National Implications: Racial Differences in Inservice Teachers' Perceptions of Caucasian American Principals' Culturally Proficient School Leadership

Dr. Mack T. Hines III
Sam Houston State University
Huntsville, Texas

William Allan Kritsonis, PhD
Professor and Faculty Mentor
PhD Program in Educational Leadership
The Whitlowe R. Green College of Education
Prairie View A&M University
Member of the Texas A&M University System
Prairie View, Texas
Visiting Lecturer (2005)
Oxford Round Table
University of Oxford, Oxford, England
Distinguished Alumnus (2004)
Central Washington University
College of Education and Professional Studies

ABSTRACT

This descriptive and comparative study investigated racial differences in inservice teachers' perceptions of Caucasian American principals' uses of culturally proficient leadership. The primary aim of this study was to closely examine the extent to which Caucasian American principals were perceived as being culturally competent leaders. A secondary aim was to add more diversity to the overall construct of school leadership.

One hundred twelve inservice teachers completed a survey regarding their Caucasian American principals' uses of culturally proficient leadership. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) and univariate analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed that race influenced their ratings on *assessing diversity, managing the dynamics of differences, assessing the culture, inclusiveness, institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources,* and *adapting to diversity*. These findings hold significant implications for how both inservice teachers and Caucasian American principals reach consensus on defining culturally proficient school leadership.

Racial Differences in Inservice Teachers' Perceptions of
Caucasian American Principals' Culturally Proficient School Leadership

American public schools continue to experience a massive influx of students from diverse cultures and ethnicities (Riehl, 2000). Specifically, 40% of public school students are from various ethnic groups. The ethnic composition of this percentage is as follows: 541,000 American Indian/Alaska Natives; 1.8 million Asian/Pacific Islanders; 7.2 million Hispanics; 8 million African Americans (NCSL, 2002). Although many theories attempt to explain this diversity, theorists agree that principals set the tone for culturally diverse schools (Adams, 1999; Lindsey, Terrell, & Roberts, 2005; Riehl, 2000).

Many of these public schools are led by Caucasian American faces of school leadership (Morgan-Brown, 2005; NCSL, 2002). Research has documented Caucasian American principals' success with leading students and teachers from various cultures (Lomotey, 1989; Shujaa, 1994). However, research needs to closely examine perceptions of their leadership in culturally diverse schools. In particular, Caucasian American principals should be evaluated on their ability to use specific strategies to develop culturally proficient schools.

Purpose of the Article

The purpose of this research is to identify racial differences in teachers' perceptions of the culturally proficient leadership practices of Caucasian American principals.

Research Question

The research question for this study is:

What are the racial differences between inservice teachers' perceptions of Caucasian American principals' uses of culturally proficient leadership practices?

The significance of examining teachers' perceptions is vital. First, principals are the most significant influences of the culture and climate of schools (Burns, 2002; Schein, 1992). Their leadership behavior influences the perceptions of students and teachers. Better stated, "followers' perceptions of leadership illuminate the understanding of the leadership" (Ayman, 1993, p. 137). Other researchers (Carter, 1995; Delpit, 2003) have denoted that this perception is culturally constructed by ethnic and personal beliefs

and experiences. Thus, the research of this study could enhance our understandings of how race influences teachers' perceptions of the principal's cultural leadership.

Second, teachers bring their various cultures and ethnicities to the school. Consequently, they must examine the different contexts of how these variables influence their perceptions of the principal's ethnicity and leadership (Morgan-Brown, 2004; Pettigrew, Jemmott, & Johnson, 1984). Both factors could fosters teachers' and Caucasian American principals' awareness of ethnicity's impact on perceptions of culturally proficient schools and leadership.

Conceptual Framework

This research is grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1964) homophily theory. According to them, human contact, communication with, and acceptance of others are strong between people who share the same cultural background. The main reason is that their common background provides them with similar frames of reference. The "medium credibility" aspect of this study indicated that because of this reference, people can earn credibility with other people. In due regards, the main focus of this study is the credibility. Better stated, this study uses race as an indicator of Caucasian American principals' culturally proficient leadership credibility with teachers.

Literature Review

Culturally Proficient School Culture

In their book *Culturally Proficiency: A Manual for School Leaders,* Lindsey, Roberts, and Terrell (2005) describe the theoretical underpinnings and elements of a culturally proficient school culture. They describe a culturally proficient school culture as "Policies and practices of a school or the values and behaviors of an individual that enable the school or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment. Cultural proficiency is reflected in the way a school treats staff, students, parents, and community." (P.146).

According to the authors, a culturally proficient school facilitates meaningful teaching and learning relationship between students and teachers. In essence, students are engaged in classroom and schoolwide activities that prepare them for functioning in a diverse society. Culturally proficient principals use six practices to ensure that these experiences are developed in culturally diverse learning communities. Listed below is a description of these practices.

Valuing Diversity

Principals must engage in a variety of practices to model diversity in schools. First, they must infuse the school with a climate of acceptance and respect. That is, they must emphasize the importance of recognizing and celebrating the uniqueness of all stakeholders. In addition, they must foster acceptance of differences in accordance to race, gender, socioeconomic status, and other diverse characteristics. Most important, culturally proficient principals must model the academic and social benefits of diverse school cultures.

Assessing the Culture

According to Lindsey et al. (2005), cultural self assessment emphasizes the evaluation of the cultural weaknesses and strengths of schools. Assessment tools range from discussions on biased curricula to stakeholders' feelings about the school. These practices convey the importance of understanding how the culture impacts the overall climate of the school.

Managing the Dynamics of Difference

Culturally proficient principals must proactively search for the hegemonic perspectives of cultural differences in the school. That is, they develop ways to understand how cultures of power and privilege impact the overall culture of the school. Principals must also address the negative influences of societal power and privilege on the dynamics of the school culture.

The most important solution is to train teachers and students on the significance of conflict resolution. To put structure to strategy, principals should engage faculty and students in discussions on how stereotype and racism create cultural conflict in schools. Teachers and students should then receive guidance on how to minimize conflict in schools.

Adapting Diversity

Cultural proficiency is a lifelong learning process (Lindsey et al., 2005; Riehl, 2000). Therefore, principals must provide students and teachers with time to adapt to this process. Support strategies include but are not limited to:

1. Engaging in cross-cultural communications;
2. Accepting cultural interventions for minimizing conflict and confusion; and
3. Addressing barriers that remove inequitable practices from the school.

Lindsey et al. (2005) indicate that these strategies should be used as teaching tools in the schools. Better stated, teachers and students should discuss events and concepts that are inclusive of the cultural makeup and issues of the school and communities.

Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Resources

Principals should use staff development to develop teachers' and students' abilities to become cohesive cross cultural communities. These training experiences should focus on concepts that threaten the cultural diversity of the school. For example, principals could provide faculty and staff members with sensitivity training on cultural differences. Additionally, principals could hold cross cultural assemblies for both students and teachers. These experiences should also be translated into culturally proficient programs and policies.

Principals could hold teachers accountable to these policies by evaluating their culturally proficient behavior. That is, they evaluate teachers' ability and commitment to integrate cultural proficiency into their daily instructional practices. This structure develops students' and teachers' abilities to honor each other's culturally diverse differences.

Inclusiveness

With inclusiveness, culturally proficient principals model the inclusion of diverse perspectives in the decision making process. Evidence to this effect is seen in the ethnically diverse makeup of advisory and decision making committees. In addition, parents and students are provided with the opportunities to share their ideas for developing the mission of the school (Dunn, 1997; Lindsey et al., 2005; Riehl, 2000).

Empirical Research

Smith (2004) conducted a seminal study on the culturally competent beliefs and practices of 11 principals in high performing, high poverty California schools. In particular, she created a 35-item culturally proficient survey from Lindsey et al.'s theories on cultural proficiency. She used this instrument to measure the principals' perceptions of effective culturally proficient school practices. In addition, she measured their most frequently used culturally proficient leadership practices.

The findings showed that the principals perceived and frequently used practices that reflected *valuing diversity* (eg. "Ensuring decision making includes diverse perspectives"), assessing *the school culture* (eg. "Provides academic intervention programs to meet needs of diverse students), and *managing the dynamic of differences* (eg. "Provides conflict resolution program for students"). She concluded that accountability measures should be used to ensure that principals engage in culturally proficient school practices.

My research extends Smith's (2004) study in two significant ways. First, my study looks at inservice teachers' perceptions of culturally proficient leadership in a variety of schools. This approach is very significant, because of the impact of teacher perceptions on reactions to school leadership (Ayman, 1993). Second, this study consists of a larger sample size than Smith's sample size. This approach creates new perspectives for interpreting the quality and quantity of culturally proficiency leadership practices in schools.

Methodology

Participants

This study consisted of one hundred twelve teachers. They were randomly drawn from a sample of teachers from nine Texas school districts. This population consisted of 48 (43%) males and 64 (57%) females. The ethnic population was as follows: 34 (30%) Caucasian American, 28 (25%) African American, and 50 (45%) Hispanic. Forty-one (37%) teachers worked at high schools, and 32 (28%) teachers worked in middle school. The remaining 50 (45%) teachers worked in elementary schools. The participants indicated that they worked with Caucasian American principals in culturally diverse schools. We confirmed this assertion by reviewing their school district's ethnic descriptions of the schools' teachers and students.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for this study was Smith's (2004) 35-item cultural proficiency survey. The survey consisted of six constructs. They were *valuing diversity* (12 items: Alpha=.82), *assessing the culture* (7 items: Alpha=.86), *managing the dynamics of difference* (4 items: Alpha=.86), *institutionalizing cultural knowledge and*

resources (4 items: Alpha=.80*), adapting to diversity* (3 items: Alpha=.83), and *inclusiveness* (5 items: Alpha=.91).

Participants were asked to use two Likert scales to respond to these construct items. The first Likert scale measured the importance of each item. The Likert scale ranged from 1-"Not Important" to 5-"Very Important". The second Likert scale rated the participants' perceptions of their principals' frequency with using the culturally proficient practices in schools. The scale ranged from 1-"Never" to 5-"Always".

Validity and Reliability

We validated the study by presenting the instrument to a panel of professors. The professors taught courses on culturally proficiency. They made and we followed their suggestions for improving the readability of some survey items. Afterward, we piloted the survey on 34 teachers. The overall .74 Alpha coefficient showed the instrument's internal consistency.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

We contacted and explained the study to the principals of the sampled school districts. After gauging the faculty's interest in the study, the principals provided me with a list of the teachers' e-mail addresses. After receiving the list, we randomly selected 212 teachers to participate in the study. We e-mailed a cover letter and the survey to the students. In the cover letter, we asked them to return the survey to me within three weeks. During the third week of data collection, we received 112 surveys from the students. Thus, we achieved a 53% return rate. Statistical Packages for Social Services (SPSS) were used to analyze survey responses. We conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) to determine the racial differences in the teachers' responses to the six survey subscales. We then conducted a follow-up analysis of variance (ANOVA) on each individual subscale.

Results

Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) findings revealed statistically significant differences in African American, Caucasian American, and Hispanic teachers on *valuing diversity, managing the dynamics of difference*, *inclusiveness*, *assessing the culture*, *adapting to diversity*, and *institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources* subscales of the survey F(3, 109)=10.82, p<.05 (See Table 1).

Table 1

Results of MANOVAs on Differences in Subscale Scores by Teacher Ethnicity (N=112)

Scale/Participant Status	M	SD	df	F	P
Survey			3	10.817	.00
Valuing Diversity			1	1.628	.04*
Caucasian American	4.32	0.45			
African American	3.02	1.02			
Hispanic	2.47	0.85			
Inclusiveness			1	4.711	.05*
Caucasian American	3.92	0.75			
African American	2.12	1.42			
Hispanic	2.07	0.95			
Managing the Dynamics of Difference			1	1.028	.037*
Caucasian American	4.02	1.25			
African American	3.43	1.52			
Hispanic	3.01	1.05			
Assessing the Culture			1	2.510	.010*
Caucasian American	3.75	0.95			
African American	3.32	1.12			
Hispanic	2.91	1.06			

Adapting to Diversity			1	1.798	.00*
Caucasian American	3.95	0.75			
African American	2.85	1.42			
Hispanic	2.17	1.25			
Institutionalizing Cultural Knowledge and Resources			1	2.703	.00*
Caucasian American	4.43	0.67			
African American	3.59	1.12			
Hispanic	3.17	1.09			

Analyses of variance (ANOVAs) on each individual subscales was conducted as follow-up tests to the MANOVA. Using the Bonferroni method, each ANOVA was tested at the .05 level. The ANOVA findings were significant for *valuing diversity* F(1, 110)=11.45, p=.034; *inclusiveness,* F (1, 110)=17.01, p=.004; *managing the dynamics of difference*, F (1, 110)=10.46, p=.021; *assessing the culture*, F (1, 110)=9.37, p=.017; *adapting to diversity*, F (1,110)=20.37, p=.047; and *institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources*, F (1, 110)=12.21, p=.001. These findings consistently showed that Caucasian American teachers gave the highest rating to the culturally proficient leadership practices of Caucasian American prinicpals. Their ratings were consistently followed by African American and Hispanic teachers. Individual post hoc analyses also showed that the differences were between African American teachers and Caucasian American teachers. The same differences were also found between Hispanic teachers and Caucasian American teachers.

Discussion

This research produced several worthy points of discussion. First, statistically significant racial differences existed for all of the survey subscales. Specifically, the Caucasian American inservice teachers displayed higher mean scores than the other two groups of inservice teachers on the subscales. In addition, statistically significant post hoc differences existed between either Hispanic and Caucasian American inservice teachers or African American or Caucasian American inservice teachers.

The former outcome suggests that Caucasian American teachers appear to be more likely than teachers from other ethnicities to give high culturally proficient ratings

to Caucasian American principals. Consistent with the tenets of Lazarsfeld and Merton's (1964) homophily theory, the Caucasian American participants of this study presumably share a stronger frame of reference with Caucasian American principals than do the minority participants. Conversely, the minority inservice teachers lack an ethnic frame of reference with their Caucasian American principals. Evidence to this effect may be seen in the minority participants' similarly low mean scores for their Caucasian American principals. Both explanations are consistent with recent research on race's impact on teacher perceptions of principals (Bell, Jones, & Madsen, 2001; Brown-Morgan, 2004). Further significance is that these inservice teachers' understanding of leadership may be influenced by their Caucasian American principals.

Overall, the research findings showed particularly low mean scores for the minority participants. The African American inservice teachers' mean score ratings ranged from "2.12" to "3.43". The ratings for Hispanic inservice teachers ranged from "2.07" to "3.17". Thus, on the whole, these participants' Caucasian American principals either rarely or somewhat model the practices of culturally proficient leadership. This finding may be indicative of possible differences between the inservice teachers and their Caucasian American principals' beliefs about culturally proficient leadership. That is, their principals could actually believe that they do model culturally proficient leadership. As suggested from this study, the frequency of their demonstrations is somewhat inconsistent with the views of this study's participants.

Implications

This study bears one important implication. First, the participants of this study should talk to their Caucasian American principals about their perceptions and observations of the principals' culturally proficient leadership. This implication is attributed to their moderate ratings of the principals' culturally proficient leadership practices. To that end, they should attempt to engage their principals in discussions on definitions and uses of culturally proficient leadership. They should also ask their principals to identify and explain their different practices of culturally proficient leadership.

For example, African American and Hispanic inservice teachers gave low ratings to their Caucasian American principals' frequency for "adapting to diversity", "inclusiveness", and "valuing diversity". Therefore, the teachers could ask principals to give their perceptions on how they model these leadership practices. Two benefits could emerge from discussion on this and other culturally proficient leadership practices. First, inservice teachers could learn about the factors that may cause their principals to place more emphasis on some culturally proficient leadership practices. Equally significant, the principals would become more aware of how their leadership is perceived by other stakeholders-particular, those stakeholders who aspire to purse the principalship. Overall, the inservice teachers and their principals could use these discussions to develop a

common frame of reference for interpreting culturally proficient leadership in their schools.

Future Research Directions

This study bears several noteworthy directions for future research. The first recommendation is to replicate this study with larger populations of inservice teachers from other states and regions. Although this study is probably the first a kind, the outcomes do not reflect confirmation. Therefore, a larger population could strengthen the findings from this study.

Second, research should measure inservice teachers' and Caucasian American principals' perceptions of the frequency of the principals' uses of culturally proficient school leadership. Smith's (2004) study examined principals' perceptions of their frequency with using culturally proficient leadership practices. We extended that body of knowledge by repeating the same process with inservice teachers. If research includes both populations in one study, the findings could increase the reliability and validity of our research.

Third, research needs to examine racial differences in inservice teachers' perceptions of the frequency of African American and Hispanic principals' uses of culturally proficient leadership practices. Within the recent decade, more African American and Hispanic principals are assuming principalships of culturally diverse schools (Dunn, 1997, Lindsey et al., 2005; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2004). However, no research has examined the perceptions of these principals' culturally proficient leadership. By conducting this research, researchers could add diverse perspectives regarding the cultural aspects of minority principals' styles of leadership. The findings could be translated into strategies for tailoring their style of culturally diverse leadership to the ethnic uniqueness of teachers and students.

Fourth, research should determine if other principal characteristics affect inservice teachers' perceptions of their culturally proficient leadership. Research has indicated that some of the most influential leadership characteristics are race (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Lomotey, 1989; Morgan-Brown, 2004), gender (Bass & Avolio, 1997; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Eagly, Karau, & Johnson, 1992), and leadership style (Adams, 1999; Bass & Avolio, 1997; Burns; 2002; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Hines, 2007). Despite the multifaceted nature of these characteristics, few studies have examined their interrelated impact on stakeholders' perceptions of leadership. Though empirically untested, the outcome of this study may be somewhat explained by the interaction of these characteristics. A study of this possible relationship could support or refute my hypothesis.

The final research recommendation is to conduct longitudinal research on inservice teachers' perceptions of Caucasian American principals' culturally proficient leadership. By evaluating the inservice teachers' over time, researchers could develop a

stable picture of the perceptions of Caucasian American principals' culturally proficient school leadership.

Conclusion Remarks

Cultural proficiency leadership is defined as the ability to create school environments that facilitate and acknowledge the cultural diversity of students and teachers. According to Lindsey et al. (2005), principals achieve this goal by engaging all stakeholders in *valuing diversity, assessing the culture, managing the dynamics of differences, institutionalizing cultural knowledge and resources*, *adapting to diversity,* and *inclusiveness*.

This study highlighted inservice teachers' perceptions of Caucasian American principals' uses of culturally proficient leadership. The findings showed that the inservice teachers' ethnicity influenced their views of their principals' uses of this style of leadership. The most salient observation is that Caucasian American inservice teachers gave higher ratings of Caucasian American principals than did African American or Hispanic inservice teachers. Therefore, the inservice teachers should discuss these perceptions with their principals. This recommendation could increase inservice teachers' understanding on the influences on culturally proficient school leadership. In addition, Caucasian American principals could increase their understanding of how to address faculty and staff needs for culturally proficient school leadership.

Limitations

This study consisted of three limitations. One limitation is the small sample size for this study. A second limitation is the population's location in one region. Therefore, the findings can only be generalized to similar populations of inservice teachers. In addition, those inservice teachers must work in similar schools in other regions. The third limitation is that we did not control for the participants' years of experience with their principals. Research shows that teachers' perceptions of their principals are influenced by their years of experience with the principals (Morgan-Brown, 2004). Thus, some of the participants may not have spent enough time with their principals to evaluate the culturally proficient leadership. Finally, outcomes of this study were not inclusive of the perceptions of the inservice teachers' principals. Therefore, researchers must use extreme caution to interpret the findings from this research.

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Appendix A

Culturally Proficient School Leadership Scale

Directions: Please use the scale to rate your principals' frequency with using these culturally proficient leadership practices in your school.

Scale
1= never uses 2= rarely uses 3=sometimes uses 4= frequently uses 5= always uses this

How often does your principal use the following culturally proficient leadership practices?	Rating
1. Designating funding and human resources to address issues that relate to cultural diversity.	1 2 3 4 5
2. Exposing faculty to staff development on addressing diverse student populations.	1 2 3 4 5
3. Handling formalities to ensure that faculty and visitors are welcome to the school.	1 2 3 4 5
4. Disseminating demographic information to enhance faculty members' awareness of the relevance of cultural diversity.	1 2 3 4 5
5. Using language in documents and statements that acknowledge cultural diversity of students.	1 2 3 4 5
6. Creating a climate that has high academic expectations for all students.	1 2 3 4 5
7. Encouraging staff to obtain certification in specifically designed academic instruction.	1 2 3 4 5
8. Making provisions for teachers to receive training on making curriculum modifications in accordance to accordance to the cultural and linguistic makeup of students.	1 2 3 4 5
9. Creating academic intervention programs that meet the needs of diverse students.	1 2 3 4 5
10. Providing instruction that addresses the background of diverse students.	1 2 3 4 5
11. Providing inclusive environment that acknowledges the diversity of students.	1 2 3 4 5
12. Ensuring that school policies are sensitive to the cultural makeup of the school.	1 2 3 4 5
13. Making decisions that are inclusive of diverse perspectives.	1 2 3 4 5
14. Providing faculty and staff members with conflict resolution training.	1 2 3 4 5
15. Ensuring that all groups of students and teachers are aware of how their cultural norms and behaviors influence the climate of the school.	1 2 3 4 5

16. Communicating ability to function effectively in cross cultural situations.	1 2 3 4 5
17. Evaluating faculty members' ability to display culturally proficient behaviors.	1 2 3 4 5
18. Maintaining school activities conducive to effectively working with and learning in cross cultural situations.	1 2 3 4 5
19. Accessing barriers to core curriculum for culturally diverse students.	1 2 3 4 5
20. Showing sensitivity to cultural differences during performance evaluations of faculty members.	1 2 3 4 5
21. Developing complaint resolution processes that have been communicated to parents.	1 2 3 4 5
22. Evaluating the extent to which curricular and institutional practices address the linguistic and cultural differences of students.	1 2 3 4 5
23. Organizing diverse members into interview panels for hiring new faculty/staff members.	1 2 3 4 5
24. Developing programs with opportunities for consultation with a diverse parent group.	1 2 3 4 5
25. Developing policies with stakeholders who represent the cultural makeup of students.	1 2 3 4 5
26. Creating a school environment that inspires students and teachers to acknowledge other cultures while retaining the uniqueness of their ethnic identity.	1 2 3 4 5
27. Ensuring that extracurricular activities are inclusive of community members are from ethnic groups.	1 2 3 4 5
28. Accommodating diverse cultural norms that may exist in the school.	1 2 3 4 5
29. Creating school activities that appeal to demographically mixed groups of students.	1 2 3 4 5
30. Providing training that develops faculty and staff members' confidence to function in cross cultural situations.	1 2 3 4 5
31. Providing leadership in creating policy statements that are inclusive of diversity.	1 2 3 4 5
32. Creating conflict resolution services for students.	1 2 3 4 5
33. Ensuring that school policies promote and advocate for culturally proficient behaviors among faculty and staff members.	1 2 3 4 5
34. Establishing diverse advisory groups.	1 2 3 4 5
35. Connecting students and staff to external organizations and resources that represent cultural diversity.	1 2 3 4 5