

THE BLUEPRINT FOR BLACK LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY  
OF THE EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK K-12 LEADERSHIP

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

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by

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## APPROVAL OF THE DISSERTATION

This dissertation, “The Blueprint for Black Leadership: A Phenomenological Study of the Effective Development of Black K-12 Leadership,” has been approved by the Graduate Faculty of the Fred S. Klipsch Educators College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

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## ABSTRACT

This qualitative study aims to explore the approaches used by Black principal supervisors to develop Black principals in K-12 settings. It will utilize a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of 10-15 Black principal supervisors who manage a Black school leader and oversee more than one principal. Participants will be recruited through existing networks and will participate in virtual one-on-one interviews that will be transcribed and analyzed using an inductive methodology to develop themes. The data collected will be stored securely and all identifiable information will be removed. The study seeks to identify commonalities and challenges in the experiences of Black principal supervisors, and to provide a blueprint for educational organizations to develop Black school leadership in a way that promotes excellence and transforms schools. The study's analysis produced 8 themes that were consistent with the literature on principal supervisors and aligned with the framework of Critical Race Theory.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my wife, who selflessly supports all of my dreams and passions, even when they seem unreasonable. It is also dedicated to my mother, who poured everything she had into me and my brothers as young men in order for us to join the task of improving the experiences of humanity. Thank you both for giving faithfully to my spirit. This work is, in actuality, a manifestation of your beautiful love.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Leaders are a particular kind of power holder. Like power, leadership is relational, collective, and purposeful.

—Dr. Amos Wilson

The crisis of Black leadership in the United States educational system is not a new phenomenon in United States history. According to the Pew Research Center, only 9% of all school principals in the United States are Black (Schaeffer, 2021). This is troubling data in terms of the distribution of power for Black communities in the United States, as Black people make up around 13% of the nation's population (Jones et al., 2022). As communities of color grow in the United States, it will be imperative to prepare a diverse teacher and principal workforce for the U.S. education system. However, even with the dire need for school administrators, Black people continue to face a leadership crisis, as leaders seem absent and some leaders' actions can be perceived as misaligned with what the community needs as a whole (Wilson, 1998). As such, there is a troubling disparity among leaders of color and White leaders in key leadership positions in school communities. The disparity gap among female principals has all but closed, going from 25% to 52% representation over the past 30 years. However, in that same timespan, non-White principals have increased from 13% to 20% only (Bailes, 2020).

There is a crisis in school leadership representation among people of color in general and Black people in particular. The pipeline of development for school principals depends largely on representation in the teaching ranks. Teachers in the U.S. are just over 80% White and 77% women. This coupled with research indicating that pipelines for principals of color are thwarted by “compressed pay, challenging working conditions,

and poor retention rates among teachers of color” contribute to low rates of Black principals in schools (Bailes, 2020). Greater representation of Black teachers in school could not only increase promotion opportunities for teachers into school administration, but also significantly reduce suspensions and disciplinary referrals, thus being beneficial for the students and school community as a whole (Lindsay, 2017).

Heifetz (2009) defines leadership as the exercise of achieving the desired results of an activity or organization by operating in one’s authority, moving past said authority boundaries when necessary to challenge expectations, and pushing people to the edge without pushing them completely over the edge. Leadership development for school leaders has shifted over the past 20 years. The role of the principal supervisor in many districts and school communities has pivoted from a role of regulations compliance and attending to the physical building needs to a role focused on leadership to improve teaching and learning (Saltzman, 2016). Principals’ supervisors may include superintendents, assistant superintendents, principal supervisors, or directors of schools, with the title of the job depending on the choice of the school district. The distinguishing factor is that there is a role designated in school communities to support principals’ growth and development to improve teaching and learning in the school setting (Honig, 2019).

This chapter provides a brief synopsis of current approaches principal supervisors use to prepare Black school leaders for effectiveness and success. The approaches generally include leadership activities, philosophies, and mentoring. The section also outlines the purpose of the study, research questions, a theoretical framework, and a clarification of terms used throughout the research.

## **Personal Story**

Somebody has to stand when other people are sitting. Somebody has to speak when other people are quiet.

—Bryan Stevenson

His body lay on the fence in front of the filthy boulevard. His chest was impaled by a trident formed by the top of the iron structure. As the police stretched a wrinkled sheet over his body to protect it from the eyes of onlookers (or the onlookers from such a gruesome sight), I wondered how this could happen. What did he do? Was he running from someone? Would this ever happen to me? Did I need to protect my physical body from impaling tridents? This was an actual scene from my youth while my mother drove me to school in the 7th grade. It has clawed at my insides ever since that day. That scene made me question whether or not my life—or any life for that matter—was worth anything. This day painted a large part of the adolescent mural that molded me. The streets were wet from morning washings, the air was crisp and ripe for the sun to enlighten the day, yet this poetic South Central murder lay center-stage to remind us that the light we were awaiting would never arrive.

This post-factum scene of violence and death was only a mere echo of what had been happening in Compton, Inglewood, and Los Angeles in the previous three decades. It symbolized what our country's urban youth had been exposed to in many major cities and poverty traps, and kept them unaware of how they should be treated educationally or what their possibilities were for leadership. These youth were provided with second-hand books, second-rate activities, third-rate facilities, and cried horror when they shunned the shell of an opportunity that was provided.

I, too, existed in this trap of poverty and U.S. urban decay, although my parents trained me to do all I could to be an asset in the neighborhood, and a leader. As I attended Los Angeles and Compton schools in California as a child, I noticed that while people in schools and systems cared about our success, we in the Black community were being taught to uphold a flawed system rather than dismantle it for the benefit of our communities. There was also no real, sustainable model for what independent Black leadership looked like outside of these systems.

All of these observations rang true for me in my complex developmental experience, in which generous mentors took the time to pour into my intellect and character. The system served as a conduit to keep me in the lowest levels of leadership as a mid-level manager or role player with little power to effect change, while simultaneously exposing me to teachers and leaders who deeply cared for me and my ability to read, communicate, care, and succeed. Those teachers and leaders were also trapped in the system predicated on non-sustainable Black leadership.

As I became a teacher within school systems, I saw the motif of limited leadership play out in real-time on myself and other participants in the system. I myself discouraged children from their dreams because I could not see the practical application of their wishes. I did not enthusiastically encourage them to become teachers either and co-opted the fetish of other professions. To be clear, I would have displayed sustainable leadership if I had understood that my profession of teaching was dying and that we needed more Black teachers in schools. In this case, my role would have been, at the very least, to show and explain how amazing my job was and to uncover the endless possibilities of education for my young pupils.

As a middle-school principal and education-system leader, I have taken on opportunities for leadership in unfamiliar situations. In these contexts, I relied on a network of individuals who helped develop my individual and team-leadership approaches, as well as my outcome strategy. I relied on this network of mentors who supported me in times of challenge, as well as sponsors who recommended me for new opportunities and managers who modeled excellence and challenged me to excel in my role.

This was not true for every principal I knew during my tenure. Many had no principal supervisors who were focused on leadership development of the principal to achieve organizational success, but rather the operational success of the institution in spite of leadership in the principal. One principal in particular in a neighboring school received no support in regard to curriculum implementation and ensuring teachers were becoming experts of a new curriculum initiative. This was a challenging time for that principal. They had no one to rely on to aid them in the challenge of change management. As a result, teachers balked at the change and essentially disregarded any curricular changes the school intended to implement. This was not my truth, as I attended training for the content, was aided in building an implementation plan, and was coached on my actions for implementation in real-time with feedback and follow-up meetings.

Being a principal gave me the opportunity to lead, yet even with the help of my mentors, I found it difficult to develop a sustainable succession for leaders to come after me. It is critical to prepare those under your leadership so that they can achieve in their roles, and so that the institution as a whole can achieve success.



This is what happened with my leadership. When I think about my work as a principal, I was highly successful in everything but one facet of the job: preparing others to lead and making sure there were other principals under my leadership ready to take the helm of the school. This experience caused me to explore if we have a clear pathway and understanding of how to develop Black leaders to assume leadership roles in the education sector. We have an opportunity to develop Black leaders to promote the excellence of existing education institutions to continue to serve our community and interests in a manner that is sustainable and interdependent with the rest of society.

I have since used my leadership position to ensure that those I lead have the same opportunities as I did. As a principal supervisor and principal coach, I modeled excellence and mentored for guidance. This study will be a pivotal moment in my work as it is designed to uncover the most effective ways Black school leaders are developed and positioned to sustain organizations and institutions, as described by principal supervisors.

### **Statement of the Problem**

He who is not courageous enough to take risks will accomplish nothing in life.

—Muhammad Ali

Representation and preparation of Black principals is of extreme importance for youth in schools. However, the number of Black principals in U.S. schools is not proportional with the number of Black students (Bailes, 2020). Research clearly shows that Black principals are more likely to hire and retain Black teachers (Bartanen, 2019). Furthermore, Black principals hiring Black teachers improves high-school graduation rates and college attendance among Black students (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). As school

systems aim to increase representation of Black principals in schools, it is imperative to examine the role and actions of Black principal supervisors in developing Black principals to best serve students in schools. The principal's role has changed in the last decade or so to reflect that of an instructional leader (Saltzman, 2016). However, many principal supervisors still frame the role of principal—especially Black principals—as disciplinarians (Humphrey, 2007). Interestingly, the trend of utilizing Black educators as disciplinarians instead of content experts and educators starts when Black practitioners are teachers in schools (Bristol, 2018). Therefore, the problem is that Black educators and principals need to be trained and developed beyond the scope of discipline in schools to exhibit excellence in their roles.

### **Purpose of the Study**

A genuine leader is not a searcher of a consensus but a molder of a consensus.

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine how principal supervisors who identify as Black develop Black principals in K-12 settings. This study will offer a blueprint for educational organizations to develop Black school leadership in a way that creates opportunities for excellence in the principal role to transform schools. This study will use a phenomenological approach, focusing on the development of school leaders as a lived experience. The researcher will collect qualitative data from multiple Black principals. The purpose is to find commonalities to explain the essence of the experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2020).

## **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following central research question: What methods do Black principal supervisors employ to develop the capacity of Black school leaders? I am looking to discover what experiences Black principal supervisors create when developing Black school leaders in K-12 schools. The participants will explain and expound upon their experiences and offer insight into what they believe is important in leadership development for Black principals. This research will identify key insights and experiences Black principals need to be effective school leaders using the insight from principal supervisors.

The study will also have a set of secondary questions:

- RQ1: How do Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders in the organization?
- RQ2: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization?
- RQ3: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership?
- RQ4: How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization?

## **Significance of the Study**

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

—Barack Obama

Black principals are not represented at rates that are commensurate with the percentage of Black students in schools. Furthermore, not having Black principals in schools could mean fewer Black teachers to have a positive impact on students. It is the principal supervisor's role to hire and develop principals into effective leaders of schools. As the school administrator's role is shifting from an operations and disciplinarian focus to an instructional focus, training these leaders becomes a task of extreme importance. The study will give emphasis on what actions and experience Black principal supervisors exhibit when developing Black principals. Information collected will help develop strategies and development plans for training Black principals in schools to support students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Critical Race Theory. This framework will aid in the topic development, the literature review, and the study's research design.

#### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT), is a theoretical framework that places the lived experiences and voices of racialized groups at the center of the research, thereby working to value their experiences and highlight their assets (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002). Some of the first CRT ideas came about in the work of Bell Jr. (1976), who critiqued the outcome of bussing and desegregation during the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. Bell Jr. (1976) opined that the cause of desegregation overall did not help Black families find high-quality schools because of many interconnected societal issues. Bell Jr. (1976) wrote that, "Opposition to any civil rights program can be expected, but the hoped-for improvement

in schooling for Black children...has proven minimal at best... Political, economic, and social conditions have contributed to the loss of school desegregation momentum” (p. 516).

Kimberlé Crenshaw defined CRT as a response to colorblindness, asserting that “CRT was not... simply a product of a philosophical critique of the dominant frames on racial power. It was also a product of activists’ engagement with the material manifestations of liberal reform” (Crenshaw, 2019, pp. 56). Crenshaw explained that CRT is not only a model that explains the ramifications and consequences of racist actions and power holders that clearly negatively impact racial groups in the United States, but also how this same effect is illustrated even in the actions of the well-intended due to the overarching system of racism that exists.

Yosso (2005) described CRT as a “framework that can be used to theorize, examine, and challenge the ways race and racism, implicitly and explicitly, impact on social structures, practices, and discourses” (pp. 70–71).

Delgado and Stefancic (2001) named three tenets as the cornerstones of CRT:

1. “racism is ordinary, not aberrational... the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country.”
2. A “system of White-over-color ascendancy serves important purposes, both psychic and material.”
3. “race and races are products of social thought and relations” (pp. 6–9).

The first tenet means that racism is an essential component in society and is not easily eliminated. It also suggests that people who benefit most from this system seldom know it exists because of its prevalence. The second tenet explains the framework upon

which the system of racism operates by noting that people who are identified as white gain the most favor in that system. The third tenet states that the system of racism is entirely constructed by people and has no biological, scientific, or spiritual merit.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

This particular study focuses on the development activities and exercises Black principal supervisors utilize to develop Black school leaders in K-12 settings. In terms of its delimitations, this study does not cover leaders outside of the African diaspora, leaders who do not identify as Black, or individuals who do not hold principal-manager related positions within their organizations.

In terms of the limitations of the study, there may be a challenge in generalizing the results based on sampling and extraneous factors. A limitation exists in terms of the sampling, as access to participants will be based on relationships and cold-calls. As a result, the pool of participants could lack geographic, sector, or thought diversity.

In terms of extraneous factors, there is no solving for opportunities or experiences that improve leadership outside of the scope of questioning. For instance, if a principal supervisor believes that their mentorship has improved the leadership of a school leader, but the junior leader already has existing social capital through family lineage or other relationships, there is no current way for the study to differentiate between those different possibilities.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Black:* Those who identify as African American or who identify as people of African descent who live in the United States. This may also include individuals who

identify as Afro-Latinx, Afro-Caribbean, or from any nation in Africa who reside or do business in the United States.

*Black Education Executive/Principal Manager:* Black leaders in the K-12 setting who work to manage and develop principals.

*Black School Leader:* Someone who is performing the duties as a school principal in that they are directly serving students through the actions of school staff in a school building or virtual school setting.

*Leadership Development:* Any role play, mentoring, professional development, coaching, or game that principal supervisors use to develop and prepare school leaders for excellence.

*Mentor:* A seasoned higher-level employee who gives their protégés career-related assistance (Ones et al., 2018, p. 324).

*Coach:* A person who observes individuals to provide feedback with the intent of helping them improve.

*Achievement:* The rate at which students are described as proficient on assessments of state-determined standards or coursework.

*Racial Identities:* “[H]ow individuals define themselves with respect to race and/or ethnicity” (Henry, 2019, pp. 43-79), and how individuals connect with said groups.

*School Culture:* The beliefs, values, and norms in action of a school community through safety, rituals, and ceremonies.

## **Summary**

From what we get, we can make a living. What we give, however, makes a life.

—Arthur Ashe

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study is to explore the activities, challenges and dispositions of Black principal supervisors in the act of developing Black principals in K-12 settings. The motivation for this research includes the contributing factors of my past as a leader ensuring that Black principals are prepared for success in the role.

I will collect the data through individual interviews, which I will audio record, as well as artifacts around leadership development from work communities. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature related to the concept of leadership used in this particular study.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

I have always thought that what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in becoming leaders as much as in developing leadership in others.

—Ella Baker

### **Introduction**

Understanding how school leaders develop, while also understanding the Black experience in school leadership, is essential to identifying the key to unlocking the potential in aiding principal supervisors to develop Black school leaders. This literature review begins by exploring the representation of Black principal supervisors, the experiences of Black principals, Black school principal's roles in student achievement, leadership attributes and competencies for principals, and leadership-development activities for principals. The purpose of this review is to determine the role that Black principal supervisors play and what strategies they may espouse to develop principals. Finally, this review also discusses the gaps in the literature.

### **Black Principal Supervisor Representation**

The representation of Black executive leaders is important to understand in the context of this study. Their ideas and thoughts will shape the findings. In one of the first studies about Black superintendents (a type of education executive) in 1971, there was found to be only 21 Black superintendents in the United States. Of the 21 participants in that study, the most common challenge for a Black superintendent was getting the job. Participants cited being “systematically kept out of the top positions” and inheriting “school systems with grave financial problems” (Moody, 1971, pp. 376-379). Contemporary Black principal supervisors across the country share the same sentiments

as their 1971 predecessors about accessibility of the positions and the disparities in these roles in regard to representation (Hodge, 2017). Hodge (2017) reported that while the population of African Americans in North Carolina was 21.6%, the population of African American male superintendents was 7.8%. Black women in the United States have even lower representation rates in the superintendent seat than Black males. Black women superintendents in the United States constitute less than two percent of people in the role, while the U.S. population is over thirteen percent Black (Webb, 2022). If the Black male superintendent representation statistics indicate disparity as well as Black women representation, then the amalgamation of representation among the two in broader society is definitely low and needs to be examined and rectified.

What may contribute to superintendent disparities by race may be the impact of racism in American society: Black candidates may be considered less competent than their White counterparts (Hodge, 2017). Critical Race Theorists have attributed outcomes like representation challenges to an environment or society in which White supremacist culture exists and permeates institutions, allowing the “dominant groups within society... to maintain power because access is limited... forms of capital for social mobility” (Yosso, 2005, p. 76).

While relatively sparse, the research on Black principal supervisors is clear on the fact that there are disparities in the roles across the United States. This is not only a moral issue in the education profession, but also an issue that affects student performance. A diverse educator workforce is known to increase student achievement (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). While diversity in general is important, this study focuses on Black leadership in schools and the development approaches for Black principals.

## **Black School Principal Representation**

The representation of Black school leaders seems to be critical to the success of schools with a significant population of Black students (Jang & Alexander, 2022, p.451). The legacy of Black principals has changed over time from before the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision in 1954 to the Post-Brown period. The Brown case was important to Black school leadership and was one of the most important education reforms in United States history (Tillman, 2004). However, it is curious that none of the major education research journals published a single issue dedicated to the decision on its 50th anniversary (Tillman, 2004). While the *Brown v. Board of Education* case was used to correct inequities in schools in some sense by allowing Black children to be educated with better resources, it also resulted in the large-scale firing and dismissal of thousands of Black principals and teachers across the United States (Tillman, 2004). In her research about pre-Brown education, Tillman states that those who served as education professionals were ministers, journalists, and politicians, and they provided leadership in the struggle to educate Black students (Tillman, 2004, p. 106). Tillman states that Blacks held a strong belief that while they could be “stripped of their... rights and property...the knowledge they acquired through education could not be taken away.” (Tillman, 2004, pp. 106-107). In fact, Tillman states that many of the early Black educators in the south who were prohibited from running schools due to anti-Black laws and legislature in the late 1800s moved their operations to more open communities to start free schools for Blacks that eventually became some of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities we have the U.S. today (Tillman, 2004). This essentially means that Black education pre-

Brown was not only present, but was necessary because Black educators were necessary in the fight to educate their own people.

After *Brown v. Board of Education*, Black principals started to dwindle in numbers. From 1967 to 1971, Black principals dropped dramatically in southern states such as Arkansas, Virginia, North Carolina (Tillman, 2004). In North Carolina alone, between those same years, Black principals dropped from 620 to 40 individuals (Tillman, 2004). In other states like Oklahoma and Missouri, more than 50% of the Black principals in those states were relieved of their duties between 1954 and 1965 (Tillman, 2004). This is a trend that even spread to Florida, where between the years of 1964 and 1965, there were Black principals in all of the school districts in the entire state. 10 years later, in 1975, only 40 of the 67 districts had Black principals (Tillman, 2004). The Black student population increased in Florida post-Brown and Florida increased their system by 165 public schools by 1976. Even then, in the 1976 school year alone, the state of Florida fired or demoted 166 Black principals (Tillman, 2004).

During the Brown era, Black principals were needed dearly to aid in a challenging time of reform for Black students in the U.S., but faced significant challenges just to keep leadership roles that they already held. In the post-Brown era, Black principals had different challenges to tackle than their pre-Brown counterparts. Sowell (1976) explored principal challenges from the pre-Brown era to the post-Brown era and suggested that before Brown, the major challenge was segregation and limited resources, and a principal relied on a strong and close community to drive education outcomes (Sowell, 1976). However, principal and school leadership in the post-Brown era was challenged by the dynamics of large urban centers and growing populations. In addition, Sowell indicates

that the principal's character and drive were key factors in the success of a school (Sowell, 1976). This now meant that the principal would be looked at as the catalyst for school culture and student achievement in schools. This brings forth the question that if competent, high character and driven Black principals are the key to leading the effort of student achievement among Black children, then where are those Black educators and how do we get them in front of students in school?

As the number of Black principals declined post-Brown, one can only imagine that more teachers of African American descent would be needed to fill those Black leader roles. However, as Black teachers also started to decline post-Brown, the task became even harder. Being a teacher serves as the pipeline to becoming a principal, and so missing Black educators becomes a critical challenge that threatens the already fragile education system for Black students. Irvine states that, "since the job requirements for school principals include prior teaching experience, it is clear that as the number of Black teachers decline, so will the pool of Black persons eligible to become principals and other administrators" (Irvine, 1988, p. 508). In fact, Irvine's study and the data from the Association for Study of Negro Life in history in 1976 reveal that the number of Black principals in the south was reduced by 90% after desegregation (Irvine, 1988). As Black administrators and school principals seem to be few in America's public schools, it is important to examine what their lived experiences are and why they may not be promoted to these positions.

One explanation for African Americans leaving school leadership positions is image management. Black principals routinely have their competence challenged while in schools and have to deal with European American bias against Black principals while

at work. Research by Madsen (2002) suggests that Black leaders have to socially construct their roles to develop one-on-one relationships with staff to influence trust in the group. One could state that any good leader influences trust in the group by building relationships. However, these Black leaders seem to express that they have to do it in order to overcome biases by the groups that they lead in order to prove their competence.

Black and White principals and administrators seem also to have different preparations and pathways to the role. Career mobility in schools is often initiated by the request of a supervisor to create opportunities for what Barry and Rearden (2022) call “tapping”, which is grooming and support from supervisors. Tapping includes a supervisor identifying a subordinate for preparation for the next role in their career. Tapping or grooming usually comes with support and an increased sense of visibility for the new leader (Berry & Rearden, 2022). Berry and Rearden also assert that Black principals and Black educators were largely absent from principal preparatory programming from 1980 to 2005, and they were less likely to be promoted to the principal role. This is alarming seeing that there was already a historical shortage from the fallout of Brown and now a compounding setback with a lack of representation in principal preparation programs until 2005.

Black people were also underrepresented in teaching roles, and teachers are traditionally the pipeline participants for administrative positions (Irvine, 1988; Berry & Rearden, 2022). Some of the differences and interesting disparities in principal role attainment and preparation might include Black school leaders being more likely to hold doctoral degrees than their white counterparts. In the study by Barry and Rearden (2022), 17.6% of Black principals held doctoral degrees compared to 9.5% of white principals.

This type of disparity occurred in every locality or every local setting such as rural, urban, or suburban. Another key uncovering in Barry and Rearden's work was that Black principals largely had more administrative experience before being promoted to the principal role, especially in rural settings. However, this was true in all settings and in some areas (Berry & Rearden, 2022). Barry and Reardon suggest that Black school principals applied to and were enrolled in principal-preparation programs in higher numbers, but were less represented in the actual role in their localities. This has several implications, one being that a limited representation of Black principals in public schools in the United States can be seen as a product of racism. As Critical Race Theory argues, racism is a part of the key structures of the United States and its systems, meaning that racism, particularly against Black people, will maintain disparities and inequities (Crenshaw, 2019).

### **Black School Principals and School Outcomes**

Principal supervisors are the individuals who will prepare potential Black principals for these roles. Black principals are more likely to hire Black teachers, and Black principal supervisors are more likely to "tap" Black teachers to be Black principals (Berry & Rearden, 2022). Black women principals in particular create positive school culture and improve all students' achievement (Jang & Alexander, 2022). Jang & Alexander (2022) found that educational excellence under Black principals is achieved even if they often serve in districts and schools with mostly impoverished students and students of color, especially Black students. Jang & Alexander's (2022) study found that Black women principals were positively associated with positive math achievement scores among ninth grade students. This was even true for schools with students with

student bodies that had a high proportion of families with low socioeconomic status and students of color. Lastly, the authors suggest that Black women principals have the ability to promote shared responsibility in a meaningful way, and that this may be the key to high student achievement in those schools (Jang & Alexander, 2022).

Another study exploring school principals' race and student achievement found that racial diversity among principals was extremely important (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019). Given that school systems across the United States are becoming increasingly more diverse, racial diversity in the principal's office matters for the racial diversity in the teaching force and ultimately the outcomes of the student (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019). The study focused on Missouri and Tennessee principals and teachers and found that hiring a Black principal substantially increased the number of Black teachers in those schools over subsequent years, compared to their White counterparts (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019). Since racial diversity among the school leaders increases the likelihood of same-race teachers, the study is revealing that diversity among leaders, particularly Black leaders, has a positive impact on the achievement, specifically math achievement, in schools. This is because Black leaders are more likely to hire Black teachers, who have been shown to increase results in math for Black children (Bartanen & Grissom, 2019).

In another study of Tennessee students and educators, the cumulative exposure to Black principals and Black teachers resulted in 2-4 percentile points of increase in math and reading achievement (Dee, 2004). This study observed the impact of own-race or same-race teachers in school settings. The study transparently balked at suggesting districts should move swiftly into hiring as many Black teachers as they could, suggesting



that the phenomenon race plays in achievement with students deserves further study (Dee, 2004).

Black principals have clearly seen some success in schools among all students and particularly Black students, therefore, it is imperative that educators and scholars continue to grow and develop Black educators through the actions of research, principals, and principal supervisors.

### **Leadership Attributes and Competencies of Principals**

There are clearly representation challenges between teachers, principals, and principal supervisors and the Black population in the United States (Schaeffer, 2021). Some of these challenges persist because Black educators may not have access to employment in particular roles, with access being determined by supervisors, mentors, and support received in systems (Berry & Readan, 2022). Aside from systems to aid with promotion, knowing what competencies good school leaders should possess to be able to perform their jobs could be helpful in developing them. In 1977, Nicholson and Anderson published a paper that attempted to identify the necessary skill set and competencies that the principal of the future would need. To do this, they surveyed several principals, mostly from high schools, to rank the importance of 36 competencies for school leadership (Nicholson & Anderson, 1977). They found the main tenets of what made a principal effective were the ability to evaluate curriculum, navigation of collective bargaining, maintain student records legally, design new programs for students with special needs, gain support from the community, synthesize information to inform decisions, analyze statistics, navigate conflict, and evaluate performance (Nicholson &

Anderson, 1977). Some of the competencies are visible in today's Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, or PSEL.

In 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration—whose member organizations include the American Association of School Administrators, the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the National School Boards Association—conducted research and worked with several school leaders to build a set of competencies for evaluating school leaders, and which certification programs would use as a tool to determine readiness for administration (National Policy Board for Educational Administration [NPBEA], 2015).

The history of such standards dates back to 1996 when the Council of Chief State School officers published the first set of standards for education leaders, and in 2008 provided a “modest” update to the previous standards based on empirical research (NPBEA, 2015). In 2015, the National Policy Board for Educational Administration published 10 standards that school leaders would be tasked to master in order to be effective principals: mission and values, ethics and professional norms, equity and cultural responsiveness, curriculum, instruction and assessment, community of care and support, professional capacity of school personnel, professional community of staff, meaningful engagement of families and community, operations and management, and school improvement (NPBEA, 2015). One stark difference between the current standards that are listed from 2015 and the competencies that were listed in 1977 is that the PSEL standards include equity and cultural responsiveness. This addition is likely due to the tireless work and contributions of scholars like Asa Hilliard, Jackie Jordan Irvine, and

Geneva Gay with their work around cultural responsiveness in schools (Tillman, 2008; Irvine, 1988). Such standards or competencies used to evaluate or determine readiness for professional leadership in education—especially among students of color and especially with Black children—are never enough as a tool to determine whether or not a principal is good or whether or not a principal is ready to serve in that position. Ideals must be put into action. A good leader must understand how to use those competencies and “bring them to life.” (Murphy et al., 2017). In effect, the competencies need to be seen in action in order for them to be meaningful within the school community.

The PSEL standards from 2015 were anchored in the positive school leadership framework which is based on positive psychology and takes an optimistic view on leadership (Murphy et al., 2017). The Positive School Leadership framework includes standards such as a strong professional calling, a focus on character and virtue, empowerment and community building, and other interpersonal skills beneficial in leadership. Murphy et al. (2017) identified these positive school leadership and positive psychology principles, stating that this framework reminds us that schooling and educational leadership are “not mechanistic technical endeavors, but inherently human.” (p. 24). One notable absence is the mention of equity or cultural responsiveness in the Positive School Leadership framework. One could argue that some of the interpersonal tenets cover this topic, but without an explicit statement, one is left to wonder how the user of the framework will gauge equity’s importance.

Seeing leadership as an action and not as simply transactional is important when understanding that schools are not like traditional businesses where owners or managers are dealing with a business entity and a customer. Schools are working with principals

and the principal's relationship with teachers, the teacher's relationship with students, the principal's relationship with students and all parties, staff and the relationship with parents or the entire family to ensure a whole body of students gets educated and are cared for daily. That is a most complicated interpersonal challenge that school leaders engage in every single day. This means that positive school leadership and interpersonal competencies are highly important for any effective principal and highly important for a principal supervisor to develop.

Grissom Loeb (2011) looked deeper into actual principal effectiveness for behaviors that lead to effective actions and found that they include creating an atmosphere conducive to learning, involvement in staff development, monitoring classrooms, and guarding teachers' instructional time. This subset of skills are known in the realm of instructional leadership. Studies in 2005 and 2008, state that transformational leadership habits like inspiration and creating a big vision have had fewer effects on achievement than instructional leadership. In fact, this study states that the effectiveness of instructional leadership reinforces instructional leadership as the main lens for which to consider principal effectiveness (Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

Since 1977, when a group of researchers in sought to identify competencies important for principals and identified technical skills such as storing files in a legal manner and the ability to evaluate curriculum (Nicholson & Anderson, 1977), thinking has shifted to the importance of having a very strong interpersonal approach that honors the community and cultures in one's school, to understanding the importance of instructional leadership to move student achievement. All of these competencies in some way are necessary to lead an effective school community, and all seem to be represented

in the 2015 set of competencies that are used by most school leader preparation programs today.

### **Leadership Development Activities and Experiences For Leaders**

Leadership development strategies are extremely important to produce highly competent leaders in organizations. Hannah and Avolio (2010) explored the types of leadership development and environments needed to ensure that leaders were developing appropriately. They found that readiness was a key component to ensuring that leaders were going to be successful (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). They also found that readiness depended on motivation and the ability to change and learn. Hannah and Avolio (2010) found that motivation mostly depends on the goals and the individual's orientation toward the goals. They identified four attributes that help build "developmental efficacy," including (a) mastery experiences that challenge the adequacy of a person's current thinking and mental models; (b) role modeling or vicarious learning; (c) social persuasion and feedback; and (d) tapping into leaders' individual interests, positive feelings, and intrinsic motivation (Hannah & Avolio, 2010). Hannah and Avolio (2010) concluded that leaders must be challenged through experiences, be coached or mentored by models, be open for feedback and growth, and have intrinsic motivation to grow as leaders.

A key leadership-development strategy is to use leadership activities and to explore challenging experiences for leaders with feedback and learner orientation. Challenging experiences are paramount to a leader's development (DeRue & Wellman, 2009). DeRue and Wellman (2009) concluded that these challenges have the key characteristics of being defined as unfamiliar responsibilities that create change, resulting in high levels of responsibility, working across boundaries, and managing diversity. They

found that the challenge alone did not promote growth in the ability of the leaders. However, leaders' reactions to the challenges, and their willingness to accept feedback, were able to offset any diminishing returns of leader performance (DeRue & Wellman, 2009).

Access to feedback is extremely important when young leaders engage in challenging experiences. This increases their self-awareness and reduces uncertainties. However, DeRue and Wellman (2009) found that learner orientation (the willingness to learn) was not as important as they had hypothesized. They also added that leadership development is still not empirically understood, adding, "Despite these promising findings, we know very little about the processes by which individuals develop the skills and capabilities necessary to lead effectively" (DeRue & Wellman, 2009, p. 868).

In addition to challenging experiences that build leadership, autonomy and an emphasis on training for adaptive leaders may be helpful. The U.S. military identifies the following traits for successful adaptive leaders: "empowering and decentralizing leadership, allowing for initiative within intent, and building cohesive, trusting teams with candor" (Burpo, 2006, p. 66). Burpo (2006) further defined an adaptive leader as someone who is "able to quickly identify an operating environment's defining variables and creatively leverage all resources" (p. 66). These ideas align with Heifetz and Obelensky's (2010) ideas of complex adaptive leadership, in that an emphasis on understanding and diagnosing the problem is key to learning quickly and finding possible adaptive solutions. Burpo (2006) also questioned the military's discontinuation of the developmental techniques that fostered adaptive leaders, like alternating post assignments and moving between heavy and light duties while in service.

A key strategy to building leadership in followers is empowering them to act according to the goals at hand. Burpo (2006) called this *decentralizing leadership*, while most military consider this idea to be *commander's intent*. Storlie (2010) opined that a commander's intent can be used to develop senior civilian leaders. Storlie (2010) defined *commander's intent* as describing, "how the Commander envisions the battlefield at the conclusion of the mission. It shows what success looks like. Commander's Intent fully recognizes the chaos, lack of a complete information picture, changes in enemy situation, and other relevant factors that may make a plan either completely or partially obsolete when it is executed" (p. 2). This notion of commander's intent could be helpful in a business or social enterprise setting. With so many mission-driven non-profit institutions operating in the United States, commander's intent can be used to deliver services faster and with more innovation. Storlie (2010) used a fictional case study to explain how to apply commander's intent to a business setting. Storlie (2010) offered the example of a FedEx CEO's intent to operate "in a safe, damage free, cost effective manner within the shipment period specified by the customer," stating that, with that in mind, managers could "start re-routing drivers..., scheduling extra planes..., getting extra truck trailers... and adapting sort schedules" (p. 3).

Storlie (2010) proposed that to build leadership competence in employees, organizations should train with after-action reviews, stating that, "Organizations need to find a way to allow employees to simulate new product introductions, competitive analysis, and store openings. These simulations... force employees to adapt themselves and their teams to new changes to meet the existing business objectives" (p. 4). In addition to after-action reviews, Storlie (2010) suggested that leaders and employees take

on smaller projects that empower people to lead with little risk and that organizations use industry history and current events as learning opportunities to build context.

In order to develop Black junior leaders, it is critical to first understand their readiness for leadership. This way, senior leaders can support them by giving them strong feedback for developmental relationships. Through a conversation with a panel of experts, Kerr (2004) studied how organizations best prepare people to lead and manage others, and concluded that organizations should provide *supportive autonomy*, which means giving employees the freedom to make decisions without being micromanaged by their supervisors. More importantly, Kerr (2004) concluded that autonomy should be focused on key experiences in the form of assignments and recommended strong developmental relationships between people who can give leaders feedback in the moment, in order to support leaders through these new and challenging assignments. Finally, Kerr (2004) noted that, in most environments, “supportive networks did not exist” (p. 119).

The panel in the study by Kerr (2004) provided key insights into executive readiness. The experts believed that companies should start this development early with promising candidates, by using assignments as developmental tools that can enable promising talent to glean the lessons, and by reducing the high stakes for assignments that may actually reduce a junior leader’s willingness to learn (Kerr, 2004). This insight is important because it can assist leaders in growing into their roles more quickly and with greater confidence, leading to better performance for all those involved.

While feedback is a huge component of leadership development, mentoring and coaching is equally as important. Lester et al. (2011) determined that mentoring had a



significant impact on leader efficacy. Their research relied on a longitudinal, quantitative study of West Point scholars that focused on determining whether leadership efficacy could be positively affected by informal mentorship. Lester et al. (2011) were interested in how mentor-mentee relationships could be used more effectively to build leadership capacity in cadets. They found that mastery learning and vicarious learning through mentors using trust as a conduit was of key importance, particularly when mentors assisted mentees in making sense of their past leadership experiences. The study found that “cadets in the mentorship program were more likely to develop leader efficacy.” (Lester et al., 2011, p. 422). This implies that mentorship is a highly important ingredient to growing leaders. In addition to developing leader efficacy, the study also found that “higher levels of trust were associated with increases in leader efficacy” (Lester et al., 2011, p. 422). This could be seen not only as a call for more mentoring to develop leaders, but also a beacon of hope regarding the place of trust in the workplace.

After-action reviews are important because they help build lessons from real-world challenges. Researchers like Johnson et al. (2018) believe there is a ratio at which supervisors should create developmental experiences like immersive challenges for their employees and junior leaders. The ratio of development used in leadership training is the 70:20:10 framework. This framework originated in the 1980s and essentially

identifies three integral types of learning: experiential, social and formal.

Experiential learning... through challenging work-based assignments and makes up 70% of development; social learning takes the form of... managerial support, mentoring and feedback and makes up 20% of development; and formal learning

takes place through structured training programs and makes up 10% of development. (Johnson et al., 2018, p. 385)

Johnson et al. (2018) conducted a qualitative study with semi-structured interviews to explore whether the 70:20:10 framework was effective at transferring knowledge into action to develop employee skill sets. They found that the three types of development “should work together and not be undertaken in isolation” (Johnson et al., 2018, p. 394). This means that experiential learning should work alongside feedback sessions and coaching to ensure that the transfer of learning happens with leaders who engage. This should all be accompanied by formal training on concepts to expedite learning. However, the study also found that experiential learning is largely unstructured and unmanaged, that social learning is too narrow and needs to include observations, and that formal learning has a stigma of over-expectations from managers to exhibit changes directly after training (Johnson et al., 2018).

Coaching is a continuing theme in developing leaders. De Haan et al. (2019) studied executive coaching in the healthcare industry through a quantitative study that featured an experimental group and a control group. De Haan et al. (2019) hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between the group that received coaching and the control group, and that coaching would have a positive impact on derailment tendencies of the coaches. The authors found a significant positive difference in participants who received executive coaching that was well above the data points in the control group. As the study was carried out over three points in time and with an experimental group and a control group, De Haan et al. (2019) felt confident enough with

their data to state that “executive coaching can be an effective intervention; not only in the eyes of the coaches, but also in the eyes of their line managers” (p. 597).

Some scholars have seen leadership gains through games and play as a form of leadership development (Kark, 2011). Kark (2011) described *play* as “amusing, pretend or imaginary interpersonal and intrapersonal interactions or interplay” (p. 510) and described the difference between play and work as less of a difference in the work itself, but in how the participants approached the work.

Kark (2011) defined *leadership development* as the development of a person and their self-concept as a leader and the ability to share leadership among a group. Kark (2011) signaled play as a key tool for both of these development needs, specifically in the way play can open spaces for leaders to explore their own self-identities and how they relate to others. Leaders in play are able to explore scenarios and replay experiences to help them make better future decisions. This can be done through simulations or role playing. Kark (2011) stated that “The ability to play is crucial for today’s leadership and management since it can enhance a leader’s ability to be creative and promote ongoing innovation and organizational change” (p. 517). Creativity and innovation are crucial to today’s leadership challenges, where variables change quickly and new problems arise that have never been encountered before.

Leadership is a critical aspect of any organization, and leadership development is an integral part of the process. The literature on leadership development is vast, and scholars have taken multiple approaches to exploring how it works in various organizations. The literature on leadership development is very clear until the focus shifts specifically to research-based strategies for Black leaders.

The gap in the literature concerns the specific leadership development strategies Black education leaders use to develop other Black education leaders. While research on leadership development and competencies exists, the scholarship on Black leadership mostly focuses on experiences and short vignettes. It is difficult to find many comprehensive studies around Black leadership and effectiveness. With this gap, there is no true roadmap or blueprint for how to develop leadership in the Black community.

In summary, there is a vast amount of literature on leadership development. This review addressed the Black education executive representation, Black school leader representation, Black principal outcomes and effectiveness, leadership attributes and competencies for school administrators, and, finally, research on the development of leaders.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

I am totally fascinated by people and our history as I understand and continue to explore it. People have so much to give and so far to go and yet we have given and gone a great distance. It's really just interesting to ask: why not? And see where that takes me.

—Nikki Giovanni

### **Introduction**

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the study in question, the participants, the essential questions the research is attempting to answer, the data collected and analyzed in connection with the study, and the trustworthiness and credibility of the study. The purpose of the qualitative study is to examine and determine what particular developmental practices and activities Black principal supervisors use and perceive to be effective for Black school leaders in the education settings. The study highlights the need for effective leadership in the Black school communities and the need to raise awareness of effective leadership practices among Black leaders.

### **Research Questions**

The study's primary aim is to answer this central question: What methods do Black principal supervisors employ to develop the capacity of Black school leaders? The study will utilize and examine the experiences of Black principal supervisors to understand the philosophies and development activities they hold with the Black school leaders they manage. The research question will help uncover specific actions Black principal supervisors use to help develop school leaders. Additionally, the study asks four secondary questions.

## **Research Philosophies and Approach**

This study used the research philosophies known as interpretivism, the inductive approach, and phenomenology. Interpretivism involves the researcher in interpreting specific elements of a study—in this case, the phenomenon of leadership development among Black school leaders. The interpretive philosophy calls for an understanding of a phenomenon. In addition, the interpretivist approach is very useful in appreciating the differences between events (Saunders et al., 2012). The interpretivist approach allows the researcher to understand concepts by building their understanding from a set of described experiences. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2013) explained it as such:

“interpretive researchers working with such concepts and perspectives are not bringing their own scientific definitions with them to field settings in order to test the accuracy of those understandings. Researchers want, instead, to understand how those concepts, roles, and so forth are used in the field. They want to let their understandings and, indeed, the very existence of concepts that are key to a particular setting or situation “emerge from the field.” (p. 18)

This study uses the interpretive approach to determine what concepts and actions emerge from the field of leadership development among Black school leaders by their Black supervisors. This approach is used in this particular study because of the need to understand the phenomenon of how Black school leaders are developed, from a Black executive leader’s perspective. This can be done only by interpreting their perspectives, and the interpretive philosophy allows the researcher to use collected responses to tell a story in the research.

The interpretive philosophy is part of the larger phenomenological approach. Phenomenology rests on the belief that “human meanings are not expressed directly, but instead are embedded by their creators in (or projected onto) the physical, linguistic, and enacted artifacts they create” (Schwartz-Shea & Yanow, 2013, p. 41). Phenomenological research is qualitative, using observations and developing general concepts and themes using an inductive approach. Researchers use phenomenology to make sense of everyday actions and behaviors. This technique is of particular importance to understanding Black leadership development as a lived experience.

An alternative approach would be to use grounded theory. However, grounded theory does not retain features of the qualitative approach needed for this study. Grounded theory is “a qualitative methodology, but while it retains many similarities with other qualitative techniques...it has a set of distinct procedures, which if followed correctly force the researcher to aim at the level of abstract theorising” (Goulding, 2002, p. 2). In grounded theory, there is a major focus on “theory development and building” (Goulding, 2002, p. 46), while phenomenology focuses on understanding a specific phenomenon—in this case, developing Black leaders. The current project does not aim to construct a theory, but to unpack a phenomenon.

### **Specific Methodology**

This study has the potential to reveal key insights into how Black leaders are being developed. These insights could serve to create a foundation on which to establish more developmental precepts to increase the sustained self-determination of Black communities with the development of education leadership. To achieve this goal, this

phenomenological study will utilize semi-structured interviews as a primary method of data collection.

The semi-structured interview is a hybrid method that can be structured into segments, advancing from open-ended to more theoretically driven follow-up questions during the duration of the interview. The foundational answers from the study and early responses can set the stage for future exploration during the interview (Cross & Galletta, 2013). The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to address the complexities of the phenomena they are investigating. It also enables participants to interact with portions of the interview that become increasingly structured over time. This semi-structured nature allows the researcher to investigate a participant's comments for clarification, meaning-making, and critical reflection (Cross & Galletta, 2013).

Semi-structured interviews have both open-ended and more research-driven questions that reveal ideas based on the experiences of the participants. The interviews also provide "data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research" (Cross & Galletta, 2013, p. 46). To develop and use semi-structured interviews, the researcher must formulate the questions, field test them, and order them in a way that makes sense for the research. A key feature of this process is that "each interview question should be clearly connected to the purpose of the research, and its placement within the protocol should reflect the researcher's deliberate progression toward a fully in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study" (Cross & Galletta, 2013, p. 46).

I chose the semi-structured interview as a key collection feature in this phenomenological study because of its holistic approach in moving from open-ended to



more structured questions over the course of the interview. This flexibility will provide an opportunity to home in on key details that provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

### **Participants**

The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with 10–15 Black principal supervisors in the principal-supervisor role. The researcher selected participants based on the following criteria: (a) they self-identify as Black; (b) they are senior leaders; (c) they manage a Black school leader in some capacity; and (d) they manage more than one principal. It was important to select participants from across the United States to increase geographic diversity and perspective as well as accessibility to leaders. To do so, the researcher formed connections with national organizations that support these leaders to gain access to them and to engage them in semi-structured interviews.

For the purpose of this study, the lived experiences of Black principal supervisors are the subject of the interviews. Considering that accessibility could have been a challenge due to the criteria, there were few constraints on which participants experienced in the study. Allowing a wide range of senior-leadership experiences led to rich perspectives due to the diversity of participants. A criticism of these selection criteria is the notion that a selection of all Black education leaders produces little diversity and reveals a monolithic experience. For this study, I understand that the Black experience is not a monolith (Omi et al., 1994) and that future studies can explore a more diverse criteria if other researchers would like to continue the exploration.

## **Selection of the Participants**

The selection of the participants was key to ensuring that the data collected for this study maintained the quality needed for rigorous analysis. Some considerations taken into account when deciding on a selection strategy for participants included the possible scarcity of the types of participants needed, the time constraints of the research, and the level of access the researcher holds to the types of participants who will be included in the study. Seeing that these possible barriers existed in the selection of participants, the researcher used convenience sampling and snowballing.

Due to the time constraints of the specified research and the nature of the participants, the researcher used convenience sampling to find initial participants for the study. Convenience sampling “builds a sample on the basis of finding convenient or readily available individuals” (Ruane, 2016, p. 247). Readily available individuals are important for this research as they will serve as a catalyst for finding more participants. However, a common rebuttal of using convenience sampling is the lack of representation of the general population. Ruane (2016) noted that “The omission of all but the most conveniently accessed elements in a population greatly undermines the representativeness of a convenience sample” (p. 247). With this in mind, I acknowledge that the selection criteria was meant to be representative of a small subsection of the general population only, which made convenience sampling an ideal tool in this research.

To ensure that there were enough participants in the study, the researcher also used snowball sampling to find additional participants. Snowball sampling consists of using referrals and social networks to build a sample. The “process is repeated until a

satisfactory sample size is achieved” (Ruane, 2016, p. 247). A challenge of using this method includes the risk of excluding individuals who are not well networked.

The researcher’s preliminary research identified a list of organizations and groups that exist to support Black principal supervisors and senior leaders: Surge Academy (Surge), Education Leaders of Color (EdLoC), and the National Charter Collaborative (NCC).

Surge is a national organization that operates several fellowship experiences around the United States to develop and provide learning opportunities to Black, Asian, and Latinx education leaders (Surge, 2022). Education Leaders of Color is a national organization that aims to provide space to help education leaders collaborate to end systemic challenges and disparities (EdLoC, 2022). Sourcing candidates from EdLoC will provide the study with candidates who are senior leaders at schools and manage principals. The National Charter Collaborative is a national organization that supports charter school leaders of color (NCC, 2022). Sourcing candidates from NCC will provide the study with candidates who may be more likely to manage principals directly and more often than district counterparts. The researcher used all three organizations primarily to help locate potential participants who fit the research criteria for this study. The researcher also used individuals selected from personal relationships or professional contacts to initiate the snowball sampling method.

### **Number of Participants**

The target number of participants is 10–15. The goal is to choose a number that will lend itself to saturation. Determining the number of participants needed in a study to reach saturation is dependent on several key items, including data quality, the scope of

the study, the nature of the topic, and the qualitative method and study design (Morse, 2000).

Some scholars recommend 12–15 as the lowest number of participants for qualitative research, while others suggest that each methodology requires different quantities for saturation. Guest et al. (2006) suggests that six participants for a phenomenological method and 35 for grounded theory are needed to reach saturation. While 10–15 is more than the suggested amount for a phenomenological study, the diversity in geographic location, experience, and organization type must be represented in the sample to reach saturation.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Surge, EdLoC, and NCC served as key recruitment partners for participants who fit the study criteria. Personal networks also assisted in recruiting participants, who were recruited from across the United States, with a primary focus on leaders from the Midwest, East Coast, West Coast, and the South. In addition, the researcher recruited participants from the social executive, corporate executive, and school executive ranks.

### **Data Collection**

Data gathering and collection had several steps, including locating the site and participants, gaining access and rapport, conducting sampling, collecting data, recording information, resolving field issues, and storing data (Creswell, 2013).

Locating the site and participants in a phenomenological study requires the researcher to be clear on the group of individuals who have all experienced a specific phenomenon. The participants do not need to be in the same physical location, but it is

important to note that the more diverse the group is, the less similarity the members will have in their experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The background of the participants in terms of management experience, role in the organization, and management of teams were essential in the study. The researcher collected the background information for participants with the goal of providing relevant context, including: (1) geographic location, not including state or city; (2) work type managed; and (3) number of principals managed.

The researcher located the participants through professional organizations like EdLoC, NCC, and Surge. The researcher sent introduction emails to members and leaders of these organizations to gain access and to build the rapport necessary to source participants. From there, the researcher used the snowball sampling method to bring the sample to saturation. When the researcher was granted access to the possible participants, they sent a consent form to the candidates to outline their rights as voluntary participants.

The researcher engaged with the participants in one-on-one semi-structured virtual interviews with five to eight focus questions that are subsets of the foundational research question. The Zoom teleconference platform was used to interview the participants. This allowed for recording of the interview. While the interview is being recorded, the researcher took general notes to gain familiarity with the responses. To transcribe the interview, the researcher employed the Rev.com transcription service, which transcribes recordings at 99% accuracy and produces a written transcript of all audio in Microsoft Word format. Microsoft Word formatted documents were used to analyze the data from the interviews by downloading the files from the Rev.com website

on a secure flash drive. The researcher stored the data and transcripts on the Rev.com platform, with backups of the material on a flash drive.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis entails “organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read-through of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them” (Creswell, 2013, p.181). In qualitative research, data analysis is not a static process but a custom-designed solution to understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

To analyze the participants’ responses, the researcher used an inductive approach to organize the data in Microsoft Word. Several inductive-analysis techniques use coding. Open coding, also known as initial coding or in vivo coding, is created using the exact words of the participants. Inductive analysis can help with (a) constructing a theme; (b) identifying representative data to support the topic; and (c) explaining the theme using theory and literature via metaphors and analogues (Creswell, 2013).

Coding entails assigning the data to micro-categories to help make sense of connections and similar information in the data. The inductive process starts with a suggested lean code of five or six categories and, over several re-reads and reviews, grows to a set of less than 25 (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used the QDA Miner tool to code the data in the transcripts.

The researcher placed the resulting set of codes from the transcriptions into eight classifications or “themes.” The themes consisted of “several codes aggregated to form a common idea” (Creswell, 2013, p. 186). To make sense of the data via interpretation, the researcher used the themes to create connections via metaphors and literary devices to

explain the implications of the data (Creswell, 2013). The researcher interpreted the themes using the theory and literature expressed in previous chapters to force multiply the connections and overall findings of the research.

### **Trustworthiness and Credibility**

With a qualitative study, and particularly with a phenomenological study, it is paramount that the researcher clarify bias (Creswell, 2013). As discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher has worked as a principal manager of three schools and managed multiple leaders to achieve success in schools. This means that the researcher fits the criteria of a participant and may hold preconceived notions of what specific answers may be to the research questions. It is important that the researcher remains as objective as possible when asking questions in order not to lead participants to preconceived responses. This will ensure that the data collected is as rich and authentic as possible.

Another method to create the credibility and trustworthiness of the study is to introduce a member-checking process into the data collection procedure (Creswell, 2013). This requires that the researcher provides each participant with the transcript of their responses so that they may ensure that the information they provided was captured accurately and correctly. Once they have reviewed and approved the transcripts, participants will sign a form indicating their approval. Only then will their responses be used in the study. If the participant notices something that needs to be changed or omitted, they can note it on the form for the appropriate changes to be made.

### **Summary**

This chapter has offered insight on the specific methodology used in this qualitative research study. It outlined the criteria of how participants were selected based

on (a) self-identifying as Black; (b) being senior leaders; (c) managing a Black school leader in some capacity, and (d) managing more than one principal.

This chapter included the rationale for the type of participants, the number of participants, and the techniques used to recruit participants. It also covered how the researcher collected the data, analyzed it, and how the research was conducted in a trustworthy and credible manner. The following chapters turn to the study results to answer the central research question: What methods do Black principal supervisors employ to develop the capacity of Black school leaders?



## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

...And excellent means the extra work...And Nazareth gonna plead his case... The reason my power's here on earth... Salute the truth, when the prophet say. I got loyalty, got royalty inside my DNA.

—Kendrick Lamar

### **Introduction**

Chapter four presents the results of the phenomenological study. The following section reviews the study, describes the composition of the study of participants, presents themes found in the research, and provides a summary of the findings of the major questions.

### **Overview**

The purpose of the study was to explore the philosophies and methods Black principal supervisors employ to develop the capacity of Black school leaders in K-12 education institutions. The research questions that were the foundation of this investigation are:

- RQ1: How do Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders in the organization?
- RQ2: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization?
- RQ3: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership?
- RQ4: How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization?

This study employed a qualitative method of phenomenological design characterized by the analysis of the quantitative strand of research in the form of semi-structured interviews. Chapter 4 reports the outcomes of these analyses. The chapter reports the results of the qualitative data from the virtual interviews and transcribed notes, with the purpose of answering all of the research questions. Convenience and snowball sampling were used to select 11 participants from across the United States. A general description of participants' demographic characteristics was reported in chapter 3 while a more comprehensive description of each participant is presented in this chapter. Participants were given code names to maintain anonymity and confidentiality. This chapter provides an overview of findings and classifies them according to themes and sub-themes relative to the understanding of the research questions.

**Table 4.1**  
*Participant's Demographic Information*

Participant	Gender	Education Attainment	Years of Experience as Supervisor	# of Principals Supervised	Charter or Traditional Public
PS-01	Female	Doctoral Student	3	14	Traditional Public
PS-02	Female	2 Masters Degrees	12	6	Charter
PS-03	Male	Ph.D.	8	50	Traditional Public
PS-04	Male	Ed.S.	8	40	Traditional Public
PS-05	Female	2 Masters	8	5	Charter
PS-06	Male	Ph.D.	2	8	Charter
PS-07	Female	Post Graduate	6	21	Traditional Public
PS-08	Male	M.A.	10	20	Traditional Public
PS-09	Male	M.A.	10	12	Charter
PS-10	Female	Ph.D.	9	61	Traditional Public
PS-11	Female	2 Masters	10	11	Charter

## **Qualitative Results**

The qualitative data for this study were obtained through the use of a 7-question semi-structured interview protocol, which can be viewed in Appendix A. Convenience sampling coupled with snowball sampling were employed in the selection of participants, with the purpose of obtaining a maximum participation against the specified criteria of demographics and leadership role of participants.

### **Textual Description of the Participants' Demography**

This section provides a brief account of the eleven participants regarding their gender, educational attainment, years of principal supervisory experience, and number of principals supervised. 11 participants shared their experiences, methods, and thoughts in regards to Black principal leadership development and readiness. Gender self-identification of participants resulted in 5 males and 6 females who participated in the study. All participants identified as Black or African-American in terms of race and ethnicity.

**Gender.** 5 Black principal supervisors identified as male, 6 identified as female, and none identified as non-binary.

**Education attainment.** 6 Black principal supervisors held Masters degrees , 1 was currently a doctoral student, and 4 held terminal degrees such as Ed.S., Ph.D. or Ed.D.

**Years of experience as a principal supervisor.** 2 Black principal supervisors held 0-5 years of experience, 8 held 6-10 years of experience, and 1 held over 10 years of experience.

**Number of principals supervised.** At the time of this study, 3 Black principal supervisors were engaged in supervising 0-10 principals, 4 were engaged in the supervising of 11-20 principals, and 4 were engaged in the supervising of 21 or more principals.

**School system type.** At the time of this study, 6 Black principal supervisors were engaged in supervising principals in traditional public school districts, while 5 were engaged in the supervision of principals in public charter networks.

### **Participant Profiles**

#### **PS-01:**

The first participant to be interviewed was PS-01. PS-01 started their journey to leadership through the teacher leader route. They served as department chair in schools and eventually served as an assistant principal in a middle school and a high school. They were promoted to a principal at the high school in which they served as the assistant. As a high school principal, they faced gender challenges from district leadership. District supervisors where she served preferred high school principals to be male. This sparked a move and city change for PS-01, who relocated and worked as a principal in another district. PS-01 then transitioned to become an elementary principal for over 4 years. Their work in the principalship inspired her mentor to sponsor her to become a principal supervisor in another city.

PS-01 experienced challenges with peers respecting her authority and vision as a first year principal supervisor. She reflects on this time as a change in her leadership from a directive style to one that relies more on influence. She has now held the role of

supervisor for 3 years and is grateful for the time in the seat where she supervises 14 principals.

**PS-02:**

PS-02 started her journey as an experienced teacher leader in California. She quickly noticed a gap in the school systems when she was in grad school pursuing a masters in education. She had an assignment to evaluate systems in schools and noticed her school did not have any such systems in place. When she attempted to interview her principal about the evaluation of these systems, she was instead tasked with creating them for her school. This task led her to create and evaluate school-level systems, thereby creating a teacher leadership role for herself within her school community.

The experience of creating systems sparked the PS-02s interest in school leadership, prompting her to relocate and gain a deeper understanding of the role. She explored opportunities in public schools, charter schools, and new school development, eventually settling in a charter school. She began as an assistant principal and eventually became a school leader, taking on multiple leadership roles beyond the traditional principal position. She moved to regional school leadership in 2012 and then transitioned to coaching principals, their leadership teams, and superintendents, CEOs, and heads of schools as a systems leader for a non-profit with a mission of supporting leaders.

After this experience, PS-02 transitioned to a principal supervisor and Chief Operations Officer of a national charter school organization where she supervises 6 principals.

**PS-03:**

Throughout PS-03s career, his focus has been on serving urban education and thinking about the systems that can support it. He started as a teacher in an urban school district through a specialized program designed to place teachers in urban schools. After two years as a science teacher in one urban district, PS-03 moved to another urban core and served as a teacher and department chair as an introduction into leadership. PS-03 soon became a principal resident and then a principal in the same urban district. He found it important to participate in fellowships or training programs to support professional development.

PS-03 has seen firsthand the lack of resources and support in urban schools, and the overwhelming responsibilities that often fall on black and brown leaders, leading to burnout or quick removal from their positions. Therefore he applied for and was accepted into a prestigious fellowship designed to develop and support systems leaders and principal supervisors in schools. Through this fellowship, he was groomed and prepared for an academic superintendent role in a third urban city's school system.

After a 2-year experience as an academic superintendent, PS-03 became the executive director of a teacher preparation non-profit and led teams to develop teachers and solve talent and leadership gaps in his city. After almost 4 years in that role, PS-03 became the Chief Academic Officer for another urban district and has been in that role for 2 years where he is responsible for academics and curriculum in a district where he supports around 50 principals.

PS-03 believes networking and learning from others has been critical to his professional growth. He also holds that humility, listening, and learning from others have always been important values to him in his career.

**PS-04:**

PS-04s is a Black male whose career in education began as a fourth and fifth-grade teacher. Afterward, he worked as an academic dean in a K-8 school and served as a middle school administrator. PS-04 then worked as an assistant principal at a high school for four years, where they supervised ninth-grade teachers and ran the ninth-grade campus. After ten years in teaching and middle school administration, PS-04 moved across the country where he served as the principal of a high school for over a year.

PS-04s leadership journey has been shaped by two distinct vignettes. The first vignette began when they started teaching fourth grade alongside a young white female teacher. PS-04s responsibilities included lunch and bus duty, grade-level discipline, and other transactional and operational tasks. In contrast, the young white female's role was to participate on the curriculum team, data analysis team, reading adoption team, instructional leadership team, school improvement team, lesson planning lead, and lead Professional Learning Communities. Although PS-04 eventually became teacher of the year, he was not exposed to some of the experiences necessary to become an assistant principal.

PS-04 stated that his frustrations were compounded by the realization that he, like many men of color in leadership, had been typecast to a very unique track based on his identity, gender, and lived experiences. In his introductory leadership roles, he now struggled to develop and support teachers, lead instructional teams, and walk into PLCs

to help teachers understand how to accelerate learning in the classroom. PS-04 had to understand the foundations of instructional leadership before his move to principal supervision. He also started to develop himself by asking for feedback on behaviors that caused him to appear intimidating or fearful, as colleagues started to report his physical size and demeanor as intimidating in meetings. PS-04 also felt race played a role in how his colleagues experienced him and his leadership.

PS-04 soon became a Chief Schools Officer and Superintendent. He was able to address instructional knowledge through study and professional development and studying leadership competencies that align with leaders of color. PS-04 noted that national leadership standards and competency-based rubrics for leaders do not always align with the leadership moves that lead to success for leaders of color.

**PS-05:**

PS-05 is a Black female school CEO whose career in education began as a high school English teacher. She soon went back to school to earn a master's in social work during her second year of teaching, with the intention of focusing on the social and emotional aspects of education. She completed a year-long social work internship at a high school and started working to become a principal. While she did not attain any principal positions, she did secure a school leadership role to become a school social worker and the dean of students at a K-5 school, all while pursuing a master's in educational leadership from an Ivy League institution.

After completing her second master's degree, the individual founded their first high school after completing a principal residency at a nearby middle school. The school had a college preparatory focus and would inform her approach to school later on by



helping her to consider more options than college for students. PS-05 had a goal to become the highest performing high school in their district, and her team achieved this, and maintained the number one ranking for four years.

Despite her successes as a leader, there were also negative consequences to the school's approach to learning and discipline, including high suspension and expulsion rates. Some of the negative consequences of losing students due to high suspension rates were mitigated due to an exceptionally high retention rate of staff, which families loved. However, the experience left PS-05 thinking more deeply about what school could be for children of color and how to provide them with experiences that uplifted them and did not belittle them through suspension and expulsion.

After leaving the high school she founded, PS-5 managed principals for a large network of schools. She did this while dreaming of a school that would serve children with dignity and provide them with agency around how their education would be administered. Using her social work and leadership background, PS-05 built the school to be focused on community and relationship building, and she is pleased with the successes thus far.

PS-05 grew the school to become its CEO and developed a principal through a residency model. She is working to ensure the school meets her criteria for success around student agency and is developing a solid team who will stay with the model to provide families with much needed consistency and sustainability.

**PS-06:**

PS-06 is a principal supervisor in his second year at a charter school network. As an undergraduate, he pursued a major in elementary education at an Historically Black

College (HBCU). The institution did not have an education department but he was able to take classes at a neighboring college to realize his dream of becoming a teacher. PS-06 recognized the scarcity of Black male teachers in K-12 institutions and vowed to become a teacher to serve the education system and children in it. Despite his initial intention to teach kindergarten for the entirety of his career, he eventually transitioned into a career in school leadership, first as an assistant principal and later as a principal. He served in the role of principal for ten years.

PS-06 has studied how to support first year principals in his own work. He has made it a point in his new role as Executive Director to support his principals in a way that helps them see success early and makes the job sustainable. He cites his own struggles with limited support and guidance during his debut as a principal as a drive for this disposition.

Through his research and lived experience, PS-06 has come to value the importance of mentorship and support for aspiring and current principals. As a result, he is committed to fostering a nurturing environment for his principals, particularly those who may not have had access to such resources earlier in their careers.

**PS-07:**

PS-07 is a Black female newly minted Executive Director of a charter network. She recently left the assistant superintendent seat at a large urban district. She has a deep-seated passion for education, she gravitated towards the teaching profession early on in her career. Her teaching role provided her with a sense of fulfillment as she observed the positive impact she was having on her students. As a middle school English teacher with

four sections consisting of approximately one hundred students, she was responsible for molding young minds in a profound way.

Despite the satisfaction she derived from her role as a teacher, she began to realize that she needed a larger platform to make a more significant impact in the field of education. She noticed that the positive outcomes she witnessed in her classroom were not necessarily reflective of the wider school environment. She then became a principal within the same urban district in which she taught. She endeavored to assist her fellow teachers and improve the collective efficacy of the teaching staff.

PS-07 was actively working to cultivate the culture of collective efficacy among her colleagues. She was committed to finding ways to enhance the professional development of teachers across the board. Her success in this and dedication to education saw her promoted to assistant superintendent where she managed more than 20 principals in a traditional public setting. PS-07 decided that replicating herself as a teacher would not be the way to bring success to students. Instead, she wanted to recreate the conditions that fostered a positive learning experience for students in all learning spaces.

**PS-08:**

PS-08 is a Black male who has served as a teacher, principal, principal supervisor, and charter school network executive where he also supervised principals. He served as a teacher for 3 years and was approached by a mentor teacher who suggested that they apply for an assistant principal position that would be opening up at another school within the same network. Despite some initial hesitance, PS-08 ultimately applied for and obtained the position. Following this, he continued to grow their network and build

relationships within the education community, which opened up new doors and opportunities for them to lead at higher levels.

Eventually, PS-08 became a principal and worked with friends and colleagues to increase academic performance at his school. Through these connections, he was introduced to future mentors who were executives at a charter organization. PS-08 formed a deep relationship with these mentors and shared best practices. Later, those mentors approached PS-08 with an offer to join their system to supervise principals and systems. This required PS-08 to expand the school's program into new areas and support principals within the network.

As part of his role in systems leadership, PS-08 hired and trained new principals and teachers, helped principals understand the model, and supported principals throughout the network. Overall, his path to systems leadership was shaped by his relationships with mentors and colleagues, as well as their dedication to improving academic outcomes for their students.

**PS-09:**

PS-09 is a Black male who is the CEO of a charter network of schools. He began his career as a middle school reading teacher in a traditional district. He soon served as a dean of students and then a vice principal in a charter school setting before accepting a fellowship opportunity that was focused on helping him launch a school. Following this fellowship, the individual worked as a principal at a standalone middle school after having spent five years in the classroom and two years as a vice principal and dean.

After serving as a principal, the individual established a nonprofit organization with the goal of creating high-performing schools. The organization placed a strong

emphasis on developing its own leaders, with a focus on promoting from within, nurturing talent, and encouraging growth of the leaders in the organization.

In leading this organization, PS-09 supervises 12 principals and manages core organization functions.

PS-09s leadership philosophy is centered on recruiting and nurturing mission-driven, passionate leaders who were willing to go above and beyond to ensure that students received the education they deserved. While PS-09 had many challenges along his journey, his approach to education and leadership resulted in a successful network of schools that put the needs of students first.

**PS-10:**

PS-10 is a Black female who is the deputy superintendent in an urban traditional district. The district is currently in turmoil and PS-10 came into this role to add stability and expertise to a challenging organization. She started as the Chief Academic Officer and recently transitioned to the Deputy Superintendent. PS-10 embarked on her educational journey in a large urban setting, commencing a five-year tenure as a teacher, followed by seven and a half years as a principal. Subsequently, she transitioned to the non-profit sector, where she facilitated the growth and development of aspiring and current leaders, including superintendents, for a period of four and a half years. Following this, PS-10 assumed a leadership position in the charter school sector, serving as a Chief Academic Officer in a network of charter schools. In this capacity, the individual oversaw the management of eleven principals for a little over a year before transitioning to a consulting role.

Presently, PS-10 serves as the Deputy Superintendent in an urban district, where she provides support to 58 school leaders and three principal supervisors.

**PS-11:**

PS-11 is a Black woman who serves as the Chief Executive Officer of a large charter school organization. She identifies as a first-generation college graduate in their family and attended an Ivy League school for undergraduate studies. PS-11 aimed to break the cycle of poverty by pursuing a career that was economically viable in undergrad. During their senior year, however, she was inspired by a teacher who visited her English seminar class and spoke about the direct impact they were having on educational opportunities. Consequently, she applied to become a teacher and started her career in 2001.

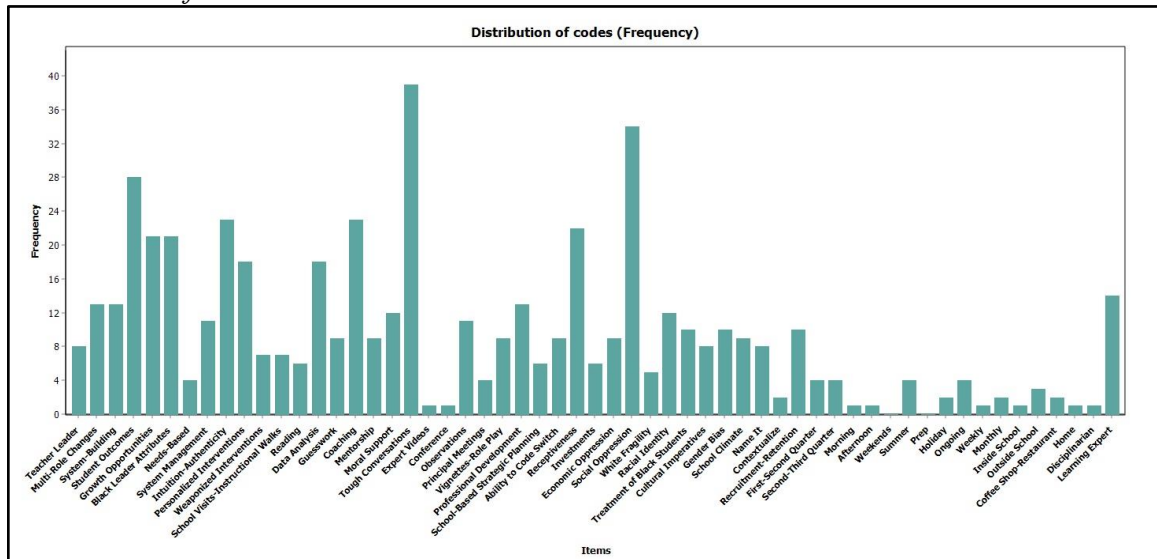
PS-11 began her career as a teacher and progressed steadily through the educational system, from teacher to assistant principal, to founder of a school through a charter system, and finally to principal, coach, and manager. Presently, she serves as a chief executive officer. Throughout her career, she has been focused on the work at hand and has been determined to keep students first in all decision making.

PS-11's defining moment in leadership was witnessing schools where the absence of love was apparent and deafening. She believes that all children deserve schools where they are motivated to attend every day and where adults believe in them not just in words but also in action, affect, and love them as if they were their own children. This belief continues to fuel her leadership and has been a driving force throughout their career.

## Thematic Analysis

This chapter presents the themes that emerged from the 11 interviews conducted in this study. Each theme is associated with a research question for which it serves as a possible answer. A definition of the theme, a descriptive narrative of the theme, quotes that support the theme's existence, and an interpretation of the theme by the researcher are provided (Rogers & Willig, 2017). The inclusion of quotes and the researcher's interpretation seeks to add validity to the pairing of the theme with the research question. Additionally, this chapter includes commentary on how each theme is relevant to the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory. All themes are displayed in Table 4.2 below.

**Figure 4.1**  
*Distribution of Codes*



**Table 4.2**  
*Theme Chart*

Themes	Codes Associated
Black Leadership Brilliance	Black Leader Attributes  Growth Opportunities  Professional Development  Multi-Role Changes
Opportunities in Awareness	Growth Opportunities  Coaching  Reading  Multi-Role Changes  Black Leader Attributes
Centering Instruction	Learning Expert  Reading  Black Leader Attributes  Recruitment-Retention
Coaching and Care	Coaching  School Visits-Instructional Walks  Receptiveness  Tough Conversations  Intuition-Authenticity
Data and Reality	Tough Conversations  Name It  Data Analysis
Combating Racial Violations	Social Oppression  Racial Identity  Tough Conversations  Name It
Center Student Life Outcomes	Student Outcomes  Recruitment-Retention  Learning Expert
Effective Principals and Inspiration	Student Outcomes  School Visits-Instructional Walks  Recruitment-Retention  Personalized Interventions



**Research Question 1:** RQ1: How do Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders in the organization?

**Black Leadership Brilliance:**

Upon review of the data, a theme of black leadership brilliance was constructed and is characterized by the recognition of self-reliant excellence within the black community, while acknowledging that such excellence does not equate to perfection. Rather, it entails striving to surpass previous achievements by giving one's absolute best. In the 11 interviews conducted, Black leadership attributes for excellence were evident in 100% of cases, occurring a total of 21 times in the data. PS-11 stated this about excellence:

Leaders should be able to be excellent. And that does not equate to perfection.

They should be able to be excellent in a highly self-reliant, independent way. And so me coming in with some of the same tools from my same toolkit and working side by side, I was stifling that by enabling a level of reliance that is not conducive to what we need to be

The leader's quote clearly identifies excellence as a trait she sees in her Black leaders and as an expectation. However, one nuance is that she understands excellence is not synonymous with perfection. This understanding leaves room for mistakes and learning opportunities, which can be extremely helpful. PS-11 also highlights the importance of leaders being self-reliant and independent. Additionally, the leader suggests that developing self-reliance in leaders is crucial because it is connected to excellence. Finally, PS-11 acknowledges that while she wants to see this type of excellence in her

leaders, she has fallen short in training them for it. This means that she is living her own definition of excellence by understanding that perfection does not equate to the excellence she and her team strive to achieve.

From a Critical Race Theory perspective, excellence and perfection have typically gone hand in hand as a way to solidify and normalize white dominance in professional spaces. Divorcing perfection from excellence allows one to view perfection as a deformity of actual lived experiences. In fact, Okun suggests that we reframe mistakes as moments of learning and center appreciation of each others' work. In addition, limiting self-criticism and asking for specific feedback on our work to improve is recommended to achieve excellence (Okun, 2020). There is a notion that fear is the force that amplifies mistakes in the context of a white-supremacist culture (Raymundo, 2021, p.117). Uncoupling the bond of fear and imperfection will free us all to engage in learning and understanding that could accelerate excellence and provide Black principal supervisors with a point of origin for developing Black principals.

In addition to excellence, Black leadership brilliance encompasses the notion of communal learning, where black leaders learn from one another in a supportive and collaborative manner. Throughout the interviews, multiple leaders described the benefits of group learning models and cohorts, which facilitated skill development and increased comfort levels with learning. Furthermore, humility was noted as a significant factor in Black leadership, as it is crucial to recognize that further learning is necessary to achieve excellence. PS-04 states:

I know that leaders of color have a unique learning style. We tend to build community. We tend to learn from one another. We tend to learn when there's

trust in the room. So part of what I believe is we need to walk side by side with our leaders. We also need to understand that their voice and their agency needs to be a strong part of their development.

PS-04 adds:

But I do think we have to look at the standard that organizations provide and see how do we create deeper, richer learning opportunities for our leaders of color. So as a principal supervisor, I would build cohorts of my male leaders of color.

PS-06 states:

The work that I do with my assistant principals each month through our assistant principal leadership cohort, I look at, I look at a couple of factors. I look at how stronger they are, right now instructionally, I look at how they are when it comes to creating and sustaining a good culture of learning on their campus

The Black principal supervisors shared the need and desire for cohort learning models to create trust in learning environments that foster excellence. The call for cohort models can also be interpreted as a need for community. The idea of community plays a critical role in success and safety among Black leaders. In fact, Cooper and Gulati stated in an article from the Harvard Business Review that Black leaders “...felt out of place among mostly white peers and bosses.” (Cooper III & Gulati, 2021). The authors referred to this as “a sense of isolation” and building community is a perfect antidote to professional learning isolation.

In the work of leading schools, complex adaptive leadership posits a relationship between groups and a sense of belonging by highlighting the crucial role of authority in social living. The distinction between leadership and authority is not a straightforward

matter and is contingent upon various factors such as personal ability, group types, and context. In this regard, the process of group work entails a series of steps, including establishing roles, selecting a leader, relying on the leader for services, and aligning the leader's actions with tasks and themes (Heifetz, 1998, pp. 49-57).

Considering that adaptive leadership is a model for group work along the human context we must also include tenets of Critical Race Theory. Critical race theory suggests that we live in a society that inherently places race at the center of our decision making and life experiences (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 6-9). This would mean that if humans are learning within groups where trust and relationships are required to foster an environment for skill development, there might be a greater opportunity for those groups to be successful if we consider creating cohorts of black leaders where the dynamics of leadership as explained by Heifetz will not be decided based on race.

### **Opportunities in Awareness:**

Awareness was a key feature in the data from Black principal supervisors. Principal supervisors largely saw awareness as an understanding of growth areas in leadership, gaps in leadership, and the ability to be humble to learn and grow. Of the 11 interviews conducted, “aware(ness)” or “growth area” was represented in 90.9% of all cases. The participants mentioned “growth” or “awareness” 21 times through the transcripts. PS-05 says this about awareness:

A leader would be making sure that they are self-aware enough to acknowledge the things that they're not good at, acknowledge the gaps that they have in their experience and their expertise in their approach and their ability to support

teachers in school and culture and all of the facets that they have to support. I think once you're self-aware and can acknowledge those things, then you can accommodate for them. So I don't think a leader is ready for that seat if they're not privy to the areas that they need to work on, or if they're unable to be self-aware enough to say, this is what I need.

This highlights the need for a Black principal to deeply understand who they are and what they bring to the table in terms of leadership. Black principal supervisors realize that they are in an ideal scenario of developing and training leaders if those leaders are receptive to particular interventions. It would seem that receptiveness to these particular interventions could be dependent on the awareness that leadership gaps exist in the first place. This is not to say that those gaps exist in the space where excellence does not live.

To illustrate the point of gaps and excellence co-existing, PS-11 goes on to say:

Be it white supremacy or not, but it's around executive functioning gaps that have gotten in the way of their innate brilliance

For context, PS-11 was speaking about Black male principals she and her team supervises. She states that there are executive functioning gaps present in their leadership. She also states that there is an innate brilliance that is present within them and that those executive functioning gaps serve as a barrier to that brilliance being shown consistently. This is further proof that Black principal supervisors find the Black principals that they supervise highly competent, but also understand that there are gaps that must be addressed to assist them in delivering excellent service and outcomes to children and communities. Going beyond understanding one's gaps, PS-06 adds context for next steps:

If, you know, you need help and support in a certain area, being able to, you know, humble yourself enough to be able to, um, reach out and seek that support. But then I also wanted to know how much time do they spend investing in themselves?

While agreeing with the other principal supervisors, PS-06 clearly states that the Black principals under their leadership need to be able to understand their gaps. However, he is also clear that there is a need for humility that not only serves as an avenue to be open to opportunities for support, but also serves as the fuel to reach out and seek said support. This nuance is where PS-06 adds unique value to this conversation by insinuating that knowing where your gaps are is not just a necessity but prerequisite knowledge to the ability to seek out support and invest in one's talents. Seeking support and investing in growth could be what creates real growth and opportunity for Black principals.

Awareness and moments of growth that capitalize on a subject's ability to be aware are cornerstones of the adaptive leadership necessary to develop as a leader. This is due to the fact that to truly understand human and group behavior to move work forward, one must understand what emotions they are holding and what experiences they have that may get in the way of their success. Rosen states that as a leader, "You can change the way you see the world and your place in it by examining your thought processes, your emotions, and how you interact with others. In short, you can tap into a new level of consciousness." (Rosen, 2013, p. 312). This is an excellent way of illustrating what Black leaders must do to effectively tap into their brilliance. There must be an understanding of one's self in a way that is meaningful to truly accelerate your learning and effectiveness.

While awareness of gaps can serve as an opportunity to grow one's leadership, awareness can also be used to understand the context within the social structure of one's existence. Using the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, one could argue that another awareness that Black leaders need to hold is the ubiquitous existence of race in their leadership context (Yosso, 2005, pp. 70-71). While awareness of a race-based society might not serve as a gap or an opportunity to grow, it may serve as an awareness of a barrier to professional success or managerial relations.

### **Centering Instruction:**

Another theme that was constructed from the data was the idea of centering instruction in school leadership. One could consider that a primary function of schooling in K-12 is to ensure children are learning in core subjects. If that is the case, then leaders of school communities (especially Black leaders of schools with Black children with increased needs and support for learning) need to understand and be aware of instructional practices at a high level. Thoughts on instructional leadership as explained in the literature are that, “for instructional superintendents (principal supervisors) to really maximize teaching and learning, they can't be responsible for anything else but teaching and learning.” (Saltzman, 2016, pp. 55-56). Furthermore, Of the 11 interviews conducted, the need for principals to understand instruction at a high level was evident in 72.7% of all cases. In addition, the participants mentioned instructional capacity 14 times and it represented 2.6% of all codes. PS-02 considers instruction as something that may not come as innate as connecting with the children for Black principals:

And so that was also some of the things, right? For me it was about personal leadership and instructional leadership. Do you know, instruction backwards and forwards and top and bottom. That was important because the culture piece, chances are for us, if it was a school with black and brown kids, there was something innate that you may have brought to it, but that isn't always true for every black leader, right?

While PS-02 explains that school culture might seem innate for Black principals, she also suggests leaders develop instructional skills that may not come so easily. PS-07 adds to this notion by stating that this is a skill that she is responsible for developing in her principals:

So I think there's like the content bucket, so like how do I, how do I develop leaders on what they need to know? Instructional. So like they're, they're solid understanding of instructional core and then all things that are, uh, like adjacent to that. And then I think the, the bucket of, um, just like people management. So how do I help

PS-02 and PS-07 both elevate the importance of instructional leadership of principals. PS-03 goes on to note situations in which Black leaders may be brought in to lead a school and be replaced by someone with more instructional knowledge. In fact, he suggests the person who would usually replace such a leader is a white woman with more instructional knowledge:

So a lot of times you'll be very quick to get the job, but if you are not clear on the support you need and the support system you need around you, you'll be the very first one that moves your job. I used to tell my principals all the time, I said, you



know, you'll get hired because this, you know, they're looking at this building like a turnaround building. They're like, yo, we need a Joe Clark to come up in here. And I said, when this data isn't moving, they'll replace you with a five foot, one white woman who can get data and like, knows instruction off the back of her hand and turn this building around.

As PS-03 discusses consequences of not having instructional knowledge, PS-08 adds to the conversation by exploring what the baseline might be for instructional knowledge coming into the role. He essentially believes that it is a teachable skill and while a leader wouldn't be able to start with zero knowledge, the leader must have the willingness to learn:

I think instructionally you have to be coachable. Like if I can teach you some stuff around like what good instruction looks like, um, and I can invest time in you, like, I would say you just can't start at zero. Like, you don't have to know all of the, the details, but you gotta be comfortable around instruction, um, and organization, bro. Organization. Like, you have to be able to, you have to be able to like determine what needs to get done when and how to like, make time.

While PS-08 starts to reveal what the baseline might be for a Black principal coming into the seat for the first time, PS-01 further clarifies where instructional knowledge must be as one engages in the principal role:

That doesn't mean, you know, every standard and every nuance of every content, but you understand what foundational best practices are. And so as I look at the readiness of principals, and as I engage with them, assistant principals or instructional coaches or deans, I'm really looking at like, what are, how do you

recognize instruction? How do you shift and pivot your coaching and your support to be able to grow a person instructionally, um, grow that instruction?

From the perspective of Critical Race Theory, one could argue that many of the Black principal supervisors' sentiments around instruction are driven by a narrative and ethos in schools that pigeonholes Black leaders as culture specialists and disciplinarians - a notion possibly driven by stereotypes about lack of intellect and capability. These roles have little to no instructional responsibilities and therefore may seldom lead to the principal seat. As the data has revealed to consider instruction as a key theme in how Black principal supervisors see their roles in developing black principals, it is imperative that many more Black educators truly understand the instructional landscape.

In summation of the themes that serve to provide context to RQ1, Black leadership brilliance as a theme represents the idea that Black principal supervisors define their role in Black principal development by believing in the brilliance of their Black leaders. To do so, they create an expectation of excellence in Black principals' work and maintain an environment that is conducive to their growth via racially homogenous cohort learning models.

The role of Black principal supervisors in the development of Black principals in regards to the theme of opportunities and awareness is that Black principals are tasked with understanding who they are and what gaps they have in leadership. This prerequisite allows black principal supervisors to provide support that develops appropriate leadership for the role. Furthermore, it is even more effective if the Black principal can identify the gaps and seek out support and development independently. This means that the Black principal supervisor would have to create an environment

where the principal feels comfortable expressing their gaps and investing in their leadership.

Lastly, Black principal supervisors define their roles as developers of instructional leaders to support student learning in the school. The data from the interviews is clear that the participants believed that skillsets around understanding instruction to develop teachers is necessary for success as a Black principal.

**Research Question 2:** RQ2: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization?

#### **Coaching and Care:**

A theme of Coaching and Care was constructed from the data and is defined by the deployment of mentoring, coaching, and personalized interventions. Coaching in particular seemed to be a very relied upon development activity by Black principal supervisors to develop their Black principals. In the 11 interviews conducted, codes of coaching are evident in 100% of cases, occurring a total of 23 times in the data. PS-04 shares his general thoughts on the importance of coaching and mentoring as a means of development:

And then, you know, this piece, this ongoing coaching and development, it's in the moment role play development, um, that, that we have found, um, is a great leverage to support growth and development of leaders.

PS-10 goes further into coaching to define questions that uncover goals of coaching or mentoring sessions that might be present:

And so we are doing a lot of coaching around how to still deliver the high expectations message would deliver in a way that people can receive it. And so we spend probably about an hour and a half a week saying, okay, what are your key messages? How do they see me? And then how do we adjust messaging so that people who are not me being another black female would receive them. Um, and then how do you do the, I don't know, song and dance, for lack of a better word, it a song and dance? How do you do the song and dance to make people who are resistant to your messaging?

PS-10 adds getting to specific actions in addition to delivery when engaging in coaching:

I think it's a balance between like conceptual understanding and immediate application. And so I lean on a lot of, in the moment coaching, I lean on a lot of role play in a lot of application of the ideas that we're doing in terms of buildings capacity. So if we're talking about coaching teachers, how do you practice coaching?

While PS-10 discusses coaching in the context of improving school function, PS-2 discusses coaching in the sense of developing a leader to gain experience leading peers and a gaining a national profile by coaching them through professional development (PD) opportunities at conferences:

And now we have a different item where now I'm coaching you through PD and that PD isn't just, here's a PD that I'm gonna leave for my teachers. You know how to do all that. I'm asking you to leave a PD for the nation, for your nation of peers, right? And superiors. Yes. Now that's different. I'm asking you to be a content expert and and create a lane for yourself. Now that's different.

While most development comments were geared towards coaching, there were several that also described informal mentoring. In fact, mentoring in some form was mentioned in 45% of all cases. PS-09 states this about mentorship:

You know, sometimes it's lonely out there. And to have a relationship with someone where you can sit down and go, Hey, let me just, let me bend your ear for a half an hour. Lemme bend your ear for 20 minutes, man, this is, this is gonna be good for me. Uh, and, and I think that's, that's the type of development, uh, that's, that's needed. Uh, especially with, uh, uh, black leaders, especially newer black leadership. Uh, they're, they're getting their feet wet and they're getting through the door. Um, to have that outlet is just as important.

A theme of coaching and care helps to provide perspective in one's leadership. One theme in adaptive leadership is to understand the factions or parts of a whole that are at play in a complex situation (Heifetz et al., 2009). A coach or a mentor can be extremely supportive in helping a leader truly understand the environment, how different factions are working together in the environment, and how the particular leader being coached is responding to that environment and context. This coaching gives that leader choices and perspective so that their leadership is greatly improved.

Using the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory, one could argue that the ubiquity of race and racism plays a large role in the management perspective of leadership. One of the common threads through the interviews around coaching was a need to assist black principals in messaging their expectations. one can only imagine the complexities of managerial relationships across racial lines when power dynamics are at play. This could mean that coaching has a larger role than understanding the parts of the

hole as it relates to school related functions with Black leaders. One might also consider the parts to the whole of race relations and power dynamics within society as a whole and what role they play in the managerial function of a Black principal in a school.

### **Data and Reality:**

A theme of Data and Reality was constructed from the data and is characterized by the reliance on data and tough conversations around school-based data to improve performance. In the 11 interviews conducted, codes for data analysis were evident in 72.7% of cases, occurring a total of 18 times in the data. In addition, codes for tough conversations were evident in 91% of cases, occurring a total of 39 times in the data. Data and tough conversations are an important connection and informs this theme because tough conversations are what these leaders seem to use to create plans and opportunities around data. PS-03 stated this about tough conversations and results:

And so I would say for my leaders of, uh, color particularly, uh, black male leaders of color, just really being honest about them to say like, at the end of the day, like, you're going to be asked to deliver. And, uh, I've been in districts where like black men are tossed from school to school, like, uh, and sometimes given some of the toughest assignments. And part of that reason why is no one's having the direct conversation with them. A lot of times there's a, a conversation behind the conversation about this person's leadership or what, what they are or not good at. And that's not fair to us as leaders, but it's also, I try to have those direct conversations to say like, this is the conversation being said around you. Um, what are you going to do about it? And not in the way of like how you're gonna

fight and defend yourself. How are you gonna back it up with the results you can get?

This comment was particularly interesting considering it centered around Black male leaders primarily. PS-01 adds this about data and tough conversations with Black principals:

So just again, utilizing data in a way that there's a discussion around it, we create a plan. We redeploy resources has allowed for us to, um, have metrics that are beneficial. Um, same difference when it comes to just some other data points around identifying who our students are that we meet the number of students we need to meet goals, right? Those intentional conversations and thinking beyond a percentage in this abstract number to make it, helping leaders understand that we can be, as we can make concrete, um, has been beneficial.

PS-01 is helping leaders to engage in data analytics not only for the sake of having the data, but also to have key discussions around building plans and tactics to address the data. This is a key action of a Black principal supervisor – bringing data and other information to action planning through key discussions with leaders. PS-01 continues by stating this about data:

But I think the development of principals is a, is a time for collaboration. Um, where we're iron sharpens iron, right? And so most recently we did, um, an activity. I try to do hands-on database activities most times that we meet as a group. Um, and so this last time that we were able to meet, we have monthly meetings, we, um, entered into a data conversation around, um, being strategic of, with our strategic plan, our, our school improvement plans, and just doing this

activity called doing the math, right? So things that are, I believe that development should be not, it isn't. A lot of sitting... sit and get development, right? Where people are just talking at you. I think development should be something where, or leaders are actively engaged with the, the data and the information that immediately pertains to their work, so that when they walk away, they have ideas to now turn around and implement.

While PS-01 discussed using data from data meetings and assessments to engage in meaningful discussion to action plan, PS-07 discusses using classroom observation data to create opportunities for tough conversations:

So if you walk into a classroom and black students aren't caught on as much as white students or if you walk into a classroom for the all black students, but the path is below, below the grade level, right? Or the rigor is not being matched in the math classroom world, you know, like whatever is happening. Like do you, can you, you can you see that one? And then I think a activity is around what type of feedback are you gonna give the teacher to help them not do this anymore. So I think there's, there's that too. I would say those that's, that's probably that feedback piece. Um, and then I would say the second activity is around just like crucial conversations.

As PS-07 describes using observations of classrooms as data to facilitate tough conversations, PS-01 explains use of data within the timeframe of the school year:

And as we move closer to the end of the first, the second, um, quarter, we are now starting to look more intentionally at the data. What data points do we have to be



able to triangulate? How are we pulling our formative data in, in having those discussions in our PLCs? And how are we looking

This explanation from PS-01 is important in that she is describing not only the action of looking at data and in what groups (Professional Learning Communities) to do it in, but also when to look at the data in a precise way to take action. The second quarter seems to be the place where she is leading her principals to explore data in an actionable fashion.

In an interesting addition to the timeline of development activities, PS-02 agrees with PS-01 in that data and school should be examined seriously sometime in the second quarter. However, PS-02 also adds that leaders need a break in that quarter because as an administrator, you work through most holidays and breaks for teachers:

But if you could do something where in your calendar, instead of giving students and families off Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, you gave them the whole week Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday as well as your teachers, you would get a recovery week in the middle of Thanksgiving right week. But you also for your school leaders could say now here are three weeks where we are going to cover your building. You go and take a month long sabbatical. Mm-hmm . And then what that does is it allows them to get the building stable but they're still back in time to come for Christmas where they can say, what are the things that I need to do in the next three weeks between December one and December 15th, right. Two and a half weeks to get my next semester started because I have this data and I have to go kick into high gear. I believe that could be transformational for school leaders because they've had a month of rest. Where then you're saying now go hard but go hard for three weeks cuz I'm gonna give you another small break here for the

holidays. But use this holiday break strategically so that you can tee up January and you are running a pace where you do transformational change and you have some wind that will get you at least through spring break.

This caveat of including a sabbatical along with duties of data driven work and being rejuvenated to finish the year strong is an interesting idea that is developed by the data observed by PS-02.

In terms of data and crucial conversations, Critical Race Theory could be coming into play when you consider that a system with racist foundations cannot benefit those on the lowest tiers of that system (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp.6-9). Seeing that Blackness is considered to be the lowest tier of a race-based system, another professional benefit Black leaders may lose is the possibility of receiving authentic, data-driven, and timely feedback via tough conversations from supervisors because of an unwillingness to confront challenges by supervisors or the failure to see the Black Leadership Brilliance.

Using knowledge to hold tough conversations is a cornerstone of thoughtful leadership in practice. In fact, to hold a tough conversation with someone can be difficult because of the biases and challenges the supervisor brings to the table, and not solely how challenging the employee might be (Heifetz et al., 2009, p. 195). Adaptive leadership requires the supervisor to understand their own biases and challenges in order to move into a space where a tough conversation with someone could align motivations and actions in a way where the person is beneficial to the organization.

Research Question 2 is: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization? Through the qualitative analysis process, it has become evident that Black

principal supervisors use a combination of coaching to specific actions, mentorship and care of Black leaders through expanded opportunities, reviewing data to determine interventions and actions, and tough conversations that challenge Black leaders to be excellent.

**Research Question 3:** RQ3: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership?

**Combating Racial Violations:**

A theme of Combating Racial Violations was constructed from the data and codes. This theme was constructed through an analysis unveiling that the data was consistent among the experiences of Black principal supervisors encountering racial violations from colleagues, experienced by Black principals they supervise (mostly from white teachers), and particularly noted by the experiences of Black women in leadership. Racial Violations is defined as an act of undermining authority in the professional setting between racial lines and perceived to be based on stereotypes and race. Codes such as “social oppression,” “racial identity,” and “the treatment of Black students” were experienced in 100% of cases and represented a combined 10.5% of all codes. PS-08 explains the phenomenon of racial challenges as follows:

So mostly it's dealing with white teachers, at least from my experience. You know, like the cultural differences for, for black, um, leaders that I've worked with. Usually it's that. And so the best, I think probably the best person I've seen deal with, it was a very maternal black female principal.

While PS-08 implies supervising white teachers can be difficult for Black principals, he also suggests that Black female principals with a maternal nature can be successful at navigating these racial challenges. PS-11 adds that while Black women may seem to navigate these waters well, it does not come without challenges in regards to long lasting and long standing mistreatment:

So I get to coach leaders in other regions and I typically get paired with black women, uh, probably from an affinity perspective, but when I tell you the tropes are just repetitive to the point where most recently I talked with the, the, um, lead coach, the one who runs our coaching program, and I just told her I think I need to step away and just have a break cuz I've been coaching since 2015 and I am exhausted and saddened by and sort of losing steam and optimism with the same scenarios playing out in region after region. So it's, this is across a lot of different regions. Um, but with black women, the same thing relative to, um, race.

While PS-11 helps to inform that narrative that a problem in regards to the racial violations exist in schools, PS-06 further explains the racial violations and how they show up particularly for Black female leaders:

So, for example, um, uh, one of the, the most common, and it, and it, and it hurts me every time, one of the most common, um, concerns I get for my black female principals is that, uh, she's so aggressive. You know, she's passive aggressive or she's, she's real demanding, or, and these are nonblack teachers that are saying this about my black female principals. And of course, some of it is cultural and they may not understand.

PS-06 is describing the relationship between Black principals and white teachers again as described in comments by PS-08. The trope of Black female leaders being aggressive and demanding is a perspective that is a race violation and could inhibit Black female principals from doing their jobs effectively. An example of this is the possibility of Black principals toning down their expectations to not seem as “demanding” to white teachers. This lack of expectations or “Black Leadership Brilliance” could lead to declining results and, in turn, lead to ineffective leadership. PS-01 says this about the stereotype of assertive Black principals:

And to be, and sometimes what, what I do know is as black leaders also where we are, well another culture, a white man can be assertive, but, but a black female is aggressive. So thinking through our words and our language so that it could be received and the feedback can be actionable, but not changing our feelings about it and naming how we feel. Um, I had an instance with a colleague where she was using my baby daddy or the baby's daddy in reference to a student. Um, and I, again, the space that we've created, we can name those things like what you're saying is offensive to me

PS-01 names a double standard of assertiveness in that she believes that if white colleagues are assertive it is perceived as a positive experience and for Black female principals, a negative connotation is ascribed to assertive leadership. She also goes on to name that she has built a culture among her leaders and staff where they can name racial violations and get to some type of reconciliation. Another note in PS-01's interview is that she named that Black principals and principal supervisors could “think through our words” in order to ensure feedback is received. While this could be true for any type of

leadership, the notion that Black leaders need to think through their words because of a perception of aggressiveness that is racially driven is a response to a society that is driven by racism and racist understandings of Black people. This is not to say that the white recipients of black directives are not well-intended, but it is to say that they can still hold racist beliefs and project that on to how they receive information from Black leaders (Crenshaw, 2019). PS-09 describes well-intended actions that are still racial violations with the following submission:

Well, an organization took teachers on a walk through one of the poorest part of the city, and through the projects, like a bunch of these white women just kind of going on a tour, like you would walk through the zoo or walk through a museum, and they would just point at the houses and say, these are where your kids are gonna come from. So this is the type of training that they received. And so we would talk, we talked very openly about, uh, and that was a real training, uh, by the way. But we would talk to our, our, our future leaders about the students, uh, that they were gonna be serving and, and where they're coming from, who they are, the importance of developing relationships, navigating, uh, uh, uh, social economic issues, uh, issues with, uh, single family households and triage families and homelessness.

PS-09 Describe the well-intentioned professional development where educators would walk through neighborhoods. However, PS-09 describes this activity as a sort of zoo. The imagery he used to describe the activity evokes the action of dehumanization, which is a tactic of racism. With common stereotypes at play with people who are being supervised by Black principals and practices of dehumanization used as professional development,

leaders can struggle to stay level-headed during times when they are racially violated. PS-08 describes the phenomenon of Black leaders staying level-headed in times of violation with this comment:

Like that whew. Like you gotta be in, in a, you gotta be in a, in a group of like black men and black women who understand you just the woo-sah so that you don't lose your marbles, right? Mm-hmm. . So like, there is a, there is a very real reality when like working with like white teachers under black authority, especially if you're anywhere closer to the same age, that is just downright hard. It is downright hard, um, because of like presumptions of intellectual inferiority and physical superiority and this tendency to like refer to you as a bully bruh. Mm-hmm. . That's hard. That's real hard. So I think it's about plugging the black leaders into a community where they can actually woo-sah with other black leaders. Like, you gotta have brothers and sisters that you can talk to and just sometimes be like, these jokes is crazy, right? Mm-hmm. , just so, just so you feel seen and if you're a part of a small network and all you have, which was what was going on for me, all you have is like your direct supervisor, your direct black supervisor who happens to be , you know, in ministry and like cares for people, right? Then you gotta be in something like an all male of color fellowship or you gotta be in something like, you know, a cohort that your organization is putting together. So I think sometimes you gotta, you gotta look for a larger movement or you gotta get down with, you know, the newest, the newest thing that Joe Cool is doing, you know, but I think more groups like that need to exist so that folks can actually woo-sah because it ain't about the technical skills as much as it's about

not losing your marbles when these people is crazy, cause they be crazy. And how can you provide clarity for them, um, without shrinking...

PS-08 provides valuable insight into understanding the mental toll it takes on Black leaders when they are dealing with racial violations in the workplace. He adds to the idea of valuable tactics to communicate with white teachers while in the leadership seat by also including that Black leaders need a place of solace to decompress from those challenges. He stated specifically that principal supervisors could use cohorts or other learning groups for Black leaders or people of color to allow them space to decompress from such transgressions. He also states that the goal of these groups is not to shy away from the violations or conflict, but to address the violations and conflict in a way that doesn't shrink the personality or impact of the Black principals in the process. PS-02 adds to this narrative by stating that these violations are not exclusive to white staff members, and that everyone in this society has internalized white supremacy:

And to be able to understand the things that are happening in a room, whether you're looking at power and privilege or whether you're looking at like, you know, white supremacist behaviors that we all have internalized that are also at play.

This is an astute comment from PS-02 because white supremacist values can be held by anybody in society. In fact, Critical Race Theory suggests that “racism is ordinary, not aberrational” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, pp. 6-9). This is important to understand because as Black leaders are developed by Black supervisors, we must know that Black authority will seldom be seen as a normalized phenomenon - by any race. Black authority will be questioned in leadership because the ubiquity of racist views is so dominant it may be hard to accept the truth of a Black authority. This means that Black principal



supervisors and Black principals alike will be tasked with dealing with racial violations through their leadership journeys and must understand how to combat them appropriately.

Racial violations can certainly be seen as an adaptive challenge because racism is rooted in deeply seeded beliefs, complex relationships with society, family backgrounds, personal interactions, and one's personal beliefs. Considering the deep integration of racism in social interaction, there is much space for the consideration of analyses of factions and parts that make up the whole in an adaptive challenge. It would be beneficial for a leader to follow Heifetz' advice (2001) and "get on the balcony" to solve racial challenges to look for patterns that can assist the leader in understanding what is really transpiring beyond the surface understanding of racism (p. 126). One must understand, however, that even well-meaning individuals may exhibit racial violations as racial biases and system effects of them saturate our culture and society (Crenshaw, 2019).

Research Question 3 asks: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership? Through qualitative analysis, the data has shown that Black principal supervisors experience significant challenges due to racial identities or racial stereotypes ascribed to them by other parties. The theme of Combating Racial Violations was constructed to describe this phenomenon. The challenges in terms of race for Black education leaders seemed to come from supervising white teachers. According to the Pew Research Center, 79% of U.S. public school teachers are white (Schaeffer, 2021). The data around the racial makeup of teachers in the U.S. suggests that racial violations could be a mainstay of Black leadership in education.

**Research Question 4:** RQ4: How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization?

**Center Student Life Outcomes:**

A theme of Center Student Life Outcomes was constructed from the data. It was evident that student life outcomes were extremely important for Black principal supervisors to understand the impact of the Black principals they manage. Centering Student Life Outcomes is defined by using the school experience to provide students with opportunities to not only do well in school, but also in their endeavors beyond school. This includes succeeding in college, being gainfully employed to address wealth disparities, or participating in society in a meaningful way through civic leadership. This theme was built from a series of codes that included the code of “student outcomes”, which was coded in 100% of all cases. In fact, student outcomes represented 5.2% of all codes and it was counted 28 times among the coding structure. PS-04 is very clear about what the ultimate measure of successes is for a Black school principal and how the success of students is cascaded down from the success of Black leadership:

And then I would say bottom line is our life outcomes increasing for children in terms of wealth and social impact beyond K-12 school. So a obviously we know bottom line student success is the ultimate measure. And if leaders are getting better, if students are getting better, it's because teaching and leading has gotten better.

As PS-04 discusses measures of students' life success as correlational to measures of leader success, PS-07 suggests that student outcomes should drive all levels of effectiveness in a school building:

Yeah, I mean I think ultimately for me it's like student life outcomes in regards to college and career readiness, and even civic participation readiness if they choose. Cuz I think that's what should drive all levels of, of effectiveness in a school building anyway. Like, I feel like if kids are moving to me, that's happening. The leaders are impacting the teachers who are then impacting the students.

PS-09 also includes thoughts on the correlation between leadership, school outcomes, and teacher effectiveness. PS-09 also states that he measures his own success by the effectiveness of the schools under his care:

So, you know, so goes your teachers, go, goes to school, goes to leadership, and if they're, they're coaching the teachers and the students are doing well, that's one way. And the second way is, um, if they're, if they feel like they can still reach, we still are in contact with each other, um, and I hear about them doing really, really well, then I think that I, uh, I think me working with them, you know, has been, uh, in some way beneficial, uh, to their career. Um, uh, like I said, we were just blessed in the sense that we could handpick, uh, uh, all of our leaders, the people that led for us. And so I think we did a really good job of, of sussing out who would be great leaders. Um, yeah. Yeah. So, you know, I think I, I think, I think the fact that the schools did well, uh, is I will hang my hat on that like I did well, because the schools did well.

The participants in the study clearly expressed student life outcomes as prepared by their K-12 experience as a key measure for determining their success in the role as a Black principal supervisor. From a Critical Race Theory perspective, one could consider this measure a necessary for racially predictable outcomes in regards to life outcomes in

terms of wealth, employment, and college readiness among Black students in a society that espouses white-over-color structures in every major life outcome (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This is simply to say that if we live in a race-based society in which Black people are placed in the lowest tiers, it is fair to say that the outcomes for Black children would also be at the bottom tiers of that respective category. This notion is only meant to illustrate that elevating the need for student life outcomes in regards to schooling could be an anecdote to combat racialized structures that maintain bottom-tiered structures for Black children in schools.

From a Critical Race Theory perspective, this could be seen as the ultimate goal of leaders in education. If the system we espouse as a society is built and nurtured to limit the success of Black people in the United States, then centering life outcomes and not simply academic outcomes would be the more noble approach. As race and its negative effects on Black people in the United States are ubiquitous and continue to persist (Yosso, 2005), leaders must challenge these outcomes at every level to even begin to consider its erasure from our society.

### **Effective Principals and Inspiration:**

After a review of the data, a theme of effective Principals and inspiration was constructed. The theme pertains to Black principal supervisors deriving a sense of self-worth from their Black principals' effectiveness and their ability to motivate their principals to sustain high performance. This theme was developed from an understanding that Black principal supervisors aspire to inspire success and effective decision making in the black principals they supervise. This theme was constructed from the codes of coaching which appeared in 100% of all cases, mentorship – 45% of all cases, tough

conversations – 90.9% of all cases, and recruitment-retention – 27.3% of all cases. PS-01 explains how she gauges her effectiveness by holding conversations:

Wow. I gauge my effectiveness for black leaders in conversation that we've had. We have in reflect, in reflective conversation when I can ask them, when we can have open conversations around spaces that they've grown, spaces that I've missed in supporting them, or spaces that I've been able to support them and have very honest conversations.

While PS-01 is seeking to understand growth of her principals through conversations, PS-10 is looking for her principals to employ modeled thinking patterns to solve problems:

I think that when I think, uh, for my personal, like I know that I'm successful when my people are like, Hey, "I was in a situation and my first inclination was like, what would my boss say?" Or, um, what, what, what, "oh, my boss would not want me to do that." Like, "what's my move?" But, so when I hear that people are responding to things that we practice with automaticity, I think I know that I am much more successful around things.

PS-04 is also looking into decision making, but also allowing his principals to provide him with feedback so he can grow:

One of the things that I would do, I would call my team in, team members in, and I would do these 360 assessments. Um, I would say, I need you to tell me about me. So I would go to their office, we'll meet in a conference room and I need to tell me about me. And they look at me crazy and like, what do you mean you, you're the superintendent, you're the principal supervisor. Yeah. But I need to know, tell me about in the decision that I made that you didn't agree with. Tell me

about something that I did that pissed you off. Uh, tell me about how I can be a better leader. Tell me about some blind spots that I'm having because I genuinely want to get better. So initially it's very awkward to people, but then as you go on, people get more and more comfortable giving you feedback because I take that feedback and I bring it to the group and say, you know, I really appreciate the feedback that you've been giving me, and I want to share the general themes that I've gotten from meeting with you. So generally, this is what many of you have said... you have very little patience for this that, and we think that da, da da da or the way that we solve problems, um, does not fit the style of this team. Okay, I received this feedback and over the next three to four months, this is what I'm going to work on and this is what I'm gonna ask you to give me feedback.

PS-11 gauges her success on how the leaders she manages expand their own impact:

And that is a key area of focus for me right now because I'm really proud of the number of leaders who ha are, who have expanded their impact, both in our organization and other regions leaving us and going to different states and I know I had a direct impact on their development and that, like you said, from a sustainability standpoint that cannot stop, that has to be a constant generation of future leaders. And we did tap out our bench depth, uh, in recent years and a lot of them are leaders that came directly out of the school community, which I led. And so now I'm like, okay, that can't just be like a pet project or left to people who are passionate about leadership development. This has to be systematic and taught, I guess, and inspired so that other leaders see themselves as generators of future leaders.

PS-06 is looking to see growth in his Black principals and enjoys when positive changes are made:

I have one, um, black principal right now who really struggled in the beginning.

And now every time I go to her campus, I'm nowhere near as stress as I was in beginning, because I see the growth, I see the progress, I see that she's building up her leaders. And that's the best feeling in the world when you can actually see it.

Because a lot of times in this position, you don't get to see a lot of the changes that you think you're trying to make or attempting to make. Um, but when you can see it in real time, in, in, in action, that's, that's a beautiful thing.

PS-01 also gauges her effectiveness on the status of the relationship or outcomes between her and her Black principals. She notes that the results are her main point of focus, but prefers a good relationship as well:

And us having those honest conversations in that, um, let's me know if I have been successful. so that's how I gauge like the relationship at the end, and then if we are able to sit down and look at metrics honestly, um, and have very intentional conversations about what's next. So the metrics is important to me, but also the relationship, again, I can't win every relationship. And, and some people, we get metrics out of people in the sense of they listen, I'm gonna do this work cause I don't want her talking to me. Cool, if that's gonna get the numbers I need, I don't have to talk to you. Just get the work done. Or I feel better as a leader though if we have those conversations and we can march through the progress that's happened.

The research question posed was, How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization? The data suggests that Black principal supervisors consider student life outcomes the NorthStar of their success in the role they play. They also consider the ability to inspire and improve the leadership of their Black principals to be of value in calculating their effectiveness. Centering student success and the impact one has had on people managed is consistent with all other data from participants. They have noted instructional excellence or coaching as key factors of their roles in 100% of cases and that clearly seems to be the driving factor of success for everyone who is interviewed. These principal supervisors care deeply about students learning from great instruction and developing their Black principals in a way that is best for those principals and the children they serve.

### **Summary**

This chapter reports the results for the qualitative data in this study. 11 interviews were conducted in accordance with procedure outlined in Chapter 3. These interviews were analyzed using thematic analyses to 1) Understand the methods that Black principal supervisors employ to develop the capacity of Black school leaders, and 2) Offer insight as to what beliefs Black principal supervisors hold and how they evaluate their effectiveness as it pertains to developing Black leaders.

The exploration of lived experiences of these eleven Black principal supervisors resulted in explanations of how they define their roles, how they develop leaders, what racial tensions they experience, and how they evaluate their own success. Using the data obtained from the interviews, thematic analysis was employed (Creswell, 2013) to construct the eight primary themes that manifested as a result. (See Table 4.2).



## CHAPTER 5:

### DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

...a crisis of leadership occurs when the intentions and needs of leadership are severely mismatched with those of its followers.

—Dr. Amos Wilson

#### **Introduction**

This chapter offers a comprehensive overview of the research process employed in this study, providing valuable insights on how the study's results can be practically applied, and can shape education policy and leadership practices in relation to Black principal supervisors and the Black principals they supervise. The chapter contributes to the education literature on education leadership, exploring the development of principals for this group. In addition, the chapter provides a thorough discussion of the implications, applications, and recommendations based on the reported outcomes, as well as limitations and areas for future research.

#### **Research Questions**

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem, the researcher utilized a qualitative research design in the form of a phenomenological study, which seeks to identify commonalities and gain insights into the essence of an experience (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The study was guided by a central question, which aimed to explore the methods employed by Black principal supervisors to develop the capacity of Black school leaders. To support this central question, the study developed a set of research questions, which were:

- RQ1: How do Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders in the organization?
- RQ2: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization?
- RQ3: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership?
- RQ4: How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization?

### **Study Overview**

The aim of this study was to investigate the methods employed by Black principal supervisors to develop the capacity of Black school leaders. The central question was explored through the lens of the theoretical framework of Critical Race Theory. To collect data on the central question, a semi-structured interview tool was developed and utilized to conduct interviews with Black principal supervisors.

A comprehensive review of the literature was conducted, which revealed challenges faced by Black principal supervisors in representation historically and at present. Additionally, the review highlighted favorable outcomes for Black female principals with a student body of any race, leadership competencies and attributes associated with effective school leadership, and leadership development exercises and activities used to cultivate leaders. The study utilized a qualitative method, specifically of a phenomenological design, to gain insights into the experiences of Black principal supervisors as they develop Black school leaders.

The analysis and interpretation of the interview data resulted in the identification of eight themes that aligned with the research questions designed to answer the central question. Specifically, the analysis revealed key activities and beliefs held by Black principal supervisors as they develop Black school leaders.

### **Discussion**

The methods and philosophies black principal supervisors employ to develop black principles in K12 school settings was apparent in the findings of this study. The discussion of the themes will be broken down into four major categories in alignment with the research questions used to answer the central question.

#### **RQ1: How do Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders in the organization?**

Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders by acknowledging the innate brilliance and excellence in Black School principals, providing school principals with opportunities to be aware of gaps and strengths, and placing instruction at the core of the organization's work to ensure student achievement at schools is improving throughout the year.

The key themes underlying these learnings are Black Leadership Brilliance, Opportunities in Awareness, and Centering Instruction (see Table 4.2). **Black Leadership Brilliance** refers to the recognition and appreciation of the exceptional qualities possessed by Black principals as seen by their Black principal supervisors. This also entails the expectation of excellence of these principals by their supervisors. In her interview, PS-11 clarifies that excellence does not equate to perfection, underscoring the

importance of striving for excellence while learning from imperfections on the journey to improving leadership (Okun, 2020).

It is crucial to note the significance of embracing this theme, particularly because it is vital to view Black principals as capable of thriving for them to excel. This perspective is in direct opposition to the system of society as described by Critical Race Theory, which posits that we live in a race-based system where Black individuals occupy the bottom rungs of all industries and systems. As a result, perceptions of Black people in such a society are likely to be negative across various domains, including leadership. Based on this model, it can be argued that societal views on Black leadership may not be favorable, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Cooper and Gulati (2021) suggest that leaders of color, including Black leaders, experience isolation in leadership. Many of the participants noted that Black principals benefit from affinity cohorts for learning where they are surrounded by people who believe in their brilliance. This could be a key activity in developing Black principals in safe spaces where they can grow and are seen as inherently brilliant. From an adaptive leadership perspective, a challenge for the Black principal supervisor could be the ongoing challenge of fostering an environment where Black principals are seen as brilliant and an expectation of excellence is held by everyone. Fostering such an environment would require understanding the motivations and desires of others to align teams on a common goal of such an environment. Therefore, it is essential for Black principal supervisors to hold the belief that Black principals are inherently brilliant and excellent, giving these principals the impetus to excel in their roles, in environments that are supportive to their leadership.

Another significant theme that contributes to addressing this question is the notion of **Opportunities in Awareness**. This pertains to leaders' ability to comprehend their leadership weaknesses and strengths. Several participants mentioned that they expect Black principals to be humble and responsive to feedback, as this is necessary for supporting leaders effectively. One participant, PS-06, even proposed that humility can create opportunities for support and motivate leaders to seek help for themselves. The literature has also supported this idea by highlighting that recognizing gaps and strengths can enhance one's leadership skills (Rosen, 2013, p. 312).

Another noteworthy aspect of awareness is that reflecting on one's leadership entails developing oneself by gaining a deeper understanding of their own leadership style. This can be achieved by connecting with a mentor for guidance and support or by reading and reflecting on literature that provides tools to increase self-awareness of leadership strengths and weaknesses. Notably, the female participants in this study were more likely than their male counterparts to mention reading as a development activity. It is possible that the male participants gained knowledge and information from other sources or were less inclined to mention reading in the interview setting. However, it could also indicate that Black women in education leadership use literature to supplement any advice or mentorship they may not have access to due to being part of a male-dominated society.

The final theme that emerged to address this question is **Centering Instruction**. This refers to the idea of Black principal supervisors becoming instructional experts and supporting the development of their principals' instructional expertise. This involves gaining knowledge about the key elements of excellent math and reading instruction to

assess the quality of instruction in schools effectively. Instructional leadership appears to be one of the most critical skills for a principal to succeed. PS-07 even implied that it was her duty to enhance her principals' content mastery skills. The literature supports this notion by stating that the role of principal supervisors has evolved over time, and they should focus solely on content and instruction (Saltzman, 2016).

PS-02 recognized the significance of content and instruction in the role of a Black principal supervisor. However, she also acknowledged that connecting with students may come more naturally to some principals. Therefore, it could be a cultural shift for the principal supervisor to encourage principals to prioritize excellent instruction and content delivery. This shift is deemed necessary by the participants because the lack of baseline knowledge in content or instruction could have real consequences, given that it is the core work of schools. In support of this perspective, PS-03 described a hypothetical scenario where a Black principal who failed to master content and instruction in schools would be replaced. PS-03 even went so far as to suggest that the replacement would be a white woman who excels in instructional leadership. This indicates that centering instruction is something that Black principal supervisors consider uniquely crucial to the principal role. It also suggests that many Black principals may not have mastered this skill, making it necessary for Black principal supervisors to develop this skill in their principals for the schools to succeed.

In summary, regarding the response to RQ1, Black principal supervisors view their role as one that entails recognizing and appreciating the brilliance of Black leaders, promoting Black principals' reflection and awareness of their strengths and growth

opportunities, and developing Black principals as instructional leaders in terms of content and content delivery.

**RQ2: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization?**

Black principal supervisors often employ various activities to develop Black principals, including coaching and mentoring, analyzing data in regards to student achievement and school culture, and engaging in crucial conversations to determine action steps for growth and improvement based on the data reviewed.

The key themes underlying these learnings are Coaching and Care as well as Data and Reality (see Table 4.2). **Coaching and Care** entails Black principal supervisors guiding their Black principals by working alongside them during school walkthroughs, providing feedback on problem-solving, and engaging in crucial conversations to tackle difficult challenges and develop action plans for future success. During her interview, PS-10 indicated that she frequently provides coaching to her Black principals on how they communicate information to their teams. She coaches them on how to reflect on the tone, perception, and messaging they want to convey while delivering information and also considers next steps if someone resists their delivery:

And so we are doing a lot of coaching around how to still deliver the high expectations message would deliver in a way that people can receive it. And so we spend probably about an hour and a half a week saying, okay, what are your key messages? How do they see me? And then how do we adjust messaging so that people who are not me being another black female would receive them. Um, and then how do you do the, I don't know, song and dance, for lack of a better

word, it a song and dance? How do you do the song and dance to make people who are resistant to your messaging?

PS-10 divides her coaching into two distinct sections. The first section, which she terms the conceptual section, entails encouraging her Black principals to explore the ideas that she presents. In the second section, known as the application section, she motivates her Black principals to consider the actions and next steps that they should take to achieve success. This approach aligns with the adaptive leadership framework, which involves testing. Heifetz (2009) notes that after a leader has examined a problem holistically, they must choose to conduct a test. The test involves pushing the group beyond their current level of operation to achieve superior outcomes. To prompt her Black principals to take action after coaching, PS-10 employs a testing approach, which challenges their assumptions and demonstrates what is possible for their team.

Another theme that sheds light on the frequently utilized activities of Black principal supervisors is **Data and Reality**. This theme involves Black principal supervisors dedicating time to collaborate with their Black principals in analyzing student achievement data, classroom observation data, and school culture data. Additionally, it encompasses the critical and challenging conversations that follow the data analysis within schools. In essence, Data and Reality involves reviewing school outcomes and engaging in difficult conversations to develop action plans aimed at enhancing these outcomes.

PS-03 provided a noteworthy insight into the Data and Reality theme by observing that Black male principals are often transferred to different schools with the expectation of improving school outcomes. He suggested that if the school fails to show



improvement, there may be negative discussions surrounding the leadership of the Black male principal. PS-03 recommends that direct conversations be held with the Black male principal concerning data and feedback from the leadership community. It is crucial for Black principal supervisors to engage in such conversations with Black principals. These conversations can be challenging since much of the dissatisfaction with the Black principal's leadership may not be openly expressed. Therefore, it would require a courageous Black principal supervisor to have an honest conversation with a Black principal regarding their performance in a manner that is genuine and well-received by the principal.

Crucial conversations are most effective when they are based on specific data. In schools, student achievement data serves as the foundation for important discussions. PS-07 recommended the use of classroom observation data to facilitate difficult conversations on enhancing classroom instruction. Black principal supervisors and their Black principals typically undertake this work through joint walkthroughs. This technique enables both parties to witness the same classroom and instruction and then align their perspectives or perceptions of what they observed through a subsequent crucial conversation.

In summary of the response to RQ2, the activities employed by Black principal supervisors to develop Black principals include coaching through specific guidance, thought partnership, directives, and mentoring to enhance the effectiveness of their principals in the school community. Additionally, Black principal supervisors review data analytics related to student achievement and school culture to facilitate meaningful and challenging conversations about the school's performance and the principal's leadership

to strive towards excellence. The significance of these two activities cannot be overemphasized as many leaders can benefit from them. Moreover, undertaking these actions demands a high level of commitment from Black principal supervisors, including an adaptive leadership practice of having the courage to explore their own fears, biases, and insecurities to consistently engage in challenging conversations with the individuals they manage (Heifetz et al., 2009).

**RQ3: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership?**

Black principal supervisors count racial identities as a significant factor in their trajectory in education leadership. Racial identities impact how the Black principal supervisor is perceived and how they coach and manage their Black principals.

The key theme that addresses this question is **Combating Racial Violations** (see Table 4.2), according to the findings. This theme encompasses the strategies and advice Black principal supervisors use to help both themselves and the Black principals they supervise navigate racial violations in the workplace. Racial violations are defined as actions that undermine authority based on racial stereotypes and biases, often occurring along racial lines. Such violations may include passive-aggressive behavior, undermining authority, and a lack of respect for Black leadership by white teachers. The literature states that Black leaders need to develop key relationships in education leadership to stave off harmful biases among staff (Madsen, 2002). Although this was a significant topic raised by study participants, it could be a challenging topic on a larger scale, given

that nearly 80% of the US teaching force is white (Schaeffer, 2021). Many participants linked racial violations to white teachers who work with Black principals.

According to the literature, there is a perception that Black principal supervisors and principals are less equipped for their roles compared to their white counterparts (Hodge, 2017). If we view the disparity in beliefs that white teachers hold towards their Black principals as a belief gap, then this can be seen as an expansion of the belief gap that white teachers hold towards their Black students. This further illustrates the importance of the role Black principal supervisors play in guiding their principals in addressing these violations. The research around bias and achievement has shown that biases held by white teachers have a negative impact on academic performance for students (Pearson, 2020).

PS-08 implied that maternal Black female principals handle racial violations best. He may be suggesting that because they hold a maternal demeanor that they may not be seen as aggressive. Speaking of being seen as aggressive, PS-06 suggests that one of the major violations in regards to race is the insinuation that Black female principals are seen as aggressive in the workplace. PS-01 states that there is a double standard at play and that white men are seen as assertive while black women are seen as aggressive, which has a negative connotation.

According to PS-08, it is implied that Black female principals with maternal qualities may handle racial violations better, potentially due to the perception that they are not as aggressive. Conversely, PS-06 indicates that one of the primary racial violations experienced by Black female principals is the perception that they are aggressive in the workplace. PS-01 argues that this is a manifestation of a double

standard, whereby assertiveness in white men is viewed positively, while assertiveness in Black women is negatively labeled as aggression.

PS-01 goes on to explain that her team has established a culture within their organization where they can address race and cultural challenges directly with colleagues. This is significant because in the additional analysis section of Chapter 4, the data suggests that female participants are more likely to identify workplace racial challenges compared to male participants. However, this does not indicate that male participants do not experience such challenges, as 100% of the participants mentioned social oppression and racial identity in their interviews. It appears that this discrepancy is due to Black female principals and their supervisors needing to acknowledge these racial challenges, in regards to the “aggressive Black woman” trope, to prevent insubordination or any attempt to undermine their authority when providing directions for improving the school community.

It is significant to acknowledge that racial challenges may not always be intentional or committed by individuals with hostile intentions. Even individuals who are committed to an organization's mission to educate all children can commit racial violations. PS-09 noted a professional development session where teachers explored the urban core of a city to gain a deeper understanding of their Black students and their neighborhoods. While the intention behind the activity may have been to help teachers understand their students' environments, the activity could also be interpreted as viewing the community as if they were zoo animals in a natural habitat. This example highlights the fact that racial violations rooted in white supremacy are not unique to individuals of a

particular race or those with malicious intent, but can also be perpetrated by well-intentioned individuals of any race (Crenshaw, 2019).

Lastly, PS-08 proposes that Black principal supervisors should establish spaces and experiences that allow Black principals to decompress from the racial challenges they face on the job. This is particularly relevant considering that such challenges may contribute to a decline in the already limited population of Black education leaders (Webb, 2022). Cohorts and other learning groups can be utilized to create affinity spaces that provide Black principal supervisors and principals with an opportunity to learn from one another and alleviate the stress of dealing with racial violations, whether they are intentional or well-intentioned.

In conclusion to the response to RQ3, racial identities have a notable impact on the experiences of Black education leaders. This is evidenced by racial violations, predominantly committed by white teachers against Black principals. Black principal supervisors are responsible for mentoring and guiding their Black principals in handling these transgressions to foster a stronger school community. However, creating a supportive school community that addresses these issues can be emotionally taxing for Black education leaders, who may require a space to decompress and process the challenges of addressing these transgressions.

**RQ4: How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization?**

According to the participants, Black principal supervisors are a crucial contributor to the success of Black school leaders, as they play a significant role in maintaining

positive student life outcomes and inspire Black principals to excel in their positions. These supervisors see themselves as entities that hold the line in ensuring that Black principals under their leadership thrive in their roles.

The key themes that address RQ4 are Center Student Life Outcomes and Effective Principals and Inspiration (see Table 4.2). The theme of **Center Student Life Outcomes** describes utilizing the school and its resources to impact life outcomes of students in regards to college success, gainful employment, and wealth building. All of these outcomes are vital to student success and are anchored by student academic achievement and growth.

PS-05 and PS-07 expressed a strong belief that student life outcomes are the ultimate measure of success for their schools and their own roles. This is particularly significant in light of the literature on Critical Race Theory, which highlights the relationship between race and life outcomes of those on the bottom tiers of a racialized society (Yosso, 2005). It is commendable that principal supervisors are taking responsibility for ensuring students' success beyond the K-12 realm.

While many participants view student life outcomes as the purpose of K-12 education, it is not a direct input to the daily operations of schools. As such, this approach may be outside the locus of control of Black education leaders. However, Black principal supervisors can directly influence whether students learn core subjects that prepare them for college success, career readiness, and the skills needed to bridge any wealth disparities. This suggests that participants believe achieving successful life outcomes is not solely dependent on academic achievement in school, although it is an anchor of life success.

One reason for the focus on extending beyond the K-12 realm could be a lack of trust in other systems, like colleges and career education programs, that help students prepare for their careers or complete college. If racial disparities exist in schools and extend past school age, it is logical for Black principal supervisors to aim not only for effective student learning in schools but also for building a system that increases the likelihood of delivering positive life outcomes for students through engaging with some of the mistrusted entities earlier in the process.

A challenge in aligning all involved parties with the definition of success, which includes more than just academic achievement in school, may arise as an adaptive challenge. The involved factions to be aligned include school leaders, students, parents, community partners, colleges that may accept students early, career education partners, and funding entities that could alleviate associated costs. It is crucial to identify any challenges and facilitate collaboration early on to create an authentic space where challenges can be addressed. Doing so can be extremely helpful in enabling Black principal supervisors to achieve their goal of positively impacting student life outcomes (Heifetz, 2009).

According to Black principal supervisors, another theme that describes their impact on Black principals is **Effective Principals and Inspiration**. This theme is characterized by the feeling of self-worth that Black principal supervisors experience when the principals they oversee demonstrate effectiveness. Additionally, it is fueled by the sense of accomplishment Black principal managers derive from inspiring their Black principals to maintain high levels of performance and influence. PS-01 describes this

phenomenon by engaging in dialogues with Black principals to assess their progress over the year and evaluate their impact:

Wow. I gauge my effectiveness for black leaders in conversation that we've had. We have in reflect, in reflective conversation when I can ask them, when we can have open conversations around spaces that they've grown, spaces that I've missed in supporting them, or spaces that I've been able to support them and have very honest conversations.

During these conversations, PS-01 takes the opportunity to identify areas where she may have fallen short in supporting the leader to seek feedback on how she can improve.

Understanding the impact of her support on the growth of the principal provides PS-01 with a sense of self-worth, while also instilling in her a sense of humility and appreciation for the feedback. Furthermore, PS-01 the fact that she is receiving feedback expresses a desire to learn from her Black principals and continue growing as a professional.

PS-11 expresses enthusiasm for motivating her Black principals to not only make progress in their own careers but also to use what they have learned from their experience with their Black principal supervisor to positively influence others:

And that is a key area of focus for me right now because I'm really proud of the number of leaders who ha are, who have expanded their impact, both in our organization and other regions leaving us and going to different states and I know I had a direct impact on their development and that, like you said, from a sustainability standpoint that cannot stop, that has to be a constant generation of future leaders. And we did tap out our bench depth, uh, in recent years and a lot of them are leaders that came directly out of the school community, which I led.



And so now I'm like, okay, that can't just be like a pet project or left to people who are passionate about leadership development. This has to be systematic and taught, I guess, and inspired so that other leaders see themselves as generators of future leaders.

PS-11 takes pride in the impact she has had on these leaders, as her influence extends beyond her school community and the schools she manages, reaching leaders nationwide. She views this as an opportunity not only to be an effective leader within her local area and educational philosophy but also to develop more leaders within the Black community who can continue to lead effectively for the betterment of schoolchildren and the future of Black people in the United States.

To conclude with a response to RQ4, Black principal supervisors measure their impact on the success of Black principals by focusing on the growth of the leadership of Black principals' leadership abilities and the impact they have on the life outcomes of the students they serve. The supervisors set such a meaningful high bar for their success because they engage in various input activities to help develop their Black principals, such as coaching, collaboration, and tough conversations, demonstrating their dedication to their success. Black principal supervisors are advocates for racial justice and view schooling as an opportunity to positively impact society beyond the K-12 experience. Ultimately, they measure their success through the most meaningful metrics in education, which include the betterment of society and the achievement of positive life outcomes for students.

## **Implications**

The findings of the study have significant implications and applications for education and education leadership. Firstly, it highlights the low representation of Black principals and principal supervisors in the United States, particularly when compared to the percentage of Black citizens in the country (Bailes, 2020). There is also a considerable disparity of outcomes across racial lines in all major social impact systems, including education (Yosso, 2005). The study participants recognize the need to develop leaders who can impact student life outcomes beyond the K-12 spectrum, have an impact beyond their current locality, and continue their legacy by inspiring other leaders.

As the literature reveals the lack of Black principal supervisors and principals (Bailes, 2020), it also suggests that black principals (especially Black women) are among the most successful education leaders in the country, across all student groups (Jang & Alexander, 2022). The core philosophy for such leaders is identified in one of the eight themes constructed from participant responses known as Black Leadership Brilliance. This philosophy requires a supervisor to have the mindset that a black principal is entirely capable of engaging in their job with excellence. This mindset is crucial because biases can play a significant role in the success or failure of a black principal's career (Madsen, 2002). A deficit mindset around a black leader could affect promotion, opportunity for impact, and the opportunity to hold the role in the first place (Hodge, 2017).

The study also highlights the need for Black principal supervisors to support Black leaders in dealing with overt and unconscious racial transgressions from a primarily white teacher workforce. Just as biases play a role in decreasing student achievement among Black students in school, the same biases affect the competence level

of Black principals (Hodge, 2017; Pearson, 2020). This requires the Black principal supervisor to spend a great deal of time coaching their principals on how to combat racial violations when they should be spending their time coaching their principals in instructional leadership – as is the key feature of their role according to the literature (Saltzman, 2016).

There are several entities that could play a role in supporting Black principal supervisors and the Black principals they manage. Colleges of education, philanthropic organizations, and school systems need to support and develop Black principal supervisors for schools to thrive. For schools of education, there needs to be increased study of mindset around Black brilliance and reducing biases educators have around black authority figures and students. This could alleviate challenges around racial violations, so black principal supervisors can focus on instructional leadership.

Philanthropic organizations can invest in black affinity learning spaces managed by Black-led not-for-profits, so black leaders can learn from one another, expand their leadership, and decompress from racial transgressions in the workplace. This could also serve as a community to practice tough conversations that are driven by data in a low-stakes community populated by goal-aligned individuals.

In addition, school systems have the opportunity to shift their management structures to a coaching and care model that centers on side-by-side walkthroughs, conversations that focus on concepts as well as action, and includes tough conversations to get leaders into action when success has not yet been evident. This is informed by the coaching and care theme as districts provide the optimal time and opportunity structure in the school day for black leaders to consistently evaluate the practice of their colleagues.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This research study adds to the growing body of literature on Black leadership, Black education leadership, Black gendered leadership, education leadership, and leadership practices, as well as the philosophies and actions of Black principal supervisors. Based on the study's findings, several recommendations can be made. This study did not compare the actions of Black principal supervisors actions with Black principals to their white counterparts. The study also did not look into quantitative outcomes of schools managed by the principal supervisors such as student achievement among state assessment and national assessments. It is suggested that future research focus on a comparison between the actions Black principal supervisors would employ to develop Black principals versus their white counterparts. Also, it is suggested that future research consider the quantitative outcomes of principal supervisors and compare them to the actions they employ to develop principals. Lastly, the researcher believes it is of interest to explore senior leader actions beyond education using similar methodologies used in this study to understand if there are any commonalities in the work of leaders across disciplines.

### **Conclusion**

Becoming a principal is a cherished aspiration for many Black educators. However, for some, the idea of rising to the position of a principal supervisor, responsible for developing policies and supervising schools, seems unrealistic. Education is a critical tool for advancing social mobility, happiness, and career opportunities, making it essential for Black communities to gain power and leadership over said tool to establish

self-determination in the education realm. It would also benefit the Black community to establish and adhere to best practices (or blueprints) that reflect their unique needs in regards to education leadership at the highest level. These blueprints are crucial for the Black community to exert greater control over the educational institutions that their children attend. By recognizing effective Black leadership and promoting their actions, the Black community can take a step towards achieving favorable life outcomes for Black students, gaining control over the systems and curricula that educate them, and benefiting from a well-educated community that will create a brighter future.

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APPENDIX A:

SEMI-STRUCTURED VIRTUAL INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT FOR BLACK  
EXECUTIVE EDUCATION LEADERS

What methods do Black principal supervisors employ to develop the capacity of  
Back school leaders?

<i>Research Questions</i>	<i>Interview Questions</i>	<i>General Notes</i>
Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory		
RQ1: How do Black principal supervisors define their role in developing Black school leaders in the organization?	Describe your journey through school leadership.  How do you define leadership development? How do you use leadership development to develop Black school leaders in your organization?	
RQ2: What are the most commonly used activities Black principal supervisors employ to develop Black school leaders to become leaders in the organization?	How do you gauge readiness of a Black leader and how do you measure success with the leader? What have your experiences been with Black leaders around readiness?	
Theoretical Framework: Critical Race Theory		
RQ3: To what extent do Black education leaders experience racial identities as a factor in education leadership?	What activities for development do you most rely on when developing Black leaders? Which activities have led to tangible academic and cultural results?	
RQ4: How do Black principal supervisors describe their impact on the success of Black school leaders in the organization?	When and/or where are the best time frames/locations to use these activities?  How do you advise principals on dealing with cultural differences in the workplace?	
	How do you know when you are effective for Black leaders?	

## APPENDIX B:

### LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Letter of Invitation to Participate in Research

The Blueprint to Black Leadership: A Semi-Structured Virtual Interview

### INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT FOR RESEARCH

**You are being asked to participate in a research study.** Scientists do research to answer important questions that might help change or improve the way we do things in the future. This consent form will give you information about the study to help you decide whether you want to participate. Please read this form, and ask any questions you have, before agreeing to be in the study.

**All research is voluntary.** You can choose not to take part in this study. If you decide to participate, you can change your mind later and leave the study at any time. You will not be penalized or lose any benefits if you decide not to participate or choose to leave the study later.

**The purpose of this study** is to investigate the impact of Black principal supervisors on the development of Black principals. The hope is that through this research, the researcher will be able to identify key patterns or beliefs by senior leaders to improve leadership in communities and further research on leadership. With this information, Black communities can design leadership programs that align the expectations of high-quality schools and education options across the United States.

We are asking you if you want to be in this study because as a Black education executive, you offer a unique and necessary perspective on the purpose and expectations of the role of a top leader in an organization. The study is being conducted by Patrick H. Jones II as a completion requirement for a doctoral degree at Marian University in Indianapolis, IN.

**If you agree to be in the study, you will do the following things.**

- Participate in a virtual 30 to 45-minute recorded audio and video interview.
- Review transcripts of the interview and approve their use.

**Before agreeing to participate, please consider the risks and potential benefits of taking part in this study.** During the interview you may experience some levels of discomfort due to not being exposed to the questions before being required to answer



them. To address this risk, participants will be given substantial wait time to answer questions and will be able to request a break from the interview at any given time. Participants will also be given the choice as to where they would like to have the interview conducted to provide them access in the space that feels most comfortable to you. The virtual platform allows for this level of flexibility.

We don't think you will have any personal benefits from taking part in this study, but we hope to learn things that will help researchers in the future.

**You will not be paid for participating in this study. There is no cost to participate in the study.**

**We will protect your information** and make every effort to keep your personal information confidential, but we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. No information which could identify you will be shared in publications about this study. Researchers will have sole access to video and audio recordings. Audio and visual recordings will be deleted once the research is completed and all data collected and analyzed.

Your personal information may be shared outside the research study if required by law. We also may need to share your research records with other groups for quality assurance or data analysis. These groups include the Marian University Institutional Review Board or its designees, and state or federal agencies who may need to access the research records (as allowed by law).

Information collected in this study may be used for other research studies or shared with other researchers for future research. If this happens, information that could identify you, such as your name and other identifiers, will be removed before any information or specimens are shared. Since identifying information will be removed, we will not ask for your additional consent.

**If you have questions about the study or encounter a problem with the research**, contact the researcher, Patrick H. Jones II, 317-292-0309, [pjonesii018@marian.edu](mailto:pjonesii018@marian.edu).

For questions about your rights as a research participant, to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or to offer input, please contact the Marian University Institutional Review Board office at [IRB@marian.edu](mailto:IRB@marian.edu).

**If you decide to participate in this study, you can change your mind and decide to leave the study at any time in the future.** If you decide to withdraw, please contact the researcher via the aforementioned cell phone number 317-292-0309 and leave a message or text. You may also email the researcher at [pjonesii018@marian.edu](mailto:pjonesii018@marian.edu).

## **PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT**

In consideration of all of the above, I agree to participate in this research study. I will be given a copy of this informed consent document to keep for my records.

**Participant's Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_








































































**Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C:

### BLACK LEADERS CODE BY GENDER

	Female	Male	Pearson's R	P value
 Journey				
 Teacher Leader	0.75%	0.75%	0.077	0.411
 Multi-Role Changes	1.50%	0.94%	-0.199	0.279
 Purpose-Driven				
 System-Building	1.69%	0.75%	-0.220	0.258
 Student Outcomes	2.81%	2.43%	0.036	0.458
 Development				
 Growth Opportunities	1.50%	2.43%	0.354	0.143
 Black Leader Attributes	2.43%	1.50%	-0.260	0.220
 Needs-Based	0.19%	0.56%	0.449	0.083
 System Management	1.31%	0.75%	-0.247	0.232
 Development Toolbox				
 Intuition-Authenticity	2.25%	2.06%	0.086	0.401
 Personalized Interventions	1.87%	1.50%	-0.016	0.482
 Weaponized Interventions	0.56%	0.75%	0.169	0.309
 School Visits-Instructional Walks	0.37%	0.94%	0.516	0.052
 Reading	0.94%	0.19%	-0.481	0.067
 Data Analysis	1.87%	1.50%	-0.020	0.477
 Guesswork	0.56%	1.12%	0.418	0.100
 Collective				
 Coaching	2.62%	1.69%	-0.149	0.331
 Mentorship	0.75%	0.94%	0.161	0.318
 Moral Support	0.94%	1.31%	0.356	0.141
 Tough Conversations	3.37%	3.93%	0.166	0.313
 Expert Videos	0.19%	0.00%	-0.289	0.195
 Conference	0.19%	0.00%	-0.289	0.195
 Observations	0.94%	1.12%	0.191	0.286
 Principal Meetings	0.19%	0.56%	0.336	0.156
 Vignettes-Role Play	0.75%	0.94%	0.177	0.301
 Professional Development	0.75%	1.69%	0.344	0.150
 School-Based Strategic Planning	0.56%	0.56%	0.064	0.426
 Gauging Readiness-Effectiveness				
 Posture and Appearance				
 Ability to Code Switch	0.56%	1.12%	0.418	0.100
 Receptiveness	1.87%	2.25%	0.271	0.210
 Collectives				
 Investments	0.37%	0.75%	0.297	0.187
 Race and Identity				
 Racism White Supremacy				
 Economic Oppression	0.94%	0.75%	-0.015	0.483
 Social Oppression	3.00%	3.37%	0.261	0.219
 White Fragility	0.75%	0.19%	-0.354	0.142
 Racial Identity	0.94%	1.31%	0.260	0.220
 Treatment of Black Students	0.75%	1.12%	0.228	0.250
 Culture				
 Cultural Imperatives	0.56%	0.94%	0.237	0.242
 Gender Bias	1.12%	0.75%	-0.092	0.394
 School Climate	0.56%	1.12%	0.372	0.130
 Cultural Difference Solutions				
 Name It	1.50%	0.00%	-0.690	0.009
 Contextualize	0.19%	0.19%	0.043	0.450
 Recruitment-Retention	1.31%	0.56%	-0.174	0.304
 Time and Location for Development				
 Time				
 First-Second Quarter	0.56%	0.19%	-0.232	0.246
 Second-Third Quarter	0.19%	0.56%	0.336	0.156
 Morning	0.00%	0.19%	0.346	0.148
 Afternoon	0.00%	0.19%	0.346	0.148
 Summer	0.00%	0.75%	0.452	0.081
 Holiday	0.37%	0.00%	-0.289	0.195
 Ongoing	0.56%	0.19%	-0.311	0.176
 Weekly	0.19%	0.00%	-0.289	0.195
 Monthly	0.37%	0.00%	-0.430	0.093
 Location				
 Inside School	0.00%	0.19%	0.346	0.148
 Outside School	0.00%	0.56%	0.346	0.148
 Coffee Shop-Restaurant	0.00%	0.37%	0.346	0.148
 Home	0.19%	0.00%	-0.289	0.195
 Leadership Orientation				
 Disciplinarian	0.19%	0.00%	-0.289	0.195
 Learning Expert	1.87%	0.75%	-0.319	0.170