moreover, students who were not subjected to high levels of discipline were generally more motivated to attend and be engaged at school. Hope and Banales (2018) suggested that student motivation is more optimistic for student outcomes. It was unclear whether one dimension of critical consciousness was especially catalytic in the sociopolitical development process, but it was well established in the motivation literature that attitudes precede behaviors (Hope and Banales, 2018). This was vital in the dismantling of systems of oppression because sociopolitical development in marginalized youth is associated with several key outcomes, including school engagement (O’Connor, 1997), occupational attainment (Diemer & Li, 2015), and academic achievement (Dee & Penner, 2017). In 2020, there was an uproar from white parents all over the country regarding the teaching of critical race theory in schools. There was also a massive pushback from Black leaders because white parents’ views of critical race theory; Black leaders were calling for culturally relevant teaching. According
to Sieder, Clark and Grave (2019), youth critical consciousness was predictive of several positive outcomes.

Advantages of High Levels of Sociopolitical Development in Students

O'Connor (1997) reported that six high achieving, low-income African American adolescents characterized their recognition of racial and economic injustice as a motivational factor contributing to their academic achievement. This is one of many studies illustrating the positive effects of high sociopolitical development. As Watts et al. (2011), noted Black students and communities were often made to believe they were responsible for their oppression and marginalization. This system was further compounded by the negative stigma associated with Black culture. Critical consciousness scholars contended that the systemic injustices and inequities played a role in the disengagement and hopelessness in youth from racially and economically marginalized groups. Sleeter (2011) reported that traditional Euro-American education was damaging to communities of color because this form of education continues the mission of enslavers in the early day of the slave trade; it continued to deny Black students to learn and celebrate their history. Therefore, more student-oriented leaders tended to focus on a curriculum around diversity, interacting with different identity groups, and understanding the effects of discrimination and racism (Sleeter, 2011). As stated earlier, Black leaders also provided students with opportunity structures in school; this structure can also benefit the staff. For example, permitting early release so students can work and help at home provided opportunities for teachers to have a glimpse at what students in low-income areas must endure and attend school. White parents and policymakers ended the conversation to include Black culture in schools; the issue never taught critical race
theory. White parents do not want their kids to be educated on the murderous history of white people in America. Facts such as this prove that Black people continued to battle white supremacy in America because because associations between ethnic studies programs and higher academic engagement, enhanced literacy skills, more positive attitudes toward learning, a higher sense of agency, and higher academic achievement (Sleeter, 2011).

Critical Care in Urban Education

Due to the harsh realities many Black students must face on a daily basis; it is imperative that urban education leaders understand the importance of Critical Care. According to, Antrop-Gonzales and De Jesus (2006), critical care theory was an ambiguous term that meant different things to different theorists and was often interpreted through culturally, racially and gender biased lenses. Depending on the age of the leader and their staff, caring could look different depending on the individuals. McKamey (2004) argued that caring is not a common reference in literature point and often does not even hold the same meaning within literature. However, in education there was one element that seemed to be left out of critical care research, and that was the fact that leadership had the ability to shape and build the culture of the school. Furthermore, adding to the importance of critical consciousness in urban education because it permits leadership to incorporate their past life and educational experiences into the school community that they build.

Many caring theorists argued that experiences of caring within the student/leader relationship were essential to student engagement and suggest that the educational success of youth of color in particular often hinges on being engaged in a caring
relationship with an adult at school. One of the key components of critical consciousness was critical reflection, which can be utilized as a tool to determine what the strengths of a community lie and use these strengths in the education of students of color. McKamey (2004) suggested three theories of caring exist, which were characterized by key assumptions. Teacher caring theory assumed a causal relationship between student achievement and caring behavior on the part of the teacher. This relationship was important because in a school community, anyone with daily contact with a child can be considered a teacher. In urban areas for example, most of the support staff in school resided in the community that the school served. Caring community theory acknowledged the capacity and obligation of schools and communities to provide caring contexts for students who may lack caring experiences in their lives. Difference theory recognized varied definitions of caring among social, ethnic, class and gender groups and argued that schools which incorporate these differences were more inclusive of students. As stated earlier, critical consciousness had many benefits in urban education because critical consciousness allowed leaders to create school settings based on their definitions of caring, and their own personal experiences.

By combining caring theory literature and research such as instrumental relationships (Stanton-Salazar, 2001) and high academic expectations (Katz, 1999) through the scholarship on caring in education and its intersections critical consciousness, can also empower urban leaders to focus more on the strengths of their communities and not just what is wrong. A large body of research on urban education often centered around deficit based approaches, but the benefit of critical care was that it allowed urban leadership to bypass the what is wrong narrative and focus on the strengths of the
students and the community. By utilizing the personal and community-based components of critical care, urban leadership would also be finding new avenues to empower their students and communities.

Critical Consciousness and Blacks in Education

The growth and demand for Black culture in education triggered a protest from white communities all over the country, particularly in the southeastern region. White parents protested not including Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the curriculum. CRT scholars pushed back by indicating that the information that white parents protested was actually Black history as it happened, and not how traditionally Euro-American history with omitted specific historical facts (Seider, 2020). According to Crenshaw (2001), CRT was applicable to education, psychology, cultural studies, political science, and philosophy disciplines. The way that CRT was received and mobilized in other disciplines varies, but it was clear that CRT occupied a space in the canon of recognized intellectual movements that few other race-oriented formations achieved (Crenshaw, 2011). Scholars such as Crenshaw (2011) and Dumas (2016) conducted studies that would indicate that CRT was a valuable tool in education. According to Jost, Jost and Whitfield (2005), the core issues of educational inequality were related to matters of race, social justice, democratic equality, and the diversity curriculum. For example, in urban education, Black students were often exposed to teachers and leaders with little to no understanding of the lived experiences of Black people. White teachers were blind to issues of racial inequity and often refused to recognize differences that separate races. Their beliefs indicate that society was fair and just and that the United States was built on fairness, justice, and equality (Jost, Jost & Whitfield, 2005). Research suggested that
leaders with higher levels of critical consciousness; students have better academic outcomes and better relationships in their school communities (Seider, 2020). Jost (2011) also suggested that race is a concept that they cannot ignored by Black educators. Furthermore, Black teachers were more conscious of their students’ obstacles. This recognition grants Black teachers and leaders the capacity to analyze the causes of oppression faced by their students.

This research study defined urban education as schools that had the following characteristics: high enrollment, less socio-economically advantaged student body, less access for resource allocation, are more likely to experience staff shortages, were less likely to have a higher proportion of qualified teachers and have higher student-teacher ratios than schools in a rural area school. Students in these settings were also more likely to be taught by a teacher of a different race. Schools that served marginalized and disenfranchised communities were always blamed for their oppression (Watts et al., 2011). Schools often suffered for Black students. Deficit approaches to teaching and learning, lacked Black input and perspective, viewed the languages, literacies, and cultural ways of being of many students and communities of color as deficiencies to be overcome in learning the demanded and legitimized dominant language, literacy, and cultural ways of schooling (Dumas, 2016; Lee, 2007; Paris & Bell, 2009). The dominant language, literacy, and cultural practices demanded by schools fell in line with White, middle-class norms and positioned languages and literacies that fell outside those norms as less-than and unworthy of a place in U.S. schools and society (Gilborn, 2018). This normalized creating policies that punished or eliminated Black culture from education.
Research suggested that leadership in urban education benefited from critically conscious leaders. There was a difference between and certified teacher and a qualified teacher. A certified teacher had all the requirements needed by the state to teach in schools, and a qualified teacher may be someone who may not be certified but understands the student's life experiences and the community. For example, many white teachers often lack shared experiences with discrimination that could be catalysts for conversation, understanding, and change (Jost, Jost & Whitfield, 2011). Therefore, many Black principals look to hire teachers who understand the experiences of their students and have the ability to have difficult conversations with students. Last, one of the key reasons it was difficult for White teachers to facilitate difficult conversation about race and oppression is because white teachers generally never had to consider what it is to be Black, and therefore find it difficult to understand and accept the focus on race issues (Jost, Jost, & Whitfield, 2011).

**Racism in Urban Education**

This research study defined racism as the belief that groups of humans possess different behavioral traits corresponding to inherited attributes and can be divided based on the superiority of one race over another (Gillborn, 2000). These beliefs often stem from prejudice or discrimination that one race had based on the race or ethnicity of the other. Stovall (2006) indicated that one of the goals of the CRT project in education was to expose and deconstruct seemingly ‘colorblind’ or ‘race neutral’ policies and practices that entrench the disparate treatment of non-White persons. Similarly, critical consciousness aimed to teach Black students how to expose racism and prejudice practices and take action and not just disrupt these forms of oppression but end them.
Contemporary research found that critical consciousness expanded not only young people's commitment to challenging pervasive injustice (Ginwright, 2010; Watts et al., 2011) but also increased academic achievement and engagement (Carter, 2008; O’Connor, 1997). Scholars such as Cammarota (2007) Dee and Penner (2017) conducted studies that indicated school-based programming that fosters sociopolitical development of students has been shown to increase academic engagement and achievement. Dumas (2016) explained that one-way racism continued to devastate urban education by creating policies using quantification and not qualitative methods. Dumas (2016) theorized that Black students were disciplined and under-resourced; therefore, pushing students out of education and into the justice system.

For black students to successfully work against the conditions that created barriers to their learning, they needed to notice when these barriers occur and communicate or explain what they notice. Ginwright (2010) said that when people understood the social, economic, and political forces threatening their communities, they were more likely to engage in activities that challenged those forces. The only problem was that racism was deeply rooted in America's housing and school zoning practices; Black communities were often overpopulated and lacked vital resources to prevent growth. Due to the low socioeconomic status of many people living in these communities, some families could not afford to travel outside of their communities quite often. Furthermore, poor Blacks did not get the opportunity to see how their wealthier counterparts were living or how they were being educated differently. Critically conscious leaders were essential in communities because they will teach their students to understand why it is different and find a way to change it (Watts, 2013). Many leaders empower their students to change by
embracing their culture (Author, 2018). That is not always the case in Black schools, because many white teachers tend to codify their lived and learned experiences on race issues in education through texts on school behavior, discipline, and suspension practices, (Jost, 2011). One of the many benefits of having a critically conscious leader is creating school communities that allow teachers, students, and staff to have conversations that would challenge society’s norms. Critical consciousness was the process of continuously reflecting upon and examining how our own biases, assumptions, and cultural worldviews affect the ways we perceive difference and power dynamics (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). Moreover, this continuous self-reflection should be accompanied by addressing social injustice. The development of critical consciousness is a core element to becoming a culturally competent practitioner.

Critical consciousness education embraces both the intellectual and emotional aspects of learning. As emotions are brought into the learning experience, students are expected to experience various feelings. Some of the emotions that students experience are curiosity, laughter, hope, joy, anxiety, defensiveness, and sadness (Shor, 1992). Freire also believed that education has to have more substance than just information from a book. Today’s current educational system does not allow Black students the opportunity to celebrate their background or provide clear historical evidence of the violence against Black people. Pitner and Sakamoto (2005) contend that identity is influenced by our membership in a specific group and is shaped by historical, political, social, and cultural factors. Individuals have membership in many groups; they tend to have multiple identities, which may have different saliencies, depending on the specific social context. Additionally, critical consciousness gets manifested at both personal and structural levels,
placing Black students at a severe disadvantage. Schools that serve marginalized communities endure limited access to resources handicapping leaders to the services and programs to their students. For example, culturally enriching programs allow Black students to connect with their local and community's history. By denying people from marginalized and oppressed communities the ability to incorporate culture into the curriculum, policymakers are denying the younger Black generation the opportunity to reflect on history. Identity is also guided by the various ways we position ourselves along a continuum of oppressed versus privileged statuses, which shapes our standpoints about how we view reality (Pitner, 2009). hooks (1994) suggested that critical consciousness provides students with the opportunity to engage in their educational experience truly. Students seek out these kinds of opportunities in school because of the desire to experience education as a practice of freedom. This freedom emerges as students use ideas in the classroom to liberate themselves from the oppressive systems they experience daily (hooks, 1994). One of the key reasons it is crucial to help Black students develop sociopolitically is that it allows students to analyze current issues and compare historical research. For example, Dubois (1903), in his book The Souls of Black Folk, suggested that people in the Black communities experience a double consciousness. Dubois (1903) defined double consciousness as a sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others. Furthermore, it illustrates the importance of Black students being exposed to critically conscious leaders and teachers.

Pitner and Sakamoto (2005) discovered that the process of developing critical consciousness requires one to strive toward an anti-oppressive work environment continually. They also believe that communities should pinpoint the oppressive nature of
one's professional training and then balance the power differences between the leader and those they lead. For instance, using this in an educational context, a leader would actively encourage his teachers and staff to engage in those difficult conversations about race, prejudice, and how oppressive some American institutions are when it pertains to Black people. This creates an environment where those that may not be as knowledgeable in certain areas can be exposed to different opinions and narratives. As long as the power balance of educational policymaking is shifted in favor of the traditional Euro-American curriculum; Black culture will always be framed as an enemy of education. Seider (2020) suggested that educational models with multicultural instructors can draw upon pedagogical tools that challenge students to critically examine the various ways they see and perceive the world around them. When school communities are allowed to draw upon strategies that help students focus and reflect on the world around them, they challenge students to critically examine how their own biases, assumptions, and cultural worldviews influence and shape how they perceive (and see) reality (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005). Research suggests that these educational approaches are beneficial for students and help teachers develop and further strengthen their critical consciousness about diversity-related issues (Pitner & Sakamoto, 2005).

Urban Education Needs More Critical Consciousness

As the United States of America progresses further into the 21st century, student populations are increasingly more Black students (Lewis, 2006). In these school systems, students of color, particularly in urban settings, represent the majority of student populations (Lewis et al., in press). Additionally, the educators—teachers, and administrators that comprise these settings are predominately white, and, in turn, the
students of the color commonly face pressures that students who do not share the racial and cultural background of the educators do not (Landsman & Lewis, 2006). This creates an environment where teachers often discipline Black students faster and more often than other students, pushing students out of school and into the justice system. According to Nelson (2018), the school-to-prison pipeline is one example of a policy outcome that racially violent impacts Black students in urban school districts, and this, combined with teachers that subjectively discipline students, leads to more students being disciplined. The discipline policies that are in place in most urban school districts are mainly targeted at elements of Black culture such as dress code, language, tone of voice, body language, and other subjective violations. Graves (2020) indicated 77% of African American adolescents report at least one incident of experienced discrimination while at school within the past three months. Due to a lack of resources, and teacher shortages in urban education, Black leaders are often forced to hire teachers that have little experience working in urban settings (Predmore, 2004). Children of color in the U.S. as young as six years old demonstrate awareness of stereotypes about their racial group (Bigler, Averhart, & Liben, 2003). The over disciplining of Black students suggests something fundamentally “wrong” with Black culture and ways of being (Zirkel, 2016). Bruce (2008) stated, “the system creates expectations and evaluates outcomes based upon ideas, beliefs, and values generally accepted by the dominant culture of the school” (p. xx). The problem is that most of these models do not create space for Black culture or Blackness, therefore, criminalizing any displays of Black culture or Blackness in school. Diemer (2011) created the Critical Consciousness scale, a validated method for youth critical consciousness. Critically conscious Black leaders attempt to foster Black youths’
identities of achievement by honoring the long history of Black achievement in the face of constraints and limits. (Kumagai, 2009). Kumagai (2009) suggested that multicultural education and contact with current social justice issues allow marginalized students to reflect on their situations. Therefore, allowing students to be heard on the issues they may feel is oppressive. In his research study, Diemer found that students exposed to more culture in school not only have the level of critical consciousness but have performed better in school. Critical consciousness in urban education is essential because Lewis (2006), reported based on the U.S. Department of Education statistics, reports that almost eighty-seven percent of the United States elementary and secondary teachers are White, while only 8% of those teachers are Black. Interestingly, Scholars such as Dumas and Watts have suggested that Black students are often treated older than can be indirectly connected to the number of White teachers teaching in urban schools. Lewis (2006) continued by stating that in 2004 several major U.S. education publications reported that White students were outperforming Black students but failed to mention who was teaching Black students and how poorly trained they were to educate Black students effectively.

One of the tenets of critical consciousness is political efficacy; one has a perceived ability to make a change, and therefore when Black students are provided the spaces to overcome their oppression; it raises their belief in their capacity to make a change. According to Andrews (2020), the belief that one's achievement represents a counter-narrative and form of resistance to White supremacy. Yosso (2005) believes that students of color can benefit from having resilient resistance, a process in which students a) confront the negative portrayals and ideas about their group; b) are motivated by these
negative images and ideas, and c) are driven to navigate through the educational system for themselves and other group members. Freire's (1973) primary goal in teaching critical consciousness was to recognize oppressive social forces shaping society and take action against them. Ginwright (2010) suggested that healing is also an essential factor of critical consciousness. It provides communities the opportunity to heal from the harm caused by oppression. This is because critical consciousness provides spaces for social analyses to occur in urban education. In other words, critical consciousness grants Black leaders the ability to name and analyze the social, political, and economic forces that contribute to inequity and inequality. Then, it allows Black leaders to take action by utilizing the best methods to resist and challenge oppressive forces.

Baldwyn (1961) called upon all educators of Black youth to prepare their students to navigate and challenge racial injustice in the United States. Baldwyn was aware of the oppression and racism Black students face, therefore calling upon leaders and teachers to prepare Black students sociopolitically. Baldwyn (1961) referred to the racism that surrounds Black children as "a criminal conspiracy to destroy him. According to a study conducted by Seider, Clack, and Graves (2020), academic achievement in students of color has been linked to having higher sociopolitical development levels. Watts (2003) defined sociopolitical development (SPD) as understanding the cultural and political forces that shape one's status in society. It is a process of growth in a person’s knowledge, analytical skills, emotional faculties, and capacity for action in political and social systems (Watts, 2003). In urban education, leadership is vital in fostering spaces where this form of growth and development can occur. SPD teaches students how to recognize when they are being oppressed and how to envision and help create a just
society is an essential part of the process (Watts, 2003). Another key reason Black leadership is important is that leadership is responsible for hiring the best teachers to educate Black students. Baldwin (1961) argued that teachers have a key role alongside families, churches, community organizations, peers, and numerous other influences in preparing Black youth to recognize and resist racism. Scholars such as Watts, Diemer, and Seider (insert year) have conducted studies that suggest that students with higher levels of sociopolitical development and critical consciousness have better academic achievement, political engagement, academic engagement, professional aspirations (Seider, Clark, & Graves, 2020). Furthermore, this research study will attempt to link the critical consciousness of Black leaders and how they perceive their roles in helping their students obtain these high levels of sociopolitical development. The vast majority of literature on SPD cited so far begins with an exploration of oppression and the role of critical awareness in perceiving and resisting it, although there is very little literature on how school leadership aid in developing SPD (Watts, 2003). Gsy (2000) defines critical consciousness as a tool that grants the ability to identify, critique, and challenge the social forces that produce inequity and oppression. Therefore, leadership that allows students to reflect on the world around them critically helps their students grow in the following areas: 1) encourages them to ask why: Why are we learning this? Why does this matter? Why did this happen? 2) teaches students how to engage in critical questioning, 3) teaches students terms and concepts that can function as “lenses” for analysis and critique. 4) position students to identify and critically analyze hidden assumptions, values, or power structures in things that are familiar, 5) position students to identify taken-for-granted assumptions or beliefs and analyze where they come from and how
they serve to benefit or oppress people—for example, meritocracy, color-blindness, traditional gender roles (Sanford, 2017). Moreover, a growing body of research has found critical consciousness to be a significant predictor of positive outcomes for youth marginalized by inequities in race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status (Seider & Graves, 2046).

Ginwright (2010) suggested that critical consciousness can replace marginalized adolescents’ feelings of isolation and self-blame for challenges they are encountering with a sense of empowerment and engagement in a broader collective struggle for social justice. Critical Consciousness research also suggests that Black students educated in a school that allows students to express themselves and ask challenging questions are more likely to have higher awareness and political efficacy. Tatum (1992) added that Black students could better resist the negative impact of the negative symbols and messages of racism when we can see them rather than when they are invisible. Tatum (1992) and Ginwright (2010) are implying that by teaching Black students the tools of critical consciousness, they will be better equipped with the navigational tools to be aware of oppression and not allow the oppressive forces to allow blame to fall on them for their oppression. Moreover, Freire's theory of education challenges the traditional style of a banking educational model. In a banking educational model, teachers are gatekeepers who contain knowledge. That knowledge is deposited into those deemed a failure if they do not receive a traditional education (Freire, 1973). For Freire, those roles are too rigid giving too much power to teachers and too little power to students. Today's educational system is driven by numbers and does not consider the background and life experiences of Black students and the communities they live in. Therefore, continuing the narrative of
the Black voice does not matter in the current educational system. hooks (1994) described dialogue as the most straightforward way people can cross boundaries erected by systems of oppression to keep people apart. Freire (1973) also believed that allowing students and teachers to have dialogue builds a relationship involving empathy nourished by love, humility, hope, faith, and trust. Urban education would benefit from more dialogue because it switches from problem-solving to problem posing. Problem-solving education limits the human experience to problems that are solved. Therefore, problem-posing education humanizes life in all of its complexities and empowers humans to have the agency to change their lives for the better by understanding and intervening in these complex problems (Freire, 2000). In order for a school to facilitate this form of growth, it must have a leader that recognizes the importance of the sociopolitical development of its students.

Conclusion

Even though critical consciousness theory is a growing body of research, there is a convincing amount of evidence that proves Black leaders with a high level of critical consciousness help develop students with greater sociopolitical development levels. For instance, Carter (2008) found that such critical race consciousness can motivate students of color to adopt a prove them wrong attitude about schooling, resulting in more remarkable academic persistence and achievement. This demonstrates the leadership needed to overcome the inequities, racism, and oppressive structure in American education. Carter (2008) referred to this process as developing an achievement as resistance orientation wherein students of color see achieving in school as a mechanism for challenging discriminatory biases against their racial identity group. The unique and
most important factor in critical consciousness is that it can be transformed to help leaders cater to their community's strengths. For example, Black schools often fall victim to stereotype threats. According to Steele (2011), Stereotype threat is the concept that the cognitive load induced by activated awareness of a pernicious stereotype regarding one's identity group can hamper an individual's performance. Therefore, critically conscious leaders have the advantage of recognizing oppressive systems and putting the best measure in place to help develop socially conscious students.

Critical consciousness consists of three key components, critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. Each of these components plays a vital role in Black students challenging oppressive forces and advocating for themselves. Critical Consciousness (CC) education develops students' capacities to participate in and create democratic spaces (hooks, 1994). CC empowers Black students with the ability to recognize that they are being oppressed and analyze and understand the source of their oppression. This is a powerful tool because it allows several different perspectives on sources of oppression. For example, in traditional forms of education students learn that exclusive authority is ordinary, yet at the same time, they are contradictory old to that they live in a free and democratic society (Shor, 1992). Leadership that facilitates CC allows students to experiment with sharing power, co-creating solutions, and taking command of the learning process. Therefore, better equipping students with more tools to navigate and negotiate life.
Chapter Three
Methodology

This chapter aims to describe the methodology used in this study. This section includes the theoretical framework, conceptual framework, description of sample selection, research design and data collection, and data analysis.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of critical consciousness (CC) aims to address multi-systemic oppression at its core (Freire, 2018). CC comprises three components: critical reflection, political efficacy, and critical action. Knowledge of CC and its components helps youth practitioners and scholars facilitate the process and expand their understanding of the importance of critically conscious leadership (Watts et al., 2011).

Critical reflection refers to social analysis and moral rejection of societal inequities, such as social, economic, racial/ethnic, and gender inequities constrain well-being and human agency (Freire, 2018). Political efficacy is the perceived capacity to effect social and political change by individual and collective activism (Watts et al., 2011). Critical action refers to an individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society, such as institutional policies and practices, which are perceived as unjust (Watts et al., 2011).

Freire viewed the relationship between reflection and action as reciprocal; critical reflection is generally considered a precursor to critical action. People do not change their social conditions without some consciousness or awareness that their social conditions are unjust (Freire, 2018; Gay & Kirkland, 2003).

Black students are often blamed for their oppression (Watts, 2011). The connection between critical reflection on social identity and internalized oppression or
privilege is also essential (Watts et al., 2011). Research suggests that critical reflection skills help reveal cause-and-effect relationships between ongoing social forces and current social circumstances (Jemal, 2017). Recent research has found that racial group identity and experiences of racial discrimination shape civic behavior (Flanagan et al., 2009). Black racial identity theory includes how members of oppressed social groups liberate themselves from oppressive social identities and form new, positive ones (Watts et al., 2011). Therefore, leadership that has an understanding of their student’s life experiences and background may construct school environments that give a sense of pride and empowers all stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, leaders). Research suggests that unless promoted by the principal, implementation of cultural responsiveness can run the risk of being disjointed or short-lived in a school (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Conceptual Framework

Critical Consciousness (CC) is a framework developed by Freire (2018) to illustrate how oppressed people in education. Critical consciousness pedagogy is defined as levels of consciousness and action that produce the potential for change at one or more socio-ecosystemic (e.g., individual, institutional) levels (Jemal, 2017). Watts and Abdul-Adil (1997) and Watts et al. (2011) view oppression as both a state and process that perpetuates the unequal distribution of needed resources (asymmetry) that negatively affects the quality of life of the poor and disenfranchised communities. The two tenets of Critical Consciousness (CC) that this research study focuses on are: 1) critical reflection, social analysis, and moral rejection of societal inequities, and 2) critical action, individual or collective action taken to change aspects of society. Critical reflection, social analysis, and moral rejection of societal inequities include social, economic, racial/ethnic, and
gender inequities constrain well-being and human agency. Critical action, individual or collective action, is taken to change society's aspects, including institutional policies and practices, perceived as unjust. Urban education is often under-funded and under-resourced, and these inequities further strain urban leadership in providing the best for their students. Thus, leaders must understand that these institutions are symbols of empowerment and pride in their communities. Freire (2018) stated that the educator has the duty of not being neutral. Therefore, this study will use critical consciousness to examine how Black leaders encourage critical action and reflection amongst the staff and students.

Critical consciousness has frequently been examined in schools and other educational contexts (De Genova & Ramos-Zayas, 2003; Milner, 2004; O'Connor, 1997). According to Woodson (1933), the same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with inspiring thoughts depresses and crushes the spark of genius in the Black by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and will never measure up to the standards of other peoples. Aside from awakening students' consciousness of their political and economic status, critical consciousness can also be an empowerment theory. According to Christens and Speer (2015), Freire believed that a critical understanding of poverty, oppression, exploitation, history, and economics was necessary for poor people to initiate positive change. Godfrey et al. (2017) examined whether an open classroom climate encouraged students to discuss inequities and injustices. They found that consciousness development, unequal systems, and community conditions create compounding advantages for some young people while creating
compounding disadvantages for others (Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Watts & Flanagan, 2007).

Consequently, Critical Consciousness gives Black leaders the ability to:

a) expose students to multiple perspectives on a given topic;
b) work with students to identify perspectives that have been excluded from the official curriculum;
c) explore the question: How might this look from the perspective of? and;
d) Make a difference visible by explicitly discussing why different people might see, experience, interpret or be affected differently (a text, policy, situation).

This study attempts to illustrate how these ten Black leaders create school environments that are optimal to aid in the growth and development of their students. This study will also seek to uncover how the leader's mission may differ from the mission of the school district. Finally, this study seeks to link how Black leaders empower schools and communities by using CC to inspire students to look at their world.

This study utilizes critical consciousness’ tenants to explore how Black leaders perceive their roles in developing their student’s sociopolitical development. Unlike Freire (2018), this study does not consider the oppressor's status. This study will attempt to discover how different leaders apply their experiences, education, and beliefs into a form of leadership that allows students’ development. Critical consciousness is an empowering, strengths-based approach (Baxamusa, 2008; Özer et al., 2009). Critically conscious leaders are aware that relationships between self and society require a metacognitive experience in that one must think about their thinking, be aware of the
existence of consciousness and be mindful of its ever-evolving process (Houser & Overton, 2001).

Discovering how the leader thinks could indicate how his subordinates are instructed to behave in some situations. In the action phase, the realization of one's power to take individual and collective actions to create equity and social justice (Getzlaf & Osborne, 2010). Second, a component of CC is the reflection, examining everyday realities to analyze the relationships between personal contexts and the broader social forces of structural oppression. This study seeks to explore how leaders exhibit critical reflections in three components. The three components of reflection are: (1) thinking critically about accepted beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and assumptions, (2) detecting the hidden interests underlying personal and social assumptions and beliefs, and (3) identifying how history impacts the present details of everyday life and how thoughts and feeling serve to maintain and perpetuate existing systems of inequality (Diemer & Blustein 2006; Diemer et al., 2016; Watts et al., 2003).

Lastly, this research study intends to explore the connection between CC of ten Black leaders, and the sociopolitical development of Black students. Jamal (2016) suggests that reflection is an emotional phase that allows students to grow by allowing students to create meaning through interpretations of shared or similar social experiences. Finally, this study will utilize the following frameworks throughout the research. 1) Critical Race Theory (CRT), 2) Critical Consciousness (CC). First, Critical Race Theory allows the research study to pinpoint the institutional racism that still exists in education. Second, CRT will attempt to give the leaders space to discuss how they have experienced interest convergence or a situation where they knew they had to follow a harmful policy.
to keep their position. Third, CRT will function as a tool that allows the researcher to explore the different forms of inequality experienced by different Black communities. Critical Consciousness (CC) lends two essential components to this study. First, CC allows this study to investigate just how the leader turns his/her own experiences into elements of the school climate that allow students to develop the tools to navigate life successfully. Second, the use of CC in this study will attempt to illustrate how the Black community benefits from leadership that inspires students to take action in the face of racism and inequality.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study:

1. How do Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students?

Description of Sample Selection

This research study will be ten Black leaders who serve the school with over a ninety percent Black enrollment. These participants will be selected based on the criteria that they must be Black, serve as principal or assistant principal, or have had one of these positions in the past.

Research Design

This research study aims to examine how do Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students. In order to gain the best answer to the research question, "How do Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students?" This study will utilize the case study as a research approach used to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in
its real-life context (Crowe et al., 2011). This study uses an intrinsic case study approach, and this research study will gain breadth by allowing the participants (leaders) to be the only driving force in answering the research questions. According to Crowe et al. (2011), it is an established research design used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. This research study aims to connect the levels of critical consciousness of ten Black leaders to the sociopolitical development of their students. This study does not actually measure the development of student, but explores how these ten Black leaders create spaces to help mold socio-politically developed students. The most important tenet of an intrinsic case study is the need to explore an event or phenomenon in-depth and in its natural context. The true feelings and emotions of the leaders are vital to answering the research questions. Therefore, utilizing an intrinsic case is one of the best conduits to finding a conclusion in this study. For this reason, sometimes, this variety of case studies is also known as naturalistic case studies.

An intrinsic case study is typically undertaken to learn about a unique phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In the case of this research study, the case study will go as follows:

1. The primary research question: How Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students

2. Using semi-structured interviews, this research study will
   a. seek to understand how the leaders critically reflect on the internal and external forces around them
   b. will also seek to understand what critical action these leaders take in response to what they discovered in the critical reflection phase.
3. We will utilize the six (6) phases of thematic analysis to code the data collected from the interviews.

4. Use the themes, patterns, and other information from the final report to answer the primary research question and sub-questions.

According to Yin (1994), case studies can explain, describe or explore events or phenomena in the everyday contexts in which they occur. This research study is a clear example of Yin's (1994) definition of a case study being an empirical inquiry that seeks to understand the phenomena within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomena and context are not evident. In addition, the case study approach will lend itself well to this research study by capturing information on more explanatory 'how,' 'what' and 'why' questions (Perales & Shanks, 2007; Yin, 1994).

Instrument

The instruments utilized in this research study are the following: 1) Zoom Conference and Video calls, and 2) twenty-two opened-ended interviews. These two instruments will permit the ten Black leaders and the interviewer to have an open dialogue with each question, gathering as much information as possible.

Data Collection

Patton (1990) recommends that researchers conduct interviews to learn the things they may not directly observe. The purpose of qualitative interviewing is not to get answers to questions but to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning they make of that experience (Seidman, 1998). Usually, qualitative studies use unstructured, open-ended interviews because they allow for the most flexibility and responsiveness to emerging issues for both the participants and interviewer (Schwandt,
This study will collect data using semi-structured interviews to obtain information regarding Black leaders' experiences and how those experiences are used in hiring practices, leadership development, and the students' consciousness.

According to Bernard (1988), semi-structured interviews (SSI) are best used when the researcher may only get one opportunity to interview the participant. Semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher the opportunity to ask more probing questions while interviewing. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation allowing the researcher to develop a clear understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Cohen, 2006). Semi-structured interviews are most beneficial when they allow participants to express their feelings and views on all subject matters freely. This study will also use SSIs. SSIs will permit the researcher to access a more profound wealth of information by allowing the participants to go into greater detail about what makes their leadership special in their student development. The researcher's goal is only to steer the conversation in a particular direction and allow the participants to feel comfortable, leading to more valuable data. Finally, SSIs will allow the researcher to ask probing questions that the leader usually may not discuss.

Once approved, the interviews with the ten Black leaders will be voice recorded on the Zoom video call platform. There will be no need to record the interviewee's face. The interview questions will provide context into areas that the leaders may not be familiar with. Interviewing in this manner allows the participant to give more details about their life experiences and their time as a leader. Before interviewing each leader, the researcher and the participants will discuss the informed consent document. After
reviewing the consent, the researcher will give the participant the consent document as a handout. The researcher will also give the participant a contact telephone number to reach the researcher. This will aid in establishing credibility to the study, enabling the participant to check the status of the study. The interview protocol was strategically modified to gain quality data in one interview. Each interview will last approximately an hour to one hour and thirty minutes. The researcher will record the order of the interviews to make transcribing the interviews at the completion manageable.

Data Analysis

This research study will use inductive thematic analysis to find themes and connections in the interviews. Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis that involves recording or identifying passages of text or images linked by a common theme or idea, allowing the researcher to index the text into categories and establish a framework of thematic ideas about it (Gibbs, 2007). Thematic analysis is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. In this research study, the focus will be on making meaning out of the interviews of the school leaders, and inductive thematic analysis will allow the leaders' interviews to be connected and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. According to Braun and Clarke (2008), inductive thematic analysis mandates that the findings only come from the data collected from the participants. This is important because thematic analysis permits the researcher to establish precedent in identifying what is most vital to answering the research questions. Thematic analysis lends flexibility to this research study because Thematic analysis will allow this research study to focus on the data in numerous different ways. Using thematic analysis, the
researcher can legitimately focus on analyzing meaning across the entire dataset or
examine one particular aspect of a phenomenon in depth (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), the thematic analysis consists of the
six (6) following phases: Phase 1) Familiarising yourself with the data; this phase
involves immersing yourself in the data by reading and re-reading textual data and
listening to audio-recordings or watching video data, 2) Generating initial codes; codes
are the building blocks of analysis. Codes will provide a pithy summary of a portion of
data or describe the content of the data; 3) Create themes and patterns; In this phase, the
analysis starts to take shape and begins to shift from codes to themes. A theme highlights
something important about the data in connection with the primary research question, and
amounts to some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set. 4) Reviewing the themes; this phase essentially is checking the quality of the themes to
ensure that the themes truly captured the closest meaning to represent the participants, 5)
Defining and naming themes; this phase is to ensure that themes do the following: a) does
not attempt to do too much, as themes should ideally have a singular focus; b) are related
but does not overlap, so they are not repetitive, although they may build on previous
themes; and c) directly address your research question, 6) Final report; produce an article,
report, journal, or research study. This research study will use thematic analysis to ensure
that the questions are answered only using the themes and patterns discovered from
analyzing the data collected from the interview process.
Chapter Four

Results

Introduction

For many decades, it has been suggested that the American educational system is broken. The question could be asked, "is it broken, or is it working as it was intended to operate?". One of the five key tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is that race and racism are a permanent fixture of American society. Therefore, an individual on the outside looking in would have no option but to suggest that the educational system is no different. Before the Reconstruction period, when over four million Blacks were released from slavery, it was considered a crime for a Black person to be formally educated. So from the 1930s through the late 1970s, Black people fought for the right to be not only educated like the White man but to be educated alongside the White man. This ideology was met with decades of violence and protest. Brown v Board of Education (1954) was viewed as a monumental win in the education arena for Blacks in America, but what was accomplished in this case was that White policymakers learned to be more covert in marginalizing and disenfranchising Black people. Fast forward to the present day, Black communities are just as void of opportunities as before the Civil Rights movement. For instance, Black communities often suffer from a lack of or limited access to certain key resources that help build a financially thriving community. For example, based on information collected by the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), Black families' household income was nearly ten times less than that of the average White family's household income. This is due to the Black communities lacking well-paying jobs, major mainstream businesses, transportation, health care, and education. All of these factors
contribute to the socioeconomic state of many Black communities. According to Diamond (n.d.), this form of oppression is known as opportunity hoarding, and this occurs when one social group restricts access to a scarce resource through outright denial or by exercising control that requires out-group members to pay for access. As stated earlier, racism is a permanent fixture of American society, meaning if a community has a lack of access to key resources, that same community will always have lesser educational funds than communities that have more resources. According to Spatig-Amerikaner (2012), schools with over 90 percent Black student population spent almost one thousand dollars less per student than schools with over 90 percent White student population (Spatig-Amerikaner, 2012).

Many of the practices that are put in place to disenfranchise and marginalize the Black community have a direct effect on urban education. For example, urban schools in the poorer parts of the country often struggle to attract or retain certified/qualified leaders and teachers. As a result, Black children often ended up in schools and classrooms being led and taught by individuals that do not understand Black communities or culture, hence—allowing young Black children to be exposed to early dehumanization and oppression. It is also important to know that the K-12 population diversifies, and the teaching force is still composed of predominantly middle-aged White women. Even though the number of Black education leaders is growing, it remains a heavy White male-dominated profession. This is why Black culture has been framed as an enemy of education, and Black students are only expected to follow the traditional Eurocentric curriculum while in school. Due to a lack of one's own culture in the education curriculum, Black students are often disconnected and uninterested in school.
W.E.B. Du Bois (1903) predicted that the color line would be the greatest problem faced by Americans in the twentieth century, and he was correct. Historical analysis suggests that the problems in urban education are not new problems but the same problems that Blacks have had to overcome for many years. For example, in the 1930s, out of two hundred and thirty counties in the southeastern region of the country, there were no high schools that catered to Black people, but all had schools for Whites, and over 90 years later, schools are more separate and unequal than ever. The systematic issues that surround urban education require a unique and dedicated leader. As suggested earlier, due to the lack of resources in urban communities, Black students are often subject to leadership and teachers who are not familiar with their backgrounds or have very few life experiences that intersect with Black culture or communities. In other words, these leaders are not as critically conscientious about what their students have to deal with outside school walls. This disconnection often leads to many scenarios where Black students end up victims because of often refuse to understand or acknowledge Black culture. This research study aims to examine how Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students. This study will utilize the strengths of qualitative research and the semi-structured interview process to interview those who lead Black schools. This study explores Black leaders' critical consciousness to discover how they manage their schools and navigate the extremely flawed American education system. The qualitative methodology will allow these leaders to expose some of the blatant racism and the cleverly hidden racism in the education system. Additionally, this study seeks to understand the smallest nuances that make the biggest differences in the life and educational experiences of Black students and communities. Additionally, this
research study wants to highlight how Black leaders often have to battle against the sometimes colorblind district and state policies that could potentially be detrimental in schools that cater to Black communities.

**What is Critical Consciousness and Why is it Important in Urban Education?**

Critical consciousness refers to how individuals come to understand, analyze, and take action against systems of oppression (Freire, 1970). Rooted in the work of Brazilian philosopher educator Paulo Freire, contemporary models of youth critical consciousness development have conceptualized critical consciousness as consisting of critical reflection, political agency, and critical action (Watts & Flanagan, 2007; Watts et al., 2011). It is important to know that most Black leaders are in charge of schools with limited access to key resources that White leaders may have readily available. Black school leaders are often commissioned to do more with less, which is a skill that Black communities have learned to master over the decades. As Watts et al. (2011) suggested, another challenge for urban school principals is the lack of resources. Unfortunately, many urban schools do not receive adequate funding from local, state, and federal government agencies. When funding is minimal, an urban principal cannot afford to purchase sufficient curricular materials, technology hardware and software, and additional academic or extracurricular resources. Also, investing in social-emotional programs and supports is near impossible without adequate funding. Most often, urban schoolchildren face a variety of disadvantages due to social issues of homelessness, joblessness, and possibly mental health issues. Often the children are at-risk students due to circumstances beyond their control.
The concept of critical consciousness (CC) in urban education is a vital component to dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline and reversing decades of marginalization and disenfranchisement. In order to do this, there must be a clear understanding of the components of CC and the driving force that aids Black leaders in the sociopolitical development of students. Watts et al. (2011) conceptualized critical consciousness as consisting of three distinct yet overlapping components: (a) critical reflection, (b) the political agency (or political self-efficacy), and (c) critical action. Critical reflection refers to the ability to name and analyze forces of inequality. It includes recognizing interpersonal forms of oppression such as stereotypes, biases, and discrimination and the ability to analyze the root causes of oppression as situated in structural and institutional forces. Political agency is the internal belief that one can affect social change (Diemer et al., 2016). The political agency serves as the bridge between an individual's understanding of oppressive social forces (critical reflection) and a willingness and desire to act (critical action). Finally, critical action refers to an individual's actual engagement in events and activities intended to challenge these oppressive forces and structures and perpetuate the unequal conditions. This action can take a wide range of forms and be individual or collective (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015); these skills are vital for Black leaders to educate Black students and protect Black students in their years of vulnerability. Black leaders are educators and protectors of young Black bodies as they navigate and negotiate their way through school. Dumas and Nelson (2016) suggested that Black students are often dehumanized because they are always perceived older. Therefore, some policies and disciplines that Black students are subjected to do not always fit the action. Lastly, Black critically conscious leaders are
aware that their students may not have the best home life or have other issues that may interfere with their education. Freire (1970) believed that a critical understanding of poverty, oppression, exploitation, history, economics, etc., was necessary for poor people and people of color to initiate positive change.

Navigating oppressive social forces entails recognizing the obstacles that oppression places in one's path and identifying ways to circumvent those obstacles. Finally, it challenges oppressive social forces (Diemer et al., 2015). A Black leader's ability to critically analyze is a vital component to effective leadership because, without this skill, it would be almost impossible to know what changes can be made. Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) noted that critical consciousness allows such individuals to become aware of oppression and exclusion, recognize their membership in oppressed groups, and explore the links between marginalization and oppressive social forces.

Critical Reflection

Critical reflection is an awareness of both the historical and systemic ways oppression and inequity exists (Diemer et al., 2021). One of the greatest abilities of a Black leader is critically reflecting on the world around them. This does not limit the analysis to one specific point in time. Critical reflection allows Black leaders the advantage to critically compare any point of history to a situation that would create new knowledge or prove that certain oppressive forces still exist in education. According to Freire (1970), critically reflective people view social problems and inequalities systematically. In education, this is a vital tool in the struggle for equality. Education has always been an issue by which White policymakers have found a way to sabotage Black people. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that Black leaders have the space and
ability to critically reflect how certain internal and external factors affect their students' lives and educational experiences.

Freire (1970) posited that engaging in critical reflection was necessary for individuals to appropriately guide their critical action, and other scholars have reported as well that strong critical reflection skills can motivate and direct the social action in which young people engage (Chambers, 2002; Diemer et al., 2016). Awareness of systemic racism entails recognition of how particular policies, laws, and cultural practices can privilege or obstruct the success of particular racial/ethnic groups over others (Tong et al., 2013). Critical reflection is a key component in the fight to interrupt and dismantle policies and practices that oppress Black students and stakeholders. By fostering people's capacity to critique and understand the possibility of transforming their world, critical reflection is a spur to action for social justice, not the goal of developing critical consciousness (Watts & Flanagan, 2007). In other words, according to Freire (1970), critical reflection facilitates the other two components of CC.

In education, institutional racism manifests racist beliefs that are indelible in institutional policies and practices and result in inequitable outcomes between racial groups (Jones et al., 2013). Cultural racism includes the laws and cultural practices that uphold the historic and modern dominance of the majority group over minority groups (Utsey & Ponterotto, 1996); black school leaders very seldom are included in the making of policies and procedures that will affect their schools. Therefore, Black students and urban school systems are often subjected to policies that reflect the prejudice and bias of the White policymaker. For example, over the last five years, there have been several instances in which the hair of Black students has come under attack. This critique of
Black hair dates back to slavery when Blacks that worked in the "big house" were often mocked or beaten because of the texture that their hair grows naturally. This issue has been debated since the early 1970s in school when Blacks were viewed as a distraction for wearing large afros. These issues are examples of just a few instances in which White prejudices found ways to be manifested as school policy. Through critical reflection, Black leaders have an opportunity to analyze the social and political conditions within their school environment, especially conditions that may inhibit civic participation, education opportunities, and economic advancement. Black leaders are empowered to act politically and civically to transform urban education (Chambers, 2002).

Political Efficacy

Based on research by Watts & Hipolito-Delgado (2015), and Diemer et al. (2016), political efficacy is the perceived capacity to effect social and political change by individual and/or collective activism. It follows that people will be much more likely to engage in critical action to create change. In urban education, there are always changes that need to be made. For example, in Mississippi, changing or revising the state education funding formula has been voted on several times in past years. In 2015, Initiative #42 would protect each child's fundamental right to educational opportunity through the 12th grade by amending Section 201 so that the state must provided and the legislature must fund an adequate and efficient system of free public schools. The recommendation is to finance this not by new taxes but by using a portion of future increases in general fund revenues over the next seven years to reach the necessary level of funding (Public education, n.d.). This amendment would have helped poorer school districts with a smaller tax base generate money that would allow for renovations, repairs,
higher teacher stipends, etc. This proposal was met with heavy resistance from the more affluent parts of the state, and it comes without saying the proposal was voted down because wealthy White parents and taxpayers refused to allow their tax dollars to go to the poorer regions of the states.

According to Freire (1970), the understanding and knowledge gained in the critical reflection phase create a space for the oppressed to discover new ways to fight their oppressor. By critically reflecting on the obstacles of urban education empowers Black school leaders to know what changes can be made using what resources they have most efficiently. The importance of political efficacy is paramount in the Black community and urban education because the possibility of change for the better will always inspire oppressed and marginalized groups to continue to fight. Political efficacy is a key predictor of important sociopolitical outcomes such as commitment to activism, social capital, and social trust (Beaumont, 2012; Wray-Lake & Flanagan, 2012). For example, Black school leaders are often asked questions regarding teacher quality, and to further understand this goes back to lack of resources. Schools located in poorer areas will not pay teachers as much as schools in richer areas. An urban teacher with an M.A. versus a suburban teacher with an M.A. will make about seven thousand dollars less, according to the United Negro College Fund (n.d.).

Lastly, according to Ladson-Billings (1995), schools play a central role in marginalized and disenfranchised communities challenging inequality. Therefore, the leaders of these schools must possess the knowledge, contemporary and historical, and understanding in facilitating a fulfilling educational experience. Lastly, schools are viewed as a community. Black leaders in high-poverty areas are more likely to recruit
and hire teachers who have a deeper understanding of the students' lives they serve. Collective political efficacy implied a common purpose and shared aspirations among people who feel confident about the capacity of their group/community to change social and political conditions (Watts & Flanagan 2007).

Critical Action

Critical action refers to an individual's engagement in events and activities intended to challenge these oppressive forces and structures and perpetuate the unequal conditions. This action can take a wide range of forms and be individual or collective (Watts & Hipolito-Delgado, 2015). Critical action offers Black leaders multiple conduits for students to express themselves of the three components of CC. Freire (1970) believed that oppressed groups must have spaces to express how they feel regarding their oppression. This can be done via art, dance, song, literature, etc.

Furthermore, critical action will always be an internal and collective resource that provides marginalized youth with the capacity to negotiate and challenge sociopolitical inequities that constrain their lives (Seider & Graves, 2020). In education, Black leaders can create multiple spaces to empower and encourage students to resist the oppression they encounter. According to Diemer et al. (2016), critical action encompasses a broad array of participatory behavior from individual sociopolitical actions (e.g., writing a letter to an elected official or signing a petition) to participation in a variety of organizational and social movements settings, including clubs, political parties, or protests. Watts and Hipolito-Delgado (2015) parse critical action into three typologies: personal action, group action, and the mass action of social movements. These different variations of critical action also allow individuals to process and deal with oppression in different ways. This
is important because younger students (elementary, middle school) may challenge oppression on a group level because they may not fully grasp how the world works. Then, older students (high school) can form their own opinions and take a more adult individual stance to challenge oppression.

Critical action in urban education has many forms, such as Black leaders hiring teachers that they feel will work with them in helping develop students as a whole and not just teaching a flat, lackluster curriculum. Research suggests that Black leaders are well aware of how the education system is rigged for Black students to fail and blame the entire Black way of life for that failure. As suggested by Watts et al. (2003), failure is inevitable by placing multiple obstacles in the path of Black educators and leaders. Once failure occurs, it becomes easier to devalue the Black voice, eliminate locally elected leadership, and create new policies that frame Black culture as an enemy of education.

The purpose of this research study is a direct result of a question that was posed to my cohort at the beginning of my journey to earn a doctorate in educational leadership. That question is, "Is it policy or polity?" This is an important question because when an urban school fails, leadership, teachers, the students, the parents, etc., are always blamed. The fault never lies with the policy or the policymakers or the shortcomings of the American educational system. This research study seeks to examine how Black leaders that work in schools with over ninety percent Black student population perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students. This research study will utilize inductive semi-structured interviews to explore the critical consciousness of Black school leaders and attempt to discover their roles in the growth of their students. This study will
continue on an intrinsic semi-structured interview protocol to collect robust data. Using this protocol allows the participant to give answers that have more breadth. Additionally, this protocol will permit the participants to tell their stories as they would have them told. Semi-structured interviews will allow the researcher the opportunity to ask more probing questions while interviewing. Semi-structured interviews are often preceded by observation allowing the researcher to develop a clear understanding of the topic of interest necessary for developing relevant and meaningful semi-structured questions (Cohen, 2006).

A growing body of scholarship supports a connection between critical consciousness and academic achievement. However, little research has considered the relationship between the key components of critical consciousness (i.e., critical reflection, political agency, and critical action) and adolescents' academic outcomes, resilience (Ginwright, 2010), self-esteem (Godfrey et al., 2017), curiosity (Clark & Seider, 2020), enrollment in higher education (Rogers & Terriquez, 2013), professional aspirations (Diemer & Hsieh, 2011), and civic and political engagement (Diemer & Li, 2011; Watts et al., 2011). The vast majority of CC research is conducted with the student/child at the center of the study. This research study centers around how Black leaders perceive their roles as facilitators so their students have the opportunity to grow and develop despite the oppression that Black communities often have to overcome. This research study also does not use the critical consciousness scales because the author believes that one of Critical Race Theory's (CRT) tenets of storytelling will lend great depth to this study. It will allow the leaders to pull from their life experiences and will add more substance to their explanations of why they lead the way they do.
This research study seeks to explore, examine, and highlight how Black leaders are expected to do more with less and still produce the same results as their good resource white counterparts. The goal of the study is to steer the conversation in a particular direction and allow the participants to feel comfortable, which may lead to more useful data. Upon completing all interviews, the next phase will be to analyze the data using the six (6) phases of inductive thematic analysis to generate code, themes, and patterns. This data analysis approach will lend itself well to this research study by capturing more explanatory how, what and why questions (Moody & Shanks, 2003; Yin, 1994). Using this approach also eliminates any presumptions or bias from appearing in the final report; the strength of this approach is that only the experiences and stories of the Black leaders will be used to form a conclusion. Lastly, semi-structured interviews will permit the study to access a more profound wealth of information by allowing the participants to go into greater detail about what makes their leadership special in their student development.

The Current Study

The following research question guides this research study:

1. How do Black (African American) leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students?

Utilizing Freire's (1970) foundational work on critical consciousness and problem-posing education, this research study will draw from the life and educational experiences of Black leaders in order to examine their thought processes or leadership philosophies when making decisions to will facilitate the critical growth and maturation of Black students. The underlying mission of this research study is to attempt to compare how damaging and colorblind some educational organizations' information is on urban
education. For example, in 1996, the Nation Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published a report entitled *The Challenges of Location and Poverty*. This report used statistics to illustrate the academic struggles of low-income areas, the schools these areas serve. Studies such as this highlight all the negative aspects of urban education but mention the lack of resources or support that these predominantly Black school districts do not have access to.

Method

Participants

The participants of this research study met the criteria of identifying as Black and classified as principal/school leaders. For example, if a participant's school has an overall student enrollment of 523 students, 483 of those students are Black. Then this school would have a Black student enrollment of ninety-two percent (92.3%). This is a vital component of this research study. First, scholars suggest that schools play a central role in raising marginalized adolescents' consciousness and commitment to challenging inequity (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lee, 2007; Perry, 2003). Second, those who lead schools that are over ninety percent Black student enrollment often have issues gaining access to vital resources that are found in abundance in schools with predominantly white student enrollment (Data Analysis, n.d.). Third, some state or district policies may further inhibit the ability of someone who is leading a school with high Black student enrollment. Lastly, it is important to explore how these Black leaders critically reflect, find ways to make the change, and take action to provide education and allow their students to develop and grow without fear. This research study utilizes pseudonyms for
all participants. In Table 1, there is a list of all Black participation leaders, total student enrollment, Black student enrollment, and grade levels.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Black Enrollment</th>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Bulldog</td>
<td>P1 School</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>9th - 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Tiger</td>
<td>P2 School</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>PK-K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Mustang</td>
<td>P3 School</td>
<td>1,132</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>9th - 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Wolf</td>
<td>P4 School</td>
<td>475</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>6th – 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Lion</td>
<td>P5 School</td>
<td>561</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>9th - 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Bear</td>
<td>P6 School</td>
<td>1,021</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>9th - 12th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Hornet</td>
<td>P7 School</td>
<td>858</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>PK – 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Eagle</td>
<td>P8 School</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>3rd – 8th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Raven</td>
<td>P9 School</td>
<td>345</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>PK – 5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Shark</td>
<td>P10 School</td>
<td>496</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>PK – 5th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

This research study collected data to understand why these ten \( n=10 \) Black leaders make day-to-day decisions that they feel are best for their schools. Data collected for this study attempts to understand how these leaders critically reflect, perceive their ability to change, and take critical action. This study will not make use of the critical consciousness scales. In other words, after this study, there will not be a number or ranking system to determine which leader has the highest CC level.
Data in this research study was collected via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Each leader who once agreed to be interviewed was emailed a password-encrypted link to a Zoom interview set by them. During the Zoom interview, the author will only utilize the audio record feature to ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of the participants are fully protected. Once the interview is started, the author will utilize an intrinsic semi-structured interview (SSI) format to collect the data from the leaders. Tong et al. (2013) suggested that SSI or open-ended interviews are one of the best methods to acquire the most robust data and clarify exciting and relevant issues raised by the respondents (Hutchinson & Wilson 1992). Second, it enables the interviewer to explore and clarify respondents' accounts inconsistencies. Lastly, the most important reason for using this interview format is one of the best methods of getting interviewees to elaborate on experiences and memories. According to Ambert et al. (1995), it can help respondents recall information for memory questions, which permits the research study to more sensitive information.

Data Analysis

This study used Inductive Thematic Analysis (T.A.) to discover codes, themes, and patterns within the data collected. T.A. is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning across a dataset, T.A. allows this research study to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2008). Identifying unique and idiosyncratic meanings and experiences is a strength of using T.A., and this allowed this research study to make connections among ten different Black leaders working with different age groups of students. When using T.A., you can
legitimately focus on analyzing meaning across the entire dataset, or you can examine one particular aspect of a phenomenon in depth. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is familiar to the way a topic is talked or written about and of making sense of those commonalities.

Also, utilizing inductive T.A. guaranteed that the data would only come from the interviews of the Black leaders, and no other outside preexisting information would be added or substituted in the findings. The two main reasons for using inductive T.A. are: (1) it offers accessibility and flexibility. T.A. is an excellent method to utilize because it teaches the mechanics of coding and analyzing qualitative data systematically while allowing the researcher the freedom to customize their research design. (2) Inductive approach to data coding and analysis is a 'bottom-up approach and is driven by what is in the data. This means that the codes and themes derive from the content of the data themselves – so that what is 'mapped' by the researcher during analysis closely matches the content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2008).

Lastly, using the six phases of T.A. revealed or assisted in identifying similarities between the interviews of the ten leaders. One unintended benefit from using T.A. was it added to the validity of the findings by connecting finding similar themes and patterns in all ten leaders’ interviews. It is worth mentioning that these ten leaders are all employed in different regions of the country, yet because of the communities they serve, they all encounter and face the same issues of oppression and discrimination.

Results

The qualitative interviews with these ten Black leaders revealed many themes and patterns, but the coding process produced four themes that were dominated or referenced
in all ten interviews. Those four themes are as follows: 1) Culturally responsive teaching, 2) The lack of the Black voice in policymaking, 3) Cultural competency, 4) Lack of equity. These four themes were very pronounced in all ten interviews, and the only similarities that these leaders shared were that they were all Black (African American) and were in charge of a school that had over ninety percent Black enrollment. Within the four main themes, several subthemes allowed each leader to further define their communities' inequities. The data coding process revealed all of these leaders' communities are suffering from the same lack of equity, and this lack of equity affects education in low-income communities the same no matter what part of the country they are in. Based on the findings of this research study, the case can easily be made that racism still exists in education.

Additionally, based on the interviews, these leaders do not all lead schools that cater to the same age groups, which leads to an exciting yet unintended finding. These leaders must also be very aware of where a child is in their critical thinking development. In other words, as Dumas and Nelson (2016) suggest, Black students are often subjected to harsher punishment because Black students are often perceived to be older than they are. This leads to teachers and administrators having a "no excuses" attitude when dealing with younger Black students (see Table 2).
Table 2

Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Themes</th>
<th>Sub Themes</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example from Transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Responsive Teaching</td>
<td>Black Culture in Curriculum</td>
<td>Culturally Responsive Teaching is a student-centered approach to education. It is based on the idea that every student brings a unique cultural strength to the classroom. Recognizing and nurturing those strengths not only encourages success but promotes open minded, supportive environment that celebrates cultural differences.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Language Barriers Systematic</td>
<td></td>
<td>“But I think about things like curriculum. And if we’re educating children of color, the curriculum that we use is not is not culturally competent, it does address their lives and experiences in a way that will make them want to engage in the content. And that’s important. Because a lot of what we tell teachers is like, how are you engaging students? How are you making them want to learn and make them make learning interesting for them. So teachers are expected to do that. But in essence, the curriculum really doesn’t do that for students”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of Representation</td>
<td></td>
<td>“So yes, I’m a Black leader. And I go out of my way to understand the experiences because I’m actually, I mean, I’m, I’m able to identify with my students we have, we have similar cultural backgrounds”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Competency</td>
<td>Teachers and students learn from each other Help eliminate bias and prejudice School community Communication</td>
<td>The National Education Association (NEA) defines cultural competence as, “the ability to successfully teach students who come from cultures other than our own. Cultural competence involves interpersonal awareness, cultural knowledge, and a skillset that together promotes impactful cross-cultural teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Voice in Policymaking</td>
<td>Colorblindness in policy Racism in education Push out of Black leaders Student Needs Lack of Support</td>
<td>State sanctions and state sponsored policies are imposed on Black leaders and their students. This is often the aftermath of white policymakers only paying attention to the over-quantification of education. These policies and procedures are often formed without the input of the very leaders they will affect directly.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“We’ve written some pieces to include in the district’s equity publication, we’ve reached out to the district office to try to get some parallel programs in place for Black girls. And we have basically gotten no response from the district”.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lack of Equity

Prejudice and bias
Lack of support
Lack of rescripted access to resources
Teacher Quality

Black communities often have limited resources to offer. This lack of resources manifests itself as deficit in urban education. The problem in urban education is that equity vs equality argument. Black schools need are receiving equality, but the urban education needs equitable education.

“Well, speaking from a professional standpoint, in my experiences, I definitely see this lack of equity in our local education system. And you definitely see that lack of equity with respect to the distribution of resources on the distribution of talent, meaning effective teachers, the lack of equity with respect to diversity within the school system”.

The following section will include questions and the responses of the Black leaders. These responses will highlight how these ten Black leaders prioritize their students' academic, physical, and socio-emotional growth.

Lack of Equity

All ten Black leaders indicated that a lack of equity in the Black community is the largest component of why urban education is in the state it is in. Each of these leaders has experience of either growing up or working in the southeastern region of the U.S. Five of the ten leaders specifically identified certain elements of their neighborhood in which the lack of equity can be easily noticed. One of the most glaring and blatant acts of racial discrimination in the United States has always been the difference in how Black and White children are educated. Districts that cater to predominantly Black students are often oppressed by restricting or denying access to specific resources that would permit the achievement gap to be lessened. For instance, issues of racial and economic inequality are longstanding and pervasive in the United States, with unemployment rates for Black Americans twice as high as those for White Americans (Diemar et al., 2016) and White families possessing more than ten times the wealth, on average, than Black
families (Kochhar & Fry, 2014). Six of the ten Black leaders were Black males, and all six male leaders mentioned how a lack of jobs or opportunities forces Black families to travel outside of their neighborhoods and communities to find better income.

During the interview process, data revealed a major lack of equity in schools that serve lower-income Black families. The data gathered from the ten Black leaders in this study helped this study gain insight into how this lack of equity affects Black students both in and out of school. Multiple subthemes were discovered within the lack of equity data; 1) lack of resources (community resources, human resources, and material resources), 2) lack of influence, 3) lack of choice, 4) lack of exposure. Lack of equity was the most obvious of all four main themes. Therefore, these four subthemes had a very strong presence in the interviews of the ten Black leaders.

This section offers deeper insight into how these Black leaders lack support and resources during a pandemic year. Also, it gives insight into how these leaders keep students motivated and engaged while so much is happening in the world around them. The lack of equity in Black communities and schools creates situations in which Black leaders have to have high levels of critical consciousness because their students often need more than traditional education. Schools that lack resources often need leaders that can be creative in building an atmosphere where students can still receive the socioemotional and sociopolitical development all students need.

Lack of Community Resources

All leaders in this study had one major aspect in common. They all work in schools in low-income or high-poverty areas. Based on information gathered in the interview process, these leaders' communities all lack resources such as jobs, health care,
transportation, grocery stores, housing, and other key resources that allow a community to prosper. Principal Tiger said the following about her community:

The lack of equity within my community has specifically negatively affected Black and Brown people, having limited access to things that would help better or improve everyday life, such as grocery stores, health care, schools that have appropriate materials, and certified staff.

There are many negative effects associated with this lack of resources. Black students who come from low-income or high-poverty areas often have self-esteem and confidence issues that are connected to the lack of having basic needs at home (food, clothes, shelter, and love). Principal Bear revealed this about his childhood:

Unlike my parents, who did not talk to me about racism and white privilege, I talk to my son about it because I do not want my son to go through the same thing I did as a child. Growing up in a city where you could visibly see how the rich people were living and going to school and how the poorer people lived and went to school affected my self-worth and how I looked at myself in the world. As a kid, you see this hierarchy, where Black is at the bottom, and I know how that impacted me.

The leaders in this study that cater to the PK-6th grade age of children all indicated that their students do not know they are poor until they see someone who has access to the resources and privileges they are denied. Principal Hornet, who leads a school that caters to PK-8th grade, said, "I don't think students realize that they are poor until they see something other than what they have known their whole life. My students don't see the rich white schools because none in our area".
The leaders in this study were not all located in the same region of the country, which further suggests that there could be a lack of equity in Black communities nationwide. Principal Raven is located in the Northeastern region of the U.S., and she indicated, "the charter school movement and turnaround school movement are at odds with the community because these movements often silence the voice of the people of the community".

The findings also illustrate that several of these leaders combatted a lack of resources by providing and teaching their students information about the world around them. Principal Shark, PK-5th:

The biggest thing to consider when you have limited access to resources is providing the students and the communities with the information they need so that they can be more critically conscious and aware of the oppressive elements that are against them.

Lack of Human Resources

The second way these leaders indicated the lack of equity affects their schools and communities is through a lack of human resources. Several of the leaders in this study expressed how the lack of community resources leads to potential teachers not wanting to work in the areas their schools serve. Principal Tiger and Principal Hornet both indicated:

The schools probably have vacancies for hard-to-hire positions. These schools are more likely to be staffed by teachers that are not necessarily certified. To staff, these hard-to-hire areas such as science, math, social studies, special education, and ESL are the subjects that students of color need to graduate. Also, on top of that, they need to take
a state test, they have to take a state test, but they may not even have a certified teacher to teach them.

Principal Mustang, Principal Bear, and Principal Eagle worked in schools in more affluent areas and schools in the poorer zip codes. These leaders expressed that when schools are in poorer areas, they often have negative stigmas connected to them, and teachers will take less pay to avoid these schools. Principal Mustang says:

One of the major problems when you deal with 90% African American or high poverty areas, The biggest problem is that teachers are never taught to dissect their own biases and prejudices and, there are not enough teachers qualified or certified teachers who can teach our students at the alarming rate to match the rate that our students are being pushed out into the system.

The data collected in the interview process revealed that some of the issues in the Black community stem from the laws, procedures, and policies that are supposed to improve education. Principal Lion suggested this about his school:

So, some policies and procedures have been implemented to disenfranchise the poor, socially, and economically disadvantaged communities. The laws and policies that have been put in place to fund our schools limit what can be done because if your community has a small tax base then, your school will probably not get upgrades and regular maintenance like the rich white schools or the school that serve more white students than ours. The sad part is our community is set up for failure because Black folks get pushed into areas like this because white folks control the cost of living around here, and Black folks can't afford to own homes or open businesses in this area.
Lack of Material Resources

The third component is a lack of material resources. Several of the leaders in this study revealed that they often would have to purchase supplies and material for their students out of their pocket because experience has shown them that there will always be at least one student who just does not have what they need. Principal Shark explained:

I think my school community predominantly serves Black and Brown boys and girls. And so when I think about how my community how my school is set up with resources, with programming with facilities and things that nature, in comparison to some of the schools that might be more affluent areas, there are some equity issues where we're not necessarily set up with the same resources, saying funding and support.

Leaders in low-income areas often have to help some students more because their home struggles may affect them at school. Principals Tiger and Hornet both said:

Sometimes you may have a student that may not have a clean shirt or got their uniform dirty and couldn't get it clean. Whatever the case may be, these leaders have established connections in the community to help in situations such as these to make sure students have exactly what they need.

Principal Bear explained how students in his city were all promised hotspots or some way to access the internet to do schoolwork during the pandemic, but the city fell short of that promise, and some students were in homes where they just didn't have internet access. Principal Mustang and Lion had the same issue, but the only problem was that the city did not make any promises in their situation. During the pandemic, their students were sent home back to a home where the parents could not afford Wi-Fi.
Principal Mustang said:

We lost some good kids to the streets because they were not in school around the positive role models we have in the building. They were forced to sit at home with nothing to do, and it's sad to say I lost a few students to the violence that comes when you put a bunch of poor people in the same areas with no resources.

Cultural Competency

In today's landscape of the current educational system, there is a lack of culture, and there is even less appreciation for Black culture. Five of the Black leaders have programs in place where the students help build the school's culture. Each of these leaders acknowledges that it is important to allow students to voice in the school culture. Cultural competence is the ability to understand and effectively interact with people from cultures different from ours. It also means negotiating cross-cultural differences to accomplish practical goals (Muñiz, 2019). According to the interviews conducted with these ten Black leaders, there is a stigma in which Black culture has been framed or positioned as an enemy of education. This is due to a complete lack of understanding or a complete unwillingness to accept that all cultures can contribute to growth and development.

The leaders in this study made it clear in this section that there is some element of personal connection to their students and the communities they lead. The interview process revealed a lack of cultural competency in education. This section consists of two subthemes: 1) the difficult conversations and 2) the school community. In 2020, a massive discussion began in schools everywhere because of the Black Lives Matter movement. The protest was sparked all over the country by the murder of George Floyd
and Breonna Taylor, even though most students were at home due to the covid-19 pandemic; these two murders of Black people committed by White police officers was on every news channel, on social media, and played a large role in the election of the current president. The leaders in this study all admit that they had to prepare their staff to have these talks amongst themselves and with the students.

Next, several leaders established connections between their upbringing and childhood to their student's current upbringing. Therefore, many leaders indicated that they go the extra mile to make sure that their students have a welcoming and loving school community. This is accomplished in many different ways, as revealed by the leaders during the interview process.

**Difficult Conversations**

The interview revealed that several leaders who work with students between the grade levels or PK-6th were mainly concerned with students understanding why Black people were marching and protesting during the BLM movement. Principal Tige indicated:

*Since most of my students are young, I don't think they understood why Black people were marching and protesting. Their level of understanding is not there yet, and what they know didn't come from school; it came from their parents. So we didn't focus on the actual movement, but we used it to work on our students' communication and other skills.*

Principal Hornet also suggested that the age of the students in the building prevented them from having a firm understanding of what was happening in the world. So that the kids would understand how working together can help a community. Principal
Hornet and other leaders in the area are working together to organize a march just for elementary school students.

Many were proud of the level of resistance displayed by their students, even though many of the students were too young to fully understand. For example, several of the leaders saw resistance in art, music, poetry, dance, journaling events. Both Principal Raven and Hornet expressed that they see themselves in their students and think it is very important that they learn the power of their voice at an early age.

Principal Raven felt that this is important because Black children need to know when to speak up when they are being harmed and how to tell when they are being harmed. So like many of the other leaders in this study Principal, Raven used the BLM movement as a teaching tool. Principal Hornet says that “it is important for these students to understand their reality and not be caught off guard by a world that somehow justifies the murder of Black people."

Principal Eagle believes that one way to empower students is by allowing them to write journals about the world around them:

I encourage my students to keep journals about the school, home, and what they think about what is happening around them. This way, for example, if a student feels that a teacher is unfair or not being fair. I, as the leader, can look into other students’ journals to make sure that all students in my building are treated fairly. This is a measure I use to help motivate and remove barriers for my students. Five of the leaders in this study expressed that you may not see the immediate effects of your leadership until later down the line, so it is important to have a staff that is helping push the mission.
All leaders expressed how their leadership is shaped by the community they serve. For example, Principal Bear, Mustang, and Shark all expressed that the policies they enact in their schools are part of many conversations with students, staff, and community members. This allows students and parents from marginalized communities to have their voices heard. Principal Bulldog indicated that, "they just want to be seen, heard, and have things seen from their perspective".

Difficult Conversations with Staff

All ten leaders in this story expressed diverse teaching staff, and with staff diversity comes a mixture of backgrounds and beliefs in one building. So as indicated by the interview process, some teachers supported the BLM movement, some did not, and then you had some teachers who did not say anything at all. This portion of the subtheme illustrates how these leaders facilitate difficult conversations about race, the BLM movement, racism, and white privilege and bias. Six of the leaders believe that students will have a clear understanding of the BLM movement by understanding Black history. For example, Principal Shark said:

I feel like we serve a community. I serve a community where the individuals want what’s best for our kids; they want their students to understand their history to understand the depths of the world and how the world is made up.

During the interview process, the leaders also revealed that their staff and teachers had no problem pointing out that there is racism in the world and education. The problem is when they have to confront their privilege and bias. Principal Bear shared an experience with a White staff member:
I think we have a very diverse staff of teachers, and you could see who was where in their journey and their understanding and acceptance of their privilege. And I tell you, like, you know, we will have these conversations, especially after this anti-racism training that we had at the beginning of last year. And you can visibly see who was very uncomfortable with the conversations. I remember I had one staff member whom I mean, and it was so obvious that she was a white woman. She was so upset about the conversation and so uncomfortable that she got visibly upset, and she remembered we were all on zoom, but she was in the office next to me, and she closed her computer. And she left. And she said, "I'm just, you know, I'm just not feeling well."

Many of the leaders told these same experiences of white teachers and staff who were visibly uncomfortable or upset by discussing their privilege in this country. Principals Raven, Bulldog, and Lion expressed their feelings about Black teachers who did not say anything because it was expected that some White teachers would find it uncomfortable to talk about BLM or their own bias and privilege. Principal Bulldog was upset and said:

I think it is sad that some Black teachers did not say anything. I know that they had opinions, but they just did not say anything out of fear. The saddest part of it all is that I have two sons, and either of them could have been George Floyd, or I could have been Breonna Taylor. We have to be able to speak out and not worry about losing our jobs.

Principal Raven, a leader in a charter school, saw a clear resistance from the White teacher and staff in their charter network. Principal Raven went as far as to declare
that her role in her charter network is so important because she will always fight against
the mechanisms that allow Black and Brown kids to be oppressed and marginalized.

As indicated in the interviews, 3 of the leaders said that they have to maintain
their professionalism as leaders because you can't forget the reason you are in a
leadership position, and that is to educate the students. Principal Tiger said:

I think Black and White people somehow hold back especially being on the job
because they're fearful of saying what they feel. And even as a leader, sometimes I hold
back on what I want to say. If it were after 5 pm, I would say it differently, but I want to
remain professional because I am the leader.

All ten leaders in this study believe that there is no way to fix the problem in
education and the world we live in if we do not continue to have these difficult
conversations. Principal Bear, Shark, and Raven all expressed that to be on their
teaching staff, you must be willing to have these conversations with other staff
members and students.

Principal Bear suggests that:

One of the challenges as an educator is that you begin to design lessons and begin
to have conversations and discussions with students in an explicit way about what
it takes to affect change. You have to have the right team of people around you to
help endorse your mission. You begin to provide opportunities for students to
practice, you know, to practice using their voice. And sometimes we must
manufacture for students. There is a lot of overlap when dealing with issues of
race and identity. One of the biggest issues is when some teachers think they are
doing good work and miss the mark on the mission. This comes from the point of
knowing who you are and also having an understanding of who your students are as well.

School Community

During the interview process, these leaders have indicated that the schools they lead and communities they serve suffer from a lack of and denial of resources. This limited access to resources calls for more equity in schools that are in low-income or high-poverty areas. Principal Raven indicated, “even with a lack of resources and equity, there is no motivation from the students. The school community that we create helps foster an environment where students are motivated to learn and grow”.

Seven of the leaders during the interview process used the phrase "safe space" when discussing providing opportunities for Black and Brown students with a space to vent, advocate for themselves, and be seen by their leaders and peers. Several leaders revealed their commitment to their students by greeting students at the beginning of each day with a smile to ensure that every student at least has a great start to each day. Principals Tiger, Raven, Hornet, Bear, Shark, Eagle all expressed that their students are greeted each morning and standing at their doors between each class by teachers and staff. Principal Raven and Tiger went into depth about this policy. Principal Tiger explained that "if students have problems or issues at home or in the outside world when they come to school, I want to forget about what is going on outside these walls."

Principal Raven believes that if a student is dealing with something or has a dirty shirt because their mom could not get their clothes washed. We can get that handled at the beginning of the day, so that child's day goes smoothly.
Seven of the leaders in this study also mentioned that there is no suspension policy under their leadership because, as stated by Principal Bear, "we can't love, protect, or educate them if they are not at school".

Principal Mustang made it clear that he will not suspend students because "when they are not in the building that means they are in the streets, and in my area kids that turn to the streets don’t come back to school. So in order to protect my kids, we have other alternatives in place to prevent pushing kids into the streets".

Principal Shark and Bear both explained that research has proven that Black students are often viewed as older than they are. Principal Bear suggests:

- Black boys and girls are subjected to harsher discipline and punishment because often, White teachers see them as being manipulative in some of their behavior.
- This leads to Black students being referred to the office at a higher rate than any other group of students.

Many leaders during the interview process also indicated that they are part of the machine, but they reflect and remind themselves that the kids they serve need more than traditional education. Principal Shark explained:

- I mentioned before that this is the school advisor time, where students and teachers can interact and talk about whatever they want. That is time that I've had to carve out of our instructional time to do that because I know that it's important for my kids to have that time to not necessarily talk about the instruction but for us to build them up as people holistically.

By not being part of the machine, the leaders in this study express that they do not want to unintentionally harm their students. Principal Shark told how he had to conform
to what society says a principal is supposed to look like. So he explains how he had to cut his hair and present himself in a way that would be pleasing to today's society of what a leader should look like. This upset Principal Shark, so he said:

Once I was in a position to affect policies at my school, I made sure I grew my dreads back, and I allowed my students to be who they were and didn't make them conform to the policies put in place to regulate Black bodies.

Principal Raven also shared Principal Shark's attitude about how policies are put in place to regulate and control Black bodies. Principal Raven stated, "I am not concerned with students tucking in shirts and walking in a straight single-file line. Now, these policies will help us as leaders develop our students".

Lastly, Principal Lion stated that beginning in leadership is a lonely position because you will not please everyone, but as long as you do what's best for the kids, you will look yourself in the mirror. During the interview process, in some way, each leader stated that they will always put the students as a priority over everything. Principal Shark stated:

I feel like the white leaders want to have those conversations. They want to be able to, you know, promote and have some of these activities. But they also operate in the sense of fear, where if they say the wrong thing, it's gonna get out. It's going to hurt them more than it will help them in the long run. I think Black leaders were able to lead more fearlessly, we're able to lead authentically, and we're able to provide our kids with everything they need.
Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

In defining Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), it is critical to draw from the work of Gay (2018), Ladson-Billings (2009), and McCarthy et al. (2015). Teachers who utilize CRT practices value students' cultural and linguistic resources and view this knowledge as capital to build upon rather than a learning barrier. These teachers use this capital (i.e., personal experiences and interests) as the basis for instructional connections to facilitate student learning and development. Teachers who use CRT apply interactive, collaborative teaching methods, strategies, and ways of interacting that support CLD students' cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences and integrate the methods with evidence-based practices (Harlin & Souto-Manning, 2012; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; Santamaria, 2008).

The interview process proved that even with a lack of resources, the leaders in this study all find ways to enrich the educational experiences of their students in different ways. Many of the leaders in this study mentioned that Critical Race Theory was banned in most southern states. Critical race theory only became a problem to white people because Black youth-led the charge to make a historical connection between events that occurred in 2020 and events that occurred during the civil rights movement. Exposure was the leading subtheme based on several significant statements from the interview process. The leaders believe that Black students need to be exposed to Black national history and their local Black history as well. For example, Principal Bulldog believes:

Black students need to be taught by Black teachers because no one knows and understands the Black life or the Black experience in America more than Black people. I work with several great white teachers, but in my honest opinion, I know they don't live
in our community. Most of them drive here from other towns where there are not as many Black people. So how in the world can I expect these people to truly love my kids when they don't even see Black people where they live.

Other leaders expressed how important it is for their students to see examples of Blackness in the curriculum and the real world. Principal Bear, Raven, and Eagle take advantage of the community support and host plays, assemblies, and other events that expose their students to the rich history of their community. Principal Raven gave an example of some of this community support:

We hosted a high school prep orientation for three days, and we had speakers that came in and talked about the connection between our history and the history of the city. Some of the speakers talked about the rabblerousers that came from that era in our cities history and letting kids know that it's okay to agitate for change.

Several leaders admitted that teaching Black students the history of the United States and how Black people have been treated will allow them to see why communities of color lack the resources White communities have. Principal Hornet, Tiger, and Eagle all believe:

I mean, you think about what's going on right now in education because of the BLM movement. Leadership is trying to limit what we can expose children of color to. It takes us having those conversations with our students, their parents, and people in the community to say, "Hey, at one point, our country was segregated, and that means this is the way it is because of that, this is what happens, and this is how, a lot of people feel about people of color in our country, especially black people, and the communities we live in".
Exposure to Black success and presenting examples of Black success to the students is a very high priority of these leaders. Principal Shark's motto is "students can't be what they can't see. That being said, he also stated the following:

The state and the district are big on the numbers. They're really big on the data; they want to ensure that students are performing on the state assessments, and it's all about the state assessments. That's what's important to them, and I think that academic achievement related to state assessments is critical to a school leader's success. I don't think that that is the only thing school leaders should focus on. I think what's important is for school leaders to understand that they have a job and a duty to develop the whole child. Not just academically, but behaviorally, socially, politically, emotionally, because, at the end of the day, it's been proven that Black students don't see themselves in the curriculum. So it is up to the leaders to constantly give examples of Black excellence for our kids.

Principal Hornet also mentioned that there is a lack of support for the district and state in areas of improving curriculum for Black students to provide more culturally relevant material:

Depending on what you are asking for, you may get put on a timeline when it comes to district support, and when you are asking for curriculum improvements, help may never come. If we're truly educating children of color, our curriculum is not culturally competent. It does not address their lives and experiences to make them want to engage in the content. And that's important. Because a lot of what we tell teachers is like, how are you engaging students? How are you making
them want to learn and make the learning interesting for them? So teachers are expected to do that.

Principals Bulldog, Mustang, Lion, and Wolf all lead schools in smaller towns in which the wealthier white kids all attend private schools, and most of these communities still practice housing segregation. Principal Mustang’s school is in one of the poorest counties in the state, but he still can do the following:

I try to bring as many examples of Black success to speak to my students because most of them come from poverty, and they need to hear the stories of people that came from where they came from and made it. Most of my kids in this school have never met a Black doctor or a Black lawyer. They have met a Black judge or Black millionaire.

Principal Bulldog explains how she does the same thing for the students of her community:

I taught a student years ago from this same community, and he comes back all the time to speak to our kids. I like him to explain to the kids now that he didn't make all A's, that he was one of the kids that stayed in trouble, but he figured it out, and now he is a successful executive for Netflix, living in California making a six-figure salary. The most important part is that he was just like most kids now. It was just needed to have the right people to motivate him to elevate his situation.
Lack of the Black Voice in Policymaking

The last section is by the theme found the most in all the interviews with the Black leaders. Based on the responses of these ten Black leaders, the system of education is not free of racism and discrimination. According to some leaders, most of what is done in education is based on quantification. So if everything is based on the number, then how is it so hard to see that the lack of resources that Black schools have is one of the leading causes for some of the disparities found in education. CRT scholars and research suggest that most of the disparities in the educational system can be linked to the lack of a Black voice in the formation of policies and procedures. Education in America has never been equal, nor will it ever come close to being equitable. According to Bendix
(2018), the United States ranks 24\textsuperscript{th} amongst all industrialized countries. This is sole because in the United States, there is a ceiling on how far a Black person is expected to go based on their background, and in the U.S., there are systems in place to protect and preserve White privilege.

While interviewing these ten leaders, there were examples and experiences where these leaders could point out the racism in specific policies and procedures. For instance, a policy passed after the pandemic forced the hands of all leaders and teachers of the two counties that had the Black students to come back to schools. Keep in mind if the leaders were not able to get students back in school and test a certain percentage of students, that school would lose its federal funding.

As indicated by several of the leaders during the interview process, one of the biggest problems in today’s educational system is the fact that there is a lack of Black input in the policymaking process. It was also revealed by many of the leaders that this lack of input from a variance of Black leaders allows some of the racism found in society to manifest as educational policy. Two of the leaders admitted that they have plenty of Black representation on the district level, but there must be Black leadership from all communities because the Black leadership in place is not directly connected to the communities they serve. Principal Lion suggested the following about the leadership in his more rural community:

There is insufficient Black input because the policymakers do not spend time in schools that suffer the most, which are districts in the Black communities. There have to be more focus groups, studies in the impoverished communities, considerations for the needs, and a collective effort to support the hopes and dreams of the people.
Three leaders in this study believe that the lack of a Black voice in education is not by accident. These leaders believe that the current system is set up to silence the Black voice, like many other aspects of American society. Principal Bear indicated:

Research has historically silenced Black voices, and research impacts policy. Policy often does not meet the needs and harms Black lives. There needs to be a change in how doctoral research programs are designed and delivered. There needs to be a change in our conception of ways of knowing.

Principal Eagle also believes that Black educators and researchers must continue to keep pushing the discussion of all the injustices and inequalities in today's society:

I do not feel that there is enough Black representation in policymaking. So I think what needs to be done to correct that is for scholars like us to continue to elevate the discussion, analyze policy, and then get our findings in front of policymakers. My doctoral research analyzed current and past education policy. In my research, I analyzed district discipline and code of conduct policies. I talked about how they disproportionately created barriers for Black students through exclusionary discipline—and so getting that work in front of leaders in my district, with the hopes that they will revise those policies because a lot of it was the subjective language that created those barriers.

Principal Shark, Tiger, and Hornet all discussed how the leadership in their city is predominantly Black, but there is little representation from the many communities that their city serves. Principal Shark says:

So when I think about the school district I operate under, I think that there are enough Black people. And so when I say this, I say that our school board, our
superintendent, and most of the cabinet members are all Black. And so yes, we do have voices at the table advocating for the needs of our Black boys and girls. However, sometimes I still think that there needs to be a variance in those voices in making sure that the voices of educated people, the voices of principals, teachers, and students' voices are all still being heard.

Two leaders mentioned that even though there is Black leadership in place when a leader asks for support from leadership at the district level, either one of two things happens. First, you get put on a timeline that is so unrealistic to help your school. Then secondly, if a leader asks for any type of support, which should be more personnel, it ends up being more paperwork and requests by the school leader.

The second part of the problem of Black voices in education is the problem at the state level. Whereas many of the leaders admitted that there is no lack of Black voice locally, on a state level, there is a problem with the missing Black voices in the capital cities. Five of the leaders in Tennessee had a serious problem with the policy put in place during the pandemic. Principal Sharks indicated:

I think that individuals tried to say that they make policies that do not necessarily benefit one particular group, but their policies are rooted in racist practices. And for example, like we just discussed, the policies that the state of Tennessee put in place that was forcing Nashville and Memphis to go back to schools before it was safe when COVID-19 was predominantly impacting Black and brown communities was one of those policies where they're trying to say that they're not targeting any individual group. However, in essence, that's exactly what you're
doing, and so they always try to mask policies and say that they're just doing this.

Principal Hornet also said the following about the same policy:

Let's talk about testing all those, so this is my example here. State-mandated state testing mandated state test and this year. In our current segment, Tennessee, Students are mandated to come back and take a state test, even if they've been on virtual for the majority of the year. The state went and wrote a policy to address the two biggest districts, minority districts in the state, which are Memphis and Nashville. They wrote a policy, they say, we're gonna snatch your funding, if you don't come back in person.

As expressed by the leaders in the interview process, this policy is damaging because even though the state will not hold the scores against the schools. The state still intends to publish the scores on the state website. This hurts Black school districts because there is no mention that these scores were affected by a global pandemic, or some schools have teacher shortages in content areas that will be tested. Principal Hornet also indicated that “these scores being made public will affect teachers wanting to work in certain schools, and parents will not want to send their kids to schools with such terrible scores.” Three of the principals, including Principal Bear, all said the following:

The things the state holds high on its priority list are easily quantifiable things. In terms of Black school leadership, the support is not there globally because there's just not enough importance placed on the schools that we serve.
Principal Bulldog put in simpler terms when stating the following:

The policymakers, they're a joke. They are. They are a complete joke. The individuals who comprise the state assessments are a joke. Because in all honesty, those people have no foundations in education whatsoever.

Discussion

This research study examined how Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students. This research study is minimal research that seeks to examine sociopolitical development from the leaders’ perspective. For example, scholars such as Clark and Seider (2020), Diemer et al. (2010), Freire (1970), Ginwright (2010), and Watts et al. (2011) have all researched the areas of critical consciousness and sociopolitical development. This study utilizes how these ten Black leaders’ life and educational experiences helped them gain high levels of critical consciousness. The ten leaders use their high CC levels to create the best educational experiences for their students. Therefore, allowing their students the spaces they also need to critically reflect, analyze, and take action in a society where Black communities often offer limited access to certain resources. This research highlighted Ladson-Billings (1995) that school plays a pivotal role in the rail trail, often children’s consciousness and commitment to specific ongoing inequity. Schools that have a predominately Black student enrollment, in this case, 90% or more, are often struck by the oppressive nature of policymakers' lack of understanding and knowledge about the Black community. Having leaders with high levels of CC is essential because, according to Erikson (1968), it has been theorized to be a period in which individuals actively seek out new understandings of the world and their role in it. Several themes were uncovered during this study, but the four that presented
themselves the most were: the lack of the Black voice in policymaking, cultural competency, culturally responsive teaching, and a lack of equity in education. The ten Black leaders in this study all had personal experiences during their youth and during their time as school leaders that allowed them to recognize the inequities that exist in education, but most impressively, what to do to provide the best educational experience they can for their students.

How Critical Consciousness Can Positively Impact Urban Education

The Interviews process reveals varous themes that suggest that more critical consciousness education would positively impact urban education. Freire (1970), the ultimate goal of critical consciousness is to promote oppressed and marginalized communities to locate sources of oppression and become socially active in a fight those oppressive forces. The leaders in this research study provide several examples of allowing their students to reflect and question the world around them. While each component of critical consciousness has a distinct meaning and purpose, they are also interconnected in that development in one element can influence development in others (Freire, 1970). For example, several leaders could critically reflect on their youth and how those moments impacted their lives. Therefore, considering those factors when constructing a school community allows students to develop holistically.

Additionally, Freire (1970) indicated that he was not in favor of traditional education. Correspondingly, all leaders in this research study have the same beliefs on the damage caused by a conventional education system. Many crucial consciousness scholars have suggested that a school setting where the students work reciprocally to investigate and address real-world issues allows for more significant and more rapid sociopolitical
development (Watt, 2011). Freire (1970) believed that, in such settings, students come to see their community and world as capable of transformation and to see themselves as possessing the agency to bring about such change.

Gay and Kirkland (2003). The overall goal of this research study is to bridge the gap between a student's sociopolitical development and the obstacles and oppression that urban leadership encounters to provide spaces for a student to grow and develop. For example, many leaders allow their teachers to include more culturally responsive material, even though it may not be part of their district's curriculum. Believe that culturally responsive teaching (CRT) for ethnically diverse students should be a fundamental feature of teacher classroom practice. CRT involves using the cultures, experiences, and perspectives of the community they serve. The interview process also revealed that many leaders emphasized having a difficult conversation with their teachers and staff. Many leaders indicated this was to educate teachers and staff to be more conscious about the messages they may be sending to their Black students. Teacher accountability involves being more self-conscious, critical, and analytical of one's own teaching beliefs and behaviors, and teachers need to develop more profound knowledge and consciousness about what is to be introduced, how, and to whom (Gay and Kirkland, 2003). To ensure student engagement, teachers must also thoroughly analyze and carefully monitor personal beliefs and instructional behaviors.

This research study further proves that urban education can only benefit from more critical consciousness education because many of the leaders in this research study referred to serving their community when considering their school culture. One of the leaders in this study explained his less than humble upbringing, and education made him
feel as though "Black" was supposed to be at the bottom of society. Corresponding with Freire (1970), he observed that as oppressed peoples' thinking about and understanding their social conditions developed, their views of society also developed. In most interviews, student empowerment was an underlying theme; all leaders believed that students should be seen and heard in the classroom. These Black leaders increased their students' political efficacy and their ability to resist oppressive forces by empowering students.
Chapter Five

Discussion and Conclusions

Introduction

This current study with these ten Black leaders proved that the research and data that has been collected on schools that serve Black communities is authentic. During the interviews with the ten Black leaders, it was discovered that based on their life and educational experiences, the education system is still riddled with the same inequities and oppression that has always been utilized to disenfranchise and marginalize Black people communities. For example, multiple leaders discussed curriculum change, requests for more funding, teacher aides in the classroom, and other forms of support that would improve the educational experience were requested. These requests often fell on deaf ears from district or state administration. However, this support was almost instant if the leaders requested anything that would suggest discipline or managing the student body. Principal Shark believes that Black students cannot be what they cannot see. This is true because the majority of the ten Black leaders in this research study, as each of them had someone Black (African American), influenced or inspired them to pursue a career in education.

Furthermore, making it even more essential for these leaders to provide the best educational experience for the students they now lead. Making a case for the question "How do these Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students?" In order to answer this question, it was vital to probe into a leader's life and education experiences, beliefs, background, hiring of teachers and staff, stance on several different matters involving race and politics. Utilizing qualitative methodology
permitted this study to gauge how critically conscious the ten Black leaders were without using Diemer et al.'s (2010) Critical Consciousness Scale (CCS).

Critical consciousness (CC) refers to the ability to analyze and take action against oppressive political, economic, and social forces shaping society (Freire, 1970). The three components of CC are (a) critical reflection, which is a school setting that can take the form of activities such as historical analysis of events that have taken place in the world, a current event happening in the world, students keeping journals about what happens in their lives, Etc. (b) political agency, which is as simple as Principal Raven’s goal of teaching students how to advocate for themselves, or as impactful as Principal Bulldog’s goal of making sure students know how voting can affect their community, and (c) critical action, which can take many forms such as art, dance, song, wearing particular clothing, forming interest clubs, marching, protesting, Etc. Critical reflection refers to the ability to name and analyze forces of inequality. Political agency is the internal belief that one can affect social change. Finally, critical action is an individual's engagement in activities that challenge oppressive forces and structures. The leaders in this research study all expressed how the areas their schools served were deprived of resources or lacked access to specific resources such as jobs, grocery stores, transportation, health care, housing, Etc. Therefore, students with high levels of critical consciousness are the best suited for these roles. Importantly, research suggests that critical consciousness may serve as a protective factor for youth marginalized by these inequities in race and economic status (Cammarota, 2007; Diemer & Hsieh, 2011; Ginwright, 2010). In this study, that protection is displayed in the form of leaders that have had an opportunity to reflect on the world around them and create spaces in which Black students can have the
freedom to learn and express themselves without fear of punishment or discipline. Additionally, because most of these leaders' schools are in high-poverty areas, being exposed to leaders with such high levels of CC helps build their levels of sociopolitical development and helps them understand and then resist unjust conditions through constructive social action.

Of the ten Black leaders, eight of the ten mentioned other cultures being a part of their student's curriculum, whether the state and district approve it or not. According to Campbell-Hunt (2000), African Americans demonstrate lower belief in a just world than White Americans because of the social inequality formally built into their social policies and practices. All leaders believe that racism found in American society manifests itself in the form of educational policy. This is why these leaders put extra emphasis on the growth and development of each student as a human being and not on who knows the most random fact out of an already whitewashed history book. Sociopolitical development has its roots in Freire's (1970) foundational work on critical consciousness. Based on the findings of this current study, it is vital to highlight that these Black leaders believe that acknowledging Blackness and abstract thinking skills will increase young people's capacity to engage and understand the world around them, thus strengthening their ability to recognize and understand the causes and consequences of such socio-political forces (Clark, 2019). Watts and Flanagan (2007) posit that youths’ critical consciousness development is moderated by the availability of meaningful opportunities (opportunity structures) for them to engage in critical reflection and action. Regarding the potential of schools and educators to offer such meaningful opportunities,
Racism overtly shaped U.S. social institutions since the first settlers arrived as early as 1607 and continue, although more subtly in some areas, to impact U.S. institutions such as education, which profoundly impacts the trajectory of someone's life in the U.S. (Yosso, 2005). Ladson-Billings (2009) and Bernal (2002) have proposed the question: why is some knowledge in the U.S. discounted (Black culture), and why is other knowledge (White culture) the basis for some U.S. institutions? Leadership scholars seeking to answer questions about culture and meaning have found experimental and quantitative methods to be insufficient on their own in explaining the phenomenon they wish to study. As a result, qualitative research has gained momentum as a mode of inquiry. This trend has roots in the development of the New Leadership School (Conger, 1999; Hunt, 1996). Through the usage of numbers and quantification, White policymakers have found new ways to silence the voices of Black leaders, students, parents, and stakeholders. For example, the policy passed in Tennessee forced Nashville and Memphis City School districts to get students back in the buildings. In short, leaders were told to get eighty percent of students, no matter how prepared, tested, and the scores will not affect you or your funding.

On the other hand, fail to do this, and you will lose federal funding for your respected school. The catch 22 to this is that no matter if the leaders get the students tested or not, the state is still going to publish the scores of each school no matter how bad they are, and these scores are made for prospective teachers, students, and parents to view by gauging the ten Black leaders levels of CC in certain areas and making use of qualitative research in an educational context. This study can create personal narratives
(of the self and others) of how these leaders view the world and how they plan to prepare their students for the inequities and discrimination that they may one day encounter.

Lastly, this research study uncovered four key themes that align with most research on the inequities and discrimination plaguing urban education: a lack of equity; lack of or complete denial of access to specific resources. Second, a need for culturally responsive teaching in classrooms and schools. Third, a need for more cultural competency in schools. Last is the lack of the Black voice in policymaking. In all ten interviews conducted, these four themes continued to arise in the conversations had with these ten Black leaders. Qualitative education research can provide racial counter-insights as a critique of how racism (1) framed Black culture as an enemy of education, (2), according to Watts et al. (2003), challenge the structures in place that allow the system to blame the victims. Furthermore, this study questioned how these ten leaders, despite a lack of resources, still provide students with the spaces they require to acquire the skill necessary to navigate a society that may view Black culture as a problem. The purpose of the study was not to imply urban education is in a wrong place, but to begin to bridge the gap between research that suggests that racism is a permanent fixture in American society, the first tenant of critical race theory (CRT), and the plethora of research and data that suggest that schools that have over ninety percent Black student enrollment are subject to obstacles that school with majority White student enrollment do not encounter.

Urban Education Suffers from a Lack or Denial of Resources

Over the past half-century, Black people have made substantial social and economic progress, gaining political rights that long had been denied to them, entering professions from which they had been blocked, and largely overcoming centuries of overt
racism and oppression. However, these apparent signs of improvement mask deep inequities that relegate tens of millions of Black people to second-class status, with far fewer opportunities to achieve good health, political influence, prosperity, and security than other Americans. The majority of Americans fail to recognize the magnitude of these problems. For example, a 2019 study found that over 97% of Americans vastly underestimated the considerable gap between the median wealth held by Black families ($17,000) and White families ($171,000)—a ratio of ten to one (Beyer, 2020). Therefore, with such a massive gap in the income of Black and White families in the United States, there is no surprise that the same gap exists in the education system. One of the most significant lies ever told is that the American education system is a pure meritocracy, meaning that if two students work equally as hard for the same amount of time that both students will receive the same rewards at the end of their processes no matter what race, gender, or neighborhood you grew up in. According to Sweeney (2018), Black neighborhoods are, and areas with very high Black populations often cannot generate as much tax money as Whiter or more affluent areas. This is a problem because, in most states, the money generated from property taxes and other means makes up the majority of money schools receive to educate students. The money from the federal government only makes up about ten percent of what schools in Black schools receive. State education funding formulas have been controversial, confusing, and even lawsuits. Designed to ensure adequate funding across schools and occasionally promote equity funding formulas distribute revenue to districts based on various factors (Mississippi Department of Education, 2021). For example, based on numbers by Mississippi Dept. of Ed. For the 2019-2020 school year, the average expenditure per student was $9,189.61
per student. This can be misleading because some of the richer, more affluent areas were able to spend more than ten thousand dollars per student, whereas some of the poorest areas, such as Scott County, Mississippi, were only able to spend $7,900 per student. This disparity makes a massive difference in how much college preparation a school can offer its students, recruiting stipends used to recruit better teachers, repairs, maintenance, upkeep of buildings and facilities, providing a wider variety of classes, and providing more extracurricular activities, etc. Based on research conducted in 2015 by American economists Jackson, Johnson, and Persico, all Black researchers, increased school funding by ten percent produced better outcomes in traditionally underfunded schools.

By evaluating the oppression and discrimination in urban education, there must be an acknowledgment that substantial disparities exist while the United States has made some progress. For instance, Beyer (2020) suggests that Black communities suffer from high rates of unemployment. However, this is directly correlated to Uriostegui et al.’s (2021) study that said Black communities are denied access to high-paying jobs, transportation, health care, housing, and other resources that allow communities to prosper and grow. That lack of these resources makes Black communities appear inattentive and often causes these areas to be devalued and zoned out of the better school districts. In this current study, several Black leaders admitted that the school is a high-poverty area. According to Beyer (2020), in 2017, 14.3% of Black workers earned poverty-level wages, compared to just 8.6% of White workers. In other words, Black people in some areas of the U.S. are working just as hard and long as White workers but making half the income. This current study also revealed that these ten Black leaders understand that some of their students may be facing obstacles outside of school that may
prevent or hinder a student of any race from having a positive educational experience and outcome. For example, several of these Black leaders mentioned having extra clothes on campus for students that may not have clean clothes or may not have the necessities at all. In this study, leaders also mentioned providing other resources to students that they may not obtain at home. This further illustrates that these Black leaders having higher CC levels in these areas made them more prepared to handle or be prepared for situations such as this without causing embarrassment to the student or their family.

One area mentioned in all interviews with the ten Black leaders was hiring qualified teachers. Teachers are a valuable and frequently irreplaceable component to a successful school setting. According to Gay and Kirkland (2003), urban districts' difficulty attracting and hiring teachers means that they are less highly qualified than their suburban counterparts concerning experience, educational background, and teaching certification. This does not mean that they may be less effective teachers. The supply and demand of qualified teachers also contribute to urban teacher shortages. Supply factors involve wages, working conditions, and geographic proximity between teacher candidates and schools (Jacob, 2007). Based on the research of Jacob (2007) and the testimonies of the ten Black leaders, schools in high poverty areas have a more challenging time hiring teachers no matter if they are qualified or certified. According to federal statistics in the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), 34.7 percent of urban schools had difficulty hiring a math teacher, compared with only 25.1 percent of suburban schools (NCES, 2021). This adds to the stress of Black school leaders because this often means that Black students are being taught by paraprofessionals or teachers that are not yet state-certified but in an alternate route program. Additionally, according to the
SASS, 20.3 percent of teachers in urban districts had three or fewer years of experience, compared with 17.6 percent in suburban districts. Urban teachers also are less likely to stay at the same school for an extended period, with 52.4 percent (compared with 57.1 percent of suburban teachers) reporting having taught at the same school for four or more years.

Lastly, Black leaders face more difficulty attracting teachers, not just qualified or certified teachers, but teachers to fill vacant positions. Moreover, according to the ten Black leaders in this current study, Black leaders also attempt to hire teachers that fit their school's culture. One of the most common misconceptions in education is between a qualified teacher and an effective teacher. Freire (1973) believed that a good teacher could differ in student views education. In other words, an effective teacher may not be certified or have many years in the field of education. However, a practical education makes students feel empowered valued, and they are a part of the learning process instead of the teacher being the holder of the knowledge. One of the most discouraging facts in education is that ineffective teachers who do not understand their students cause huge discipline disparities in urban education. This discipline disparity also influences some teachers' discussion to avoid teaching in urban schools. A study conducted in Texas, for example, found that mobility patterns among public school teachers were more strongly correlated with student characteristics and discipline than with salary levels. In the current study, all of the ten Black leaders, the leaders who lead younger students, acknowledged that younger students need to be effective teachers because of the stage of development these children are in. While in the early development of critical thinking and self-esteem, effective teachers allow Black youth to have positive educational
experiences, which can be a greater possibility of a positive outcome later in the student's life.

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

It is only fitting to bring this section with two quotes that revolve around the education of Black children and dismantling the oppressive internal and external factors of the education system. First, from the children's book, *Little Man*, (1976) of CRT scholar, author, playwright, poet, and activist, James Baldwin:

A child cannot be taught by anyone who despises him, and a child cannot afford to be fooled. A child cannot be taught by anyone whose demand, essentially, is that the child repudiates his experience and all that gives him sustenance (p. xx).

Second, coming from Principal Shark in this study, “Black kids cannot be what they cannot see”. Both quotes are very impactful in education and educating Black children in the U.S. According to Watts et al. (2013), the American education system has always framed Black culture as an enemy, making those who practice Black culture in settings where traditional Eurocentric education is taught an enemy. This current study revealed that all but one of the ten Black leaders felt that the Black students need more exposure to Black culture via school curriculum. Black students are forced to learn how every race and culture shaped this country except Black culture. Haycock and Crawford (2008) reported that most of today’s teaching force is made of middle-aged White suburban or rural women who have had very little to no exposure to Black culture. This is compounded by the fact that teacher preparation programs have been lacking in educating teachers on the importance of cultural diversity. This information has created cause for concern amongst CRT scholars and Black education leaders, as research shows that a
student's race, ethnicity, cultural background, and other variables (e.g., poverty, assessment practices, systemic issues, lack of P.D. opportunities for teachers, institutional racism) significantly influence the student's achievement (Harry & Klingner, 2014; Orosco & Klingner, 2010; Skiba et al., 2011). This problem is because if someone does not value or respect someone's culture, they are almost guaranteed to have some preconceived prejudice or bias before encountering people. These preconceived biases eventually become issues such as lower than usual student expectations, discipline referrals, student-teacher confrontations, students losing interest in education, Etc.

Additionally, children are more likely, however, to detect interpersonal discrimination (such as that perpetrated by peers and teachers) than institutional discrimination (such as government-level discrimination (Greene et al., 2006; Hayes et al., 2004; Szalacha et al., 2003).

There are two approaches in current schooling that can be found based on who the leadership is and what the administration has to say about it. The first approach is known as the No Excuses Model. "No-excuses” describes an approach to education that seeks to eliminate opportunity gaps facing youth from oppressed racial and SES groups through extended time in school, strict disciplinary environment, direct instruction, and intensive focus on traditional mathematics and literacy skills (Carter, 2008). With its positioning of the teacher as knowledge holder and authority figure, the no-excuses approach represents the banking model of education that Freire (1973). The second approach is the Progressive Model. The Progressive schooling models emphasize a caring and collaborative community in which students and teachers work together as partners and a curricular focus upon social justice, inquiry-based learning, and deep understanding
There is also a focus on social justice issues and an emphasis on egalitarian teacher-student relationships. Based on data collected in this current study, all ten Black leaders have created a culture within their respected school that resembles a progressive model.

Another action that has been taken against Black culture in 2021 is the banning of Critical Race Theory (CRT), or the teaching of CRT in states such as Tennessee, Florida, Oklahoma, Idaho, Alabama, Mississippi, Etc. This further illustrates that White Americans do not want their children's education on how this country was built, and at the same time deny Black communities and children an opportunity to analyze American history historically. According to Gay (2000), McCarthy et al. (2015), and Ladson-Billings (2009), teachers who utilize CRT practices value students' cultural and linguistic resources and view this knowledge as capital to build upon rather than a learning barrier. These teachers use this capital (i.e., personal experiences and interests) as the basis for instructional connections to facilitate student learning and development. Teachers who use CRT apply interactive, collaborative teaching methods, strategies, and ways of interacting that support CLD students' cultural, linguistic, and racial experiences and integrate the methods with evidence-based practices (Harlin & Souto-Manning, 2012; Hersi & Watkinson, 2012; McCarthy et al., 2015; Santamaria, 2008). Culturally responsive methods provide teachers with a critical understanding of how students' cultural, linguistic, and racial identities develop and how these constructs impact learning. As stated in the interviews of Participants 6, 7, and 10, Black students are the only race of people that are denied access to their history in schools, and symbols of Black culture or liberation have been deemed a distraction in some school systems, items
such as Black Lives Matters paraphernalia, clothing of African origin or displays Africa, anything with images of Black power or togetherness. Knowledge of the effects of culturally responsive teaching on students' historical and contemporary views is an essential element in crafting effective instructional practices. This study revealed how Black students began to think critically more often in situations of importance and when reflecting on certain factors around them. This happened because these ten Black leaders have created spaces where their students can express themselves differently from traditional schools. Also, with programs such as mentoring, and related cultural clubs and organizations, Black students learned the power of their voice and their capacity to make or influence change. Lastly, Black students learn to advocate for themselves and challenge structures intended to oppress them by utilizing CRT in schools.

Cultural Competency

One of the sole reasons the ten Black leaders in this study had a firm grasp was understanding their students' cultural background—this element known as Cultural Competency. Cultural competence is the ability to understand and interact effectively with people from other cultures (National Center for Cultural Competency, 2021). Additionally, the NCCC (2021) suggests no one definition of cultural competence. Definitions of cultural competence have evolved from diverse perspectives, interests, and needs and are incorporated in state legislation. Based on data collected during this study, the culture is constantly changing and evolving. Therefore, education must evolve with them, but that is not the case. For example, in the Black community, language is part of the culture. It is also part of an individual's racial identity. Language, the communication medium of culture, can be shaped by culture. Racial identity is the sense of one’s cultural
and linguistic beliefs and values; it can entail a group of people united or classified based on history, nationality, or geographic distribution (Irvine & Armento, 2001). In the traditional school model, Black students are often told to dress, talk, and act in a particular manner. These practices and procedures have origins in White suburban etiquette and are commonly referred to as the norm. When Black students are forced to duplicate the norm in schools, they often feel oppressed and discriminated against.

In some extreme cases, Black students do not travel far outside of their neighborhoods. Therefore, all they see and know is Black culture. Often, Black students are exposed to White culture as what they may see on television. For example, some White Americans do not understand why the Black community is not as accepting of police presence, and this is solely because police have been the best legal divider between White and Black people. After a historical analysis of the terrors, police have caused in the Black community. After analyzing a contemporary lens, there is cause to argue that not much has changed. Due to the increasing need for more cultural competency in education, there is growing pressure and focus on teacher educators to provide diverse experiences for their students to help them develop cultural skills as well as cultural knowledge (Keengwe, 2010). In other words, there is a need for future teachers to understand how to work with diverse groups of races, cultures, and languages that students represent in the classroom. Establishing sound pedagogy rooted in cultural understanding of the students is also critical, given that racial, cultural, and linguistic integration has the potential to increase academic success for all learners (Shin et al., 2016).

For many years, multicultural scholars have argued for teachers to gain knowledge and develop skills for working with students from different backgrounds
(Banks, 2006; Khanna et al., 2009; McCarthy et al., 2015). Many early childhood teachers have limited experience working with diverse students and families (Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Lie et al., 2011). For example, the diversity in the United States has changed so much in the past few decades that language is an essential component in the Black community (Aud et al., 2012). Language, the communication medium of culture, can be shaped by culture. A culture's racial identity is the sense of that particular culture’s cultural and linguistic beliefs and values; it can entail a group of people united or classified based on history, nationality, or geographic distribution (Irvine & Armento, 2001). The following two scenarios are examples of how the educational system lacks cultural competency.

Scenario one: Cities like Jackson Miss, Memphis Tennessee; New Orleans, Louisiana; and Atlanta Georgia, all have majority Black inner-city populations. Even though each of these cities is reasonably close to each other, there are considerable differences in the culture of each of these cities. Therefore, the language of each of these cities is also different, and this is one reason that Black students do not do well in a colorblind educational system. So, when a White teacher tells a student to speak proper English in the classroom, this is not only dehumanizing but an absolute insult to a student's beliefs and values.

Scenario two: In some Black communities, a person's hair and how they wear or style their hair has a significant meaning. In the past few years, there have been several instances in which Black students have been forced to cut their hair or have privileges taken away because it is considered a distraction. There is no more dehumanizing example of racism in education when a Black student is punished because their hair
naturally grows out of their head. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of this research study to inform the reader that the hair is not colored or styled in a way that would cause a distraction, but natural Black hair has in some cases been deemed a distraction in the classroom.

These two scenarios have been happening in education for far too long. The Black leaders in the current study also confirmed that they had encountered situations where a student and a teacher had a confrontation, and the student was guilty of advocating for themselves. The lack of cultural competency in education allows teachers' bias and prejudice to be substituted for actual cultural knowledge. Tatum (2003) argued that history texts treat African Americans as invisible in schools or base their portrayal on negative stereotypes that have been created by society. According to Principal Bear, in this current study, White leaders have problems with issues involving culture and race because White leaders may experience more anxiety with getting it right whereas, Black leaders do not or may not have these stressors because of a greater connection with students and the community. Another example during the current study, there were several examples in which leaders allow students to create leadership committees that vote on specific issues in their school community that may add to the school culture. When teachers ignore or reject different cultural expressions of development that are normal and adequate and on which school skills and knowledge can be built, conflicts can occur, leading to student failure (McCarthy et al., 2015). Teachers who are successful in the classroom generally possess cultural competence that entails mastering complex awarenesses and sensitivities, various bodies of knowledge, and a set of skills that, taken together, underlie effective cross-cultural teaching (Diller & Moule 2005).
Lastly, in any profession in the United States, professional development or training is involved in getting them better when people struggle to do something. There is evidence that many teachers struggle to teach students with backgrounds different from their own (Sadker et al., 2009). The field of education should be no different, and there must be a greater emphasis placed on training teachers to be more accepting and understanding of the backgrounds and cultures of their students. Based on the interviews of the ten Black leaders, teachers must understand that academic success is tied to students feeling free to express themselves in the classroom, allowing more personal growth for both the teachers and students. This relationship between teachers and students creates higher expectations from teachers, which facilitates student growth, and students are more accepting of criticism from teachers that they believe care about them (Li, 2005).

Lack of the Black Voice in Policymaking

Urban education is often a victim of policies and procedures with little to no input from the local Black leaders or administrators. Several Black leaders expressed that when it comes to forming policies that will directly affect their school and students, it is infrequent that their input is considered. This creates issues in urban education when these policies and procedures fail. The leaders and their teachers and staff are the ones that suffer. For example, Watts and other critical consciousness scholars argue that this current education system allows the victims to blame their oppression. In 2016, Armstrong posed, "Are We Nearing the End of Impunity for Taking Black Lives?". In this piece, Armstrong (2016) illustrated how the issues in police brutality and the killing of unarmed Black people have always been a problem and still are a problem today.
Nelson (2018), utilizing both a contemporary and a historical lens, suggested that the ending of Black lives starts before Black people ever have encounters with the police. By using state-sanctioned and state-sponsored policies and procedures, white policymakers begin the assault on Black people as early as kindergarten (Dumas & Nelson, 2016; Nelson et al., 2019). This current study illustrated that the ten Black leaders all have issues with the current policymaking process. Additionally, Participant 1 even went as far as acknowledging that they would do more to resist some of the oppression that is noticed in their school, but that may result in a loss of employment. The key reason it is believed that White policymakers do not allow Black input in policymaking is that according to Harrell (2000), the early school years are vital in the development of formal reasoning and abstract thinking skills increase young people’s capacity to engage in critical reflection by strengthening their ability to recognize and understand the causes and consequences of sociopolitical forces.

As a final question in this study, the ten Black leaders were asked how former President Donald Trump protected Black lives. This lack of faith in our government is well deserved because, just like in education, if Black citizens attempt to infringe on the White privilege, they are met immediately with resistance. According to several of the Black leaders in this study, the administration is often slow to act when they make suggestions based on the growth and development of students but is quick to strike when it involves managing or discipline. For example, in this study, one of the leaders revealed that they advocate for increasing the awareness of how young Black girls are increasingly passing young Black males in the number of discipline referrals. This leader wants to start a mentoring program to help young Black females and possibly decrease the number
of discipline referrals. This leader has had zero response from their district concerning starting a program to help young Black females. As a result, this leader anticipates referral numbers of young Black girls to continue to rise.

Additionally, another leader in this study says, "It is all about the numbers when it comes to policymakers." In other words, if the leaders of these schools are not discussing anything revolving around testing, or other quantifiable results, then there is a good chance that your cries for help will fall upon deaf ears. For reasons such as this, it is vital to have critically conscious leaders. According to Kirshner (2015), critical consciousness is the ability to perceive a disparity and ask why it exists. CC allows both leaders and followers to view oppression as a process and focuses on creating and sustaining inequality. This is an essential tool because the ten Black leaders in this study all come from different parts of the country and have different backgrounds, leading to over ninety percent Black student enrollment. Each of these leaders has encountered similar problems with state and district leaders when it involves anything to do with Black culture. These ten Black leaders recognize this and work harder to help grow and develop the whole child and not just the student. Partnerships between youth and leadership can be a powerful force to develop motivation and action among more marginalized youth (Kirshner, 2015). This is why so many Black leaders in this study focused on making school an open, fun, loving place for their students. These partnerships offer youth access to broader social networks, as well as opportunities to partner with leaders on social campaigns targeting inequity, which may foster youth's capacity to resist, challenge, and contest societal inequalities (Kirshner, 2015).
Implications for Future Research

The body of research in Critical Consciousness (CC) is growing in connection with education in the United States. This new growth is coming due to more and more evidence proving that traditional Euro-American education is not enough in communities of color. This research study illuminates that very fact in a new way that has not been done in CC. Several studies have been conducted in the past decade on how students with higher levels of CC or sociopolitical development have greater ease in navigating the oppressive force in America. There is very little research done on the leaders' critical consciousness that provides a safe space for students to explore and exercise their consciousness. This research study attempted to explore how Black leaders could facilitate their students with the opportunity to analyze the world around them critically. While at the same time doing so in communities of low socioeconomic status, where resources and personnel are not always readily available. The Black leaders in this research study also made way for other future studies in the areas of critical consciousness because every leader in this study was at some point in time inspired to be an educator by another strong Black educator. Therefore, it further suggests that critical consciousness theory has a place in urban education.

For future research, two areas of inquiry are on the horizon using critical consciousness as the driving lens. 1) Using critical consciousness to examine how other strong Black leaders, 2, inspired today's Black leaders) there needs to be more variance of Black representation in policymaking. Critical consciousness is a powerful tool that can provide Black leaders with enlightening teachers, staff, and other leaders of their privilege and biases in education. History provides examples of people who reject their
privilege and become an ally to those oppressed (Segrest, 1994). Freire (1970) had one main goal: to liberate his people by using various conduits to incorporate more examples of culture in education. Several of the leaders in this research study indicate that allowing their students to be exposed to Black culture is essential to the school community they attempt to create. Critical consciousness could inform the structure and content of urban education to address oppressive conditions for those most impacted (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Existing educational disparities suggest that the education system in the United States systematically denies equal access and opportunity to marginalized populations (NASW, 2015). Through critically conscious leadership, Black students can be equipped with the tool to navigate the oppression in society, and this development can start as early as pre-k and continue throughout high school.

Conclusion

This research study looked to examine how Black leaders perceived their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students. In this study, their roles are vital in the success of Black students and considering the obstacles most Black students face in their day-to-day lives. Now add the inequities, discrimination, prejudice, and bias teachers, out-of-date school supplies and equipment, etc., and you have the making of a terrible educational experience. However, there is hope in Black leaders who understand what their students are up against, and therefore, do their best to facilitate school environments where the oppressive external forces do not hinder Black students from having the best educational experiences. The primary investigator of this study would like to state that this paper is not attempting to make it appear as though Black leaders are the only leaders that face problems. However, Black leaders are the only leaders that when the system
fails, the blame falls at the feet of that Black leader and their staff, but when a Black leader has success, the credit often goes to the policy or the system that made the policy. Education in the United States needs to be dismantled and reassembled with people from all cultures having input on what is taught. For example, every state education board should reflect the population. According to Domenech, the American Association of School Administrators executive director, only 8.6 percent of all superintendents are people of color, including Black and Latino (n.d.). This is a small growth from five percent in 2000. However, as stated earlier in this study, all of these Black leaders were inspired to be educators by other great Black educators, and these ten Black leaders will continue to inspire others to carry the torch and work to improve the lives of others in their communities.

Critical consciousness would benefit urban education in three ways:

1. Teachers who have little exposure to Black culture would discover how being white automatically grants you certain privileges.
2. The educational policy would shift away from equality and work more towards equality.
3. Hiring a certified teacher in the most needed subject area would not be as challenging.

As indicated by the Black leaders in this research study, urban education has been garnered much negative stigma. According to Schneider (2017), Politicians and policy leaders routinely bemoan their quality. Furthermore, media outlets regularly run stories of failing urban schools. The attack on Black leaders and the communities they serve are planned aggressions that often end in removing Black leadership and silencing the Black
community. Black leaders must encounter attempting to educate their students. The three components of critical consciousness would expose the oppression, lack of resources, lack of funds, and general denial.

First, critical consciousness education in teacher preparation would reduce the amount of bias, stereotyping, and prejudice that some teachers may have towards Black students. Gay and Kiriland (2003) believe a natural place to begin the learning process is by being aware of the obstacles that can interfere with educating Black students. For example, Some of these have to do with ethnic, racial, and cultural diversity (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). The interview revealed that Black students are aware of when they are being mistreated, which often causes students to disengage or be less interested in learning. One significant issue is that teachers do not clearly understand what actions may be oppressive to Black students. Critical consciousness would encourage teachers to have more difficult conversations with students about current events. Actions such as this allow teachers to learn how students view the world and also grant access to the student's life experiences and backgrounds.

Most importantly, beliefs such as "Treat all students the same regardless of who they are,' and "Good teaching anywhere is good teaching everywhere." must be framed as damaging in urban education. Many leaders in this research study explained that education could not have a one size fits all approach. Moreover, this includes individual students and communities.

Second, critical consciousness would allow policymakers to see that urban education needs more equitable legislation to help overcome this oppressive society. According to the National Society of High School Scholars (2021), at a base level,
education should be equal, and education must include equity to ensure that all students are getting the education and support they need for positive outcomes. Interestingly, all ten Black leaders explained how they go the extra mile to ensure that their students have what they need to succeed in school (including off-clock mentorship, clean clothes, shoes, food, counseling). Equity means that every student gets the opportunities and resources they need depending on their specific situation. Urban education suffers from the problem of "sameness," meaning equality in urban education means that every student gets the same resources and opportunities. This also means the same funding for all schools, the same quality of an abundance of materials and facilities, and the same quality of instruction. This is highly problematic in Black communities because, as indicated by all ten leaders in this research study, these communities are often low-income/ high poverty. Critically aware policymakers would see that equity is needed in urban education. Anti-critical consciousness scholars would suggest that there is not enough time to tend to every need of each student. The ten Black leaders in this research study would suggest otherwise because several leaders explained that asking their district leadership for help came from well-worded promises and paperwork when solid support would have come in the form of more personnel in the building.

Third, critical consciousness would help certified teachers disassociate their bias and prejudice with Black communities and teach in high Black student enrollment schools. Many of the Blac leaders in this research study presented examples where white teachers would take jobs in more affluent areas that paid less money, just so that they would not have to work in schools that were deemed difficult to work in or failing. Critical consciousness would provide an opportunity for teachers to see that the state of
urban education is being worsened by an educational system that continues to fail Black students. Therefore, encouraging more teachers to explore employment in urban schools, providing Black students with more access to teachers in those highly sought after subject areas. Lastly, critical consciousness encourages novice teachers in urban education to learn more about how traditional education further oppresses and marginalizes Black students.
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April 29, 2021

PI Name: Ray Williams
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Submission Type: Initial
Title: A Study of Critical Consciousness: How Black leaders perceive their roles in the sociopolitical development of their students
IRB ID: #PRO-FY2021-283
Exempt Approval: April 28, 2021

The University of Memphis Institutional Review Board, FWA00006815, has reviewed your submission in accordance with all applicable statuses and regulations as well as ethical principles.

Approval of this project is given with the following obligations:
1. When the project is finished a completion submission is required
2. Any changes to the approved protocol requires board approval prior to implementation
3. When necessary submit an incident/adverse events for board review
4. Human subjects training is required every 2 years and is to be kept current at citiprogram.org.

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Thank you,
James P. Whelan, Ph.D.
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