

Instructional Supervision as Liberation: Culturally Responsive Mentorship Through National Board Facilitation

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored how National Board Certification (NBC) facilitators practice culturally responsive instructional supervision (CRIS) as an expression of justice-oriented leadership. Guided by the C.A.R.E. Framework—Culturally responsive, Accomplished teaching, Reflective educators, and Equity-centered practice—the study addressed two central questions: (1) How, if at all, do NBC facilitators engage in CRIS to reimagine pedagogy and leadership toward more equitable schooling? and (2) In what ways, if at all, do they enact supervisory mentorship that advances justice-oriented leadership? Findings revealed that participants moved beyond compliance-driven supervision toward reflective, justice-minded mentorship. Their leadership practices positioned the NBC standards as tools for collective reflection and pedagogical transformation. When rooted in mentors' lived experiences, CRIS emerged through the NBC process as a catalyst for shifting instructional leadership, challenging deficit narratives, reframing teacher reflection, and cultivating culturally sustaining pedagogy. These insights extend existing scholarship on CRIS and Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) by illustrating how NBC facilitators operate as agents of instructional and institutional change. The study offers implications for reimagining professional learning, leadership preparation, and supervision models that foreground educational equity, critical reflection, and teacher agency as the foundation of liberatory leadership.

Keywords

Culturally Responsive Instructional Supervision; National Board Certification; instructional leadership; justice-oriented leadership; teacher mentorship; professional learning communities

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Introduction

This article examines how instructional supervisors, in their role as facilitators of National Board Certification (NBC), demonstrate culturally responsive instructional supervision that fosters emancipatory, equity-driven outcomes. Drawing on interviews with three NBC facilitators—Casey, Carter, and Cameron²—this qualitative inquiry explored how their supervisory practices challenge hegemonic ideologies and reshape educational policies and practices with students, teachers, and their wider school community. Their leadership revealed two key themes: (a) cultivating equitable schooling that reimagines pedagogy and leadership through culturally responsive instructional supervision; and (b) fostering justice-oriented mentorship. These findings contribute to the growing body of research on culturally responsive instructional leadership and its potential to transform schools into affirming spaces for People of the Global Majority (PGM) (Ford, 2022; Lim, 2020). Rather than relying on deficit-based language like ‘minority’ or ‘nonwhite,’ PGM affirms the global demographic reality and asserts a more empowered, asset-based identity framework. The term is rooted in anticolonial and antiracist traditions that challenge Eurocentric hierarchies and call attention to the political and cultural power of racialized communities worldwide (Ford, 2022; Lim, 2020). This reframing aligns with movements in culturally responsive education that aim to center the experiences, knowledge systems, and leadership of historically marginalized peoples across global contexts.

Literature Review

Instructional supervision, when anchored in culturally responsive frameworks, offers a powerful avenue for advancing equity in schools. As culturally responsive instructional supervisors (CRIS), educators are positioned to dismantle deficit ideologies; challenge the entrenchment of white supremacy in educational systems; and promote asset-based, justice-oriented pedagogies (Walrond, 2025a; Cormier et al., 2024; Gay, 2018; Gooden, 2002; Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016). Khalifa (2018) conceptualized Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) as a practice in which leaders challenge teaching and environments that marginalize students of color, and they will also identify, protect, institutionalize, and celebrate all cultural practices from these students’ (pp. 145–146). Watson and Baxley (2021) emphasized that such leadership necessitates critical self-reflection, community engagement, and the centering of racial and cultural responsiveness in instructional decision-making. Instructional supervisors, particularly those trained in CRSL, must support educators in both developing pedagogical skills and interrogating the racialized dynamics of their classrooms and schools (Gist et al., 2021; Yuan et al., 2023).

National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs) exemplify a model of rigorous, reflective practice aligned with many of these aforementioned ideals. The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) outlines Five Core Propositions of Accomplished Teaching, which are embedded within four certification components: (a) content knowledge, (b) differentiation and responsiveness to diverse learners, (c) instructional practices and learning environment, and (d) reflective practice. These standards emphasize commitment to student learning, deep content and pedagogical knowledge, and collaboration within professional learning communities.

² Pseudonyms

Empirical studies have suggested that NBC has a positive impact on teaching quality and student achievement. For example, Lustick and Sykes (2006) found that the certification process significantly altered teachers' instructional practices, while Coskie and Place (2008) highlighted improvements in literacy instruction among NBCTs. Several studies also link NBCTs to higher student test scores (Cavalluzzo et al., 2014; Cowan & Goldhaber, 2015; Harris, 2013), with notable gains in both mathematics and English language arts (Los Angeles Unified School District, 2012). Pyke and Lynch (2005) investigated the effectiveness of collaborative preparation practices among mathematics and science teachers pursuing NBPTS certification. Through a survey of candidates from 1999 to 2000, the researchers explored how group support structures influenced certification outcomes, finding that while group participation was valued for motivation and practical guidance, its impact on performance scores was inconsistent across content areas and grade levels. Importantly, students in historically underserved schools demonstrated the most significant benefit from NBCTs (Bristol & Esboldt, 2020; Goldhaber & Anthony, 2004, 2007). However, some studies reported no statistically significant effect on student outcomes (Harris & Sass, 2009; Podgursky, 2001), while other studies questioned the mechanisms through which such impacts are realized (Elfers & Plecki, 2014; National Research Council, 2008).

Despite this mixed evidence, few studies have directly examined the influence of National Board-aligned professional development on instructional supervision or broader cultural shifts within schools. This gap is particularly notable, given the growing emphasis on transformative professional learning. Learning Forward (2024), a national professional learning association, has developed research-based standards for effective professional learning that emphasize leadership, equity, and data-driven practices. Garrett (2021) found that when aligned with Learning Forward's (2024) standards, professional development initiatives contributed to both instructional improvements and student gains. Yet, further research is needed to understand how such models intersect with culturally responsive supervision and leadership, especially in the context of programs that support NBCT development. As instructional leaders continue to navigate complex, racially diverse learning environments, integrating CRSL into professional learning frameworks remains a critical and underexplored area of inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in The C.A.R.E. Framework (Walrond, 2025b), a conceptual framework that draws upon the intersecting domains of Architecture of Accomplished Teaching (AAT), CRIS, and CRSL. Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional lens through which the supervisory practices of NBC facilitators are examined, with particular attention to how they foster equity-focused, emancipatory educational change among students, educators, school communities, and themselves.

Architecture of Accomplished Teaching (AAT)

At the core of AAT lies a commitment to student-centered instruction, reflective practice, and evidence-based teaching principles that align with the National Board's vision of accomplished teaching (Walrond, 2025b; NBPTS, 2016). In this study, facilitators model these principles by

supporting teachers in designing instruction that affirms student identities and promotes authentic learning experiences. These supervisory practices are not merely technical but also pedagogical and emancipatory, requiring a deep understanding of students' sociocultural contexts.

Culturally Responsive Instructional Supervision (CRIS)

CRIS expands the scope of traditional instructional leadership by centering supervisory inquiry, cultural responsiveness, and critical reflection (Walrond, 2025b; Cormier et al., 2024; Khalifa et al., 2016). This framework positions supervisors not merely as evaluators but also as co-learners and co-constructors of knowledge who critically engage with the ideologies embedded in curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Walrond, 2025b). As Gay (2018) argued, culturally responsive supervision necessitates actively challenging deficit-based perspectives and fostering equity-centered professional learning environments. Integral to CRIS is the expectation that both teachers and instructional leaders examine their own sociocultural positioning—including race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, immigration background, sexual orientation, ability, and other identity markers (Khalifa, 2020; Milner, 2007). This self-examination is essential to disrupting the pervasive deficit narratives that often devalue the experiences of students who are marginalized, minoritized, or otherwise othered in educational spaces. Through this process, CRIS advances a more just and reflective approach to supervision that affirms the cultural assets of all learners and promotes sustained, equity-oriented transformation.

Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)

CRSL, the third strand of the framework, situates supervision within broader leadership practices aimed at systemic transformation. It foregrounds equity-driven, community-centered approaches and systems-level change (Khalifa et al., 2016; Walrond, 2025b). Facilitators operating within this domain engage in antiracist leadership and culturally sustaining systems-building, ensuring that school policies and professional learning environments are affirming for People of the Global Majority (Riley, 2025). Central to this work is the active protection of students who have been historically marginalized by schools by challenging exclusionary practices. CRSL disrupts deficit-based narratives and instead fosters learning spaces that affirm students' cultural identities, languages, and lived experiences.

The convergence of AAT, CRIS, and CRSL conceptualizes NBC facilitators not simply as instructional supervisors but also as equity leaders who engage in feedback-rich supervision, foster responsive pedagogy, and prioritize student learning as the central measure of instructional excellence. In sum, this conceptual framework provides the foundation for analyzing how culturally responsive supervision can serve as a lever for transformative and liberatory education (Walrond, 2025b).

See Figure 1 for The C.A.R.E. Framework, which identifies the pseudonym for the center involved in this study and outlines each tenet of the conceptual framework.

Figure 1: The C.A.R.E. Framework

The C.A.R.E. Framework—Culturally Responsive, Accomplished Teaching, Reflective Educators, and Equity-Centered Practice—conceptualizes instructional supervision as a justice-driven approach that affirms students' cultural identities (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995), promotes reflective pedagogy (NBPTS, 2016), fosters relational and inquiry-based leadership (Cormier et al., 2024; Waite, 2021; Watson & Baxley, 2021), and actively challenges structural inequities to center the needs of historically marginalized learners (Khalifa, 2018).

*Pseudonym

Purpose of the Study

This study is part of a broader 3-year research initiative (2023–2026) aimed at addressing a gap in the literature regarding the effects of leaders of color and their influence on educators of color pursuing NBC. The overarching project investigates the effect of a professional development program across three key groups: (a) classroom teachers, (b) school principals, and (c) instructional supervisors. This article reflects one part of this larger study that specifically examined the role of facilitators as instructional supervisors. Through a qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2007), this article explored the role of culturally responsive supervision within the NBC process. Drawing on interviews with three ($n = 3$) veteran National Board-Certified educators and facilitators—Cameron, Carter, and Casey—this article addressed three guiding questions:

1. How, if at all, do NBC facilitators engage in culturally responsive instructional supervision (CRIS) that reimagines pedagogy and leadership toward more equitable forms of schooling?
2. In what ways, if at all, do NBC facilitators enact supervisory mentorship as a form of justice-oriented leadership?

Methods

To answer our research questions, we employed a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, we drew on semi-structured interviews to understand how facilitators perceived their evolving roles as culturally responsive instructional leaders and mentors (Cormier et al., 2024). This approach allowed us to capture the nuanced reflections, professional learning, and identity shifts of facilitators as they engaged in justice-oriented supervisory praxis. In this study, all names attributed to participants, educational institutions, school districts, and related entities are hereby designated as pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Setting

In 2024, the Golden State National Board Resource Center (GSNBRC) recruited four California-based National Board-Certified teachers to serve as facilitators for the Certification Support Program (CSP) in collaboration with Empowering Teachers as Leaders and Learners (ETLL). These facilitators were tasked with co-leading professional development sessions for both teachers and school principals. Of the four facilitators, three were current or former employees of the Golden State Unified School District (GSUSD), while the fourth was affiliated with the Pacific State Unified School District (PUSD). All facilitators had achieved and maintained NBC. Drawing on the National Board standards, *What Teachers Should Know and Be Able to Do* ('What Book', 2017), and the characteristics of accomplished teaching, the research team developed interview protocols aligned with the study's guiding research questions.

Sample

Table 1 presents the demographic profiles of the NBRC instructional supervisors who participated in this study. Pseudonyms were used to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of NBRC Instructional Supervisors*

Instructional Supervisor	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Education (teacher, leader, coach)	National Board Teacher Certification by Area
Cameron	Female	Latinx	16 years	Early Childhood Generalist
Carter	Male	Latinx	26 years	Early Adolescence Social Studies
Casey	Female	Black	29 years	Early Childhood Generalist

Data Collection and Analysis

Following institutional approval of the interview protocols, facilitators were invited to participate in one qualitative interview. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, with recordings stored locally to restrict access to the core research team. Audio, video, and transcripts from these sessions were uploaded to a secure shared drive. The qualitative data set for this component of the study included interview transcripts with the facilitators, who were also serving in instructional leadership roles. The participating district was purposefully selected based on criteria aligned with the objectives of the broader research study. Specifically, the district was characterized by a notably low number of National Board-Certified teachers (only 19 at the time of selection), making it a strategically important site for examining efforts to expand access to and support for NBC.

During the semi-structured interviews, each participant was interviewed once and asked to share background information, including their teaching experience, engagement with the NBC process, and reflections on the professional development they deliver. Interview questions focused on how facilitators designed and enacted culturally responsive instructional supervision (RQ1) and how their facilitation experiences shaped their leadership practices (RQ2). Sample questions included: “Can you talk about how you are preparing for the National Board Candidate Support Program sessions at your school?” (*If not provided, prompt: Have you designed the purpose/rationale for your lessons? If not provided, prompt: Have you considered the needs of your participants? If not provided, prompt: What content are you planning to cover? How do you ensure it is culturally responsive? If not provided, prompt: What activity structures will you employ?*). All of which probed how facilitators planned, structured, and implemented culturally responsive supervision aligning with RQ1 and examined how facilitators adapted instruction to teachers’ diverse learning and cultural contexts, also aligning with RQ1. Sample questions such as, “What do you believe it takes to be successful as a National Board facilitator?”, which explored facilitators’ evolving conceptions of leadership, reflecting RQ2; “How do you believe facilitating the National Board Candidate Support Program will impact you as an educator? As a facilitator?”, which directly addressed how their engagement in the NBC process shaped their instructional leadership practices and professional growth (RQ2); and “What shifts, if any, do you believe would improve the culture of the school?”, which invited reflection on how culturally responsive supervision can inform broader school and leadership change, bridging both RQ1 and RQ2. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by a professional transcription service.

After each interview, the researchers completed a contact summary form (Creswell, 2007), which served as an analytic memo to capture initial impressions and emergent themes. Data preparation included transcription review and minor corrections to improve accuracy. Each transcript was then analyzed using a three-step reading strategy—holistic, selective, and detailed reading—to generate a comprehensive understanding of participants’ narratives (van Manen, 2014). To guide the coding process, the research team developed a codebook integrating both etic and emic codes (Lett, 1990). Etic codes were informed by the conceptual framework and relevant literature (e.g., PDK_Core, denoting knowledge of the Five Core Propositions: content knowledge, differentiated instruction, learning environment, reflective practice and professional learning community). Emic codes emerged inductively from the data (e.g., Change Facilitator,

used to describe changes to practice facilitators made by working with teachers seeking NBC). To enhance reliability, each researcher independently coded the transcripts, followed by collaborative reflection using textual reflective practice (Macbeth, 2001). Etic and emic codes with overlapping meanings were collapsed into broader thematic categories to facilitate the identification of key patterns and findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A crosswalk table was used to map individual interview items to the corresponding research questions, ensuring coherence and analytical rigor.

The analysis revealed that instructional supervisors who engaged in the NBC process underwent significant professional learning, which not only shaped their leadership dispositions and supervisory approaches but also contributed to broader shifts in school- and district-level policies and practices.

Findings

In this section, we present our findings from our examination of how facilitators experienced shifts in their instructional leadership practices through their engagement with the GSNBRC. On average, facilitators demonstrated key changes in practice. Specifically, their work reflected: (a) a move toward equitable schooling that reimagines pedagogy and leadership through culturally responsive instructional supervision, and (b) the enactment of supervisory mentorship as a form of justice-oriented leadership.

Research Question 1: How, if at all, do NBC facilitators engage in culturally responsive instructional supervision (CRIS) that reimagines pedagogy and leadership toward more equitable forms of schooling?

Toward Equitable Schooling That Reimagines Pedagogy and Leadership Through Culturally Responsive Instructional Supervision

Instructional supervision, when grounded in culturally responsive frameworks, can foster educational liberation—an education that moves beyond narrow measures of achievement to prioritize equity and the full intellectual and emotional development of all learners, particularly those from historically marginalized communities (Bristol et al., 2025; Cormier et al., 2024). For early childhood facilitators who support educators, their lived experiences often influence how they design supervision and enact pedagogical leadership. Cameron, a Latinx educator with experience as a classroom teacher, coach, mentor coordinator, and National Board-Certified teacher facilitator, shared how deeply personal experiences of marginalization and cultural erasure can become the foundation for supervisory dispositions that resist deficit thinking and affirm culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Cormier et al., 2024; Khalifa et al., 2016).

National Board as Mirror and Blueprint: Transforming Pedagogical and Leadership Praxis

Cameron's identity as a first-generation college graduate and trilingual speaker (Spanish, French, and English) was central to her educational philosophy. Having experienced exclusion and cultural invisibility throughout her K–12 education, she developed a keen awareness of how

systemic norms within schooling can obscure the talents, languages, and identities of students from the Global Majority (Gay 2018). These formative experiences now inform her practice as a supervisor and mentor, exemplifying the critical consciousness central to CRSL.

As a Latina, first-generation college student...I was not seen often in schools and not supported. I was consistently ignored and just funneled through the system.... There was always this language barrier for me.... I speak Spanish and French...I was seen as a problem, why don't you speak English? I wanted to ensure that teachers who do and want to pursue their national boards are seen and supported and not going on this journey by themselves, because it's a hard journey.

This reflection demonstrated how Cameron's critical consciousness as a facilitator was shaped by a rejection of the deficit narratives she experienced firsthand. Instead of reproducing conventional supervisory models centered on performance metrics and compliance-based accountability, Cameron centered support, belonging, and recognition. Her role as an instructional supervisor was emancipatory. In framing support as a response to prior harm, she modeled a disposition of cultural humility, one that recognized the social-emotional dimensions of educator development, especially for those navigating racialized and linguistic exclusion. Through the development of critical consciousness of Freire (1970) and Waite (2021, 2024), culturally responsive instructional supervision supports the delivery of formative feedback that focuses on addressing sociocultural gaps and how educators can create liberatory instructional practices to confront inequitable outcomes (Mette et al., 2023). As an instructional supervisor, Cameron actively works to push back against non-liberatory practices, ensuring that the schools she partners with do not perpetuate assimilationist and one-size-fits-all school norms (Cormier et al., 2024; Waite, 2024).

When asked what impact she hoped National Board-Certified teachers were having on their school communities, Cameron emphasized two aspirations: (a) the development of equity-centered leadership, and (b) a fundamental shift away from the deficit-oriented culture that dominates many school environments. Cameron's own schooling experiences were marked by cultural erasure, shaping a critical consciousness that now informed her approach as a culturally responsive supervisor. In her leadership, she actively challenges assimilationist norms and intentionally works to assert student identities through inclusive curriculum and affirming pedagogical practices. Reflecting on the enduring legacy of assimilation in schools, Cameron explained:

There's a lot of assimilation. If you look at the history of schooling—it's all about taking the child, the language, the culture, away from the child to be molded into a U.S. standard. Speak English. Know this version of history. And only this version. We still see that today.... And her books. The bookshelf. It had books in Egyptian language, which I guess is Arabic, but they have, like pyramid books. They had books about friendships in English. They have books which I believe it was either some type of Asian language. I don't know which one, but it was culturally responsive and representative of the students.

Here, Cameron's instructional supervision became a vehicle for reorienting the cultural practices of schools, affirming multilingualism, rejecting racialized assimilation, and holding institutions

accountable (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). In discussing what it means to grow as an educator within the framework of National Board standards, Cameron centered practices that honor the developmental needs of young children. She critiqued dominant approaches in early childhood education that prioritize early academic achievement at the expense of play, exploration, and social-emotional learning. Cameron's culturally responsive supervision also manifested in her critiques of early childhood pedagogy that emphasized accelerated academic skills over developmentally appropriate practice. She identified these trends as extensions of hegemonic ideologies that privilege white, middle-class norms of productivity and early literacy benchmarks over play-based, joyful learning (Delpit, 2012; Gay, 2018), she said:

We sometimes have expectations for young, 3-, 4-, 5-, 6-, 7-year-olds that are not okay.... Kids do not need to be reading in front of a screen. They should be using Play-Doh before they're using a pencil or a pen.... They need to have social interactions.... The kids will learn to read and write naturally and organically if we, as educators, provide those opportunities. It doesn't need to be forced.

As an instructional leader, Cameron demonstrated how her supervisory practice was grounded in asset-based perspectives. Her focus on organic learning and social development validated the varied ways young children make meaning of their experiences, especially those from multilingual and multicultural backgrounds (Gay, 2018; Paris, 2012). By refusing premature academic compliance and instead advocating for culturally and developmentally aligned instruction, Cameron positions herself within a tradition of equity-centered educators and leaders who challenge the racialized expectations embedded within dominant schooling models (Gay, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Paris, 2012). Moreover, Cameron operationalizes her supervisory stance through her role as a mentor coordinator. She actively shapes the placement process for new teachers, ensuring that the environments in which they are placed are conducive to culturally responsive practice. For example, she said:

As a mentor coordinator, I go out to different school sites, ensuring that wherever I put my mentee, the school site is going to be amazing.... I don't want to see your rug time being 40 minutes long.... The teacher had rug time. It was 20 minutes, but the whole time was singing and dancing—perfect. That's what I want to see.

This example reflected how Cameron's supervisory disposition extended beyond philosophical commitments into everyday decision-making. By redefining what counts as "high-quality" early childhood practice—through the inclusion of music, movement, and joy—Cameron models a vision of supervision that is relational, humanizing, and responsive to the developmental needs of diverse young learners (Gay, 2018; Mette et al., 2023). In doing so, she protects her mentees from harmful pedagogical practices while advocating for environments that affirm children's cultural identities and full personhood.

As we argued in our conceptual framework, Cameron's practice illustrates a profound alignment with the tenets of *Architecture of Accomplished Teaching* (NBPTS, 2016) and the core principles of CRIS (Cormier et al., 2024) and CRSL (Khalifa, 2018). Her leadership approach affirms the pedagogical value of cultural knowledge, reflective practice, asset-based student learning, and collective responsibility—tenets also reflected in the *'What Book'* (NBPTS, 2017). Rather than

positioning professional excellence as a fixed endpoint, Cameron engages the process as iterative, justice-oriented, and rooted in the lived realities of students and teachers alike. In doing so, her supervision not only supports educators in navigating existing systems but also helps them reimagine and reconstruct those systems in the service of equity and emancipatory outcomes (Khalifa et al., 2016; Waite, 2024).

Transforming Teaching and Leadership Praxis

Similar to Cameron, Casey, a veteran Black educator in the GSUSD, also describes how formative experiences shaped her work as a supervisor and mentor. Casey, who brings three decades of experience in classroom teaching said education is “our family business,” recounts volunteering in her mother’s kindergarten class as a college student. When working with Steven, a name she still remembers, Casey said Steven struggled with writing W, “but kept making it an M and I was holding his hand. I had him trace it. I had him write it in highlighter, and he wrote over it.” After leaving Steven to practice by himself, Casey recalled, “a few minutes later, he came screaming across the room, and when he showed that, the look of pride on his face, I was hooked.” Here, Casey describes, what Higgins (2005) refers to as career imprints, how an early experience developed her critical consciousness (Waite, 2021) and elements of accomplished teaching (NBPTS, 2016; Walrond, 2025b). Ultimately these experiences motivated Casey to become a teacher. It stands to reason that early career imprints (Higgins, 2005) that supported Casey’s critical consciousness (Waite, 2021) and her orientation toward accomplished teaching (NBPTS, 2016; Walrond, 2025b), continue to inform her supervisory approach, which is deeply aligned with the C.A.R.E. Framework and the and the Five Core Propositions of the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 2016). Casey’s instructional leadership also embodies the tenets of culturally responsive instructional supervision (CRIS) and culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL), both of which foreground critical consciousness, relational trust, and affirming pedagogy for students of the Global Majority (Khalifa et al., 2016; Waite, 2021).

Much like her formative experience with Steven, Casey’s facilitation challenges the compliance-driven orientation that many teachers bring to the National Board Certification (NBC) process—a mindset often rooted in institutional accountability rather than equity-focused practices. The lesson she learned from Steven—that meaningful learning begins with responsiveness to a student’s needs—now shapes how she mentors teachers. For Casey, culturally responsive supervision is not merely a technical exercise but a liberatory praxis (Khalifa et al., 2016; Waite, 2021; Walrond, 2025b)—an enactment of the C.A.R.E. framework’s equity-centered principle of continuous improvement. She approaches supervision as an ongoing cycle of reflection, feedback, and responsiveness, where teachers learn to study their practice through the same compassionate, inquiry-driven stance that once helped Steven trace his W. She affirmed:

It shifts from ‘What do I have to do?’ and ‘How do I comply?’ into ‘Why did I make that teaching move?’ and ‘What do you notice in this student work?’... The way teachers reflect on their work evolves. It becomes about ‘What can I learn from my students in order to help them even more?’ That shift—from performing for a score to deep reflection about children—is everything. And that’s what makes them better educators.

Here, Casey's words echo her early imprint with Steven: both moments center learning as reciprocal. Just as she once learned to teach by attending closely to a child's struggle and joy, she now cultivates that same equity-minded, reflective stance among the teachers she supports—modeling continuous improvement not as compliance, but as care (Walrond, 2025b). Casey's emphasis on the Five Core Propositions deepened this shift by instilling in teachers a structured yet humanizing lens through which to examine the interplay between their practice and their students' lived experiences:

I appreciate the focus on the core propositions.... It gets teachers in the mindset of thinking about their practice—how it impacts student learning, and what the evidence of that learning is. That's where you start to see real instructional transformation.

In summary, Casey's instructional leadership illustrates how culturally responsive supervision—rooted in her formative experiences in her mother's Kindergarten classroom and her early work with Steven, alongside the guiding principles of NB professional standards—can disrupt the performative culture of schooling and cultivate authentic, student-centered practice (Cormier et al., 2024; Gay, 2018; Khalifa, 2018). Her approach exemplifies how Accomplished and Affirming Teaching (AAT), Culturally Responsive Instructional Supervision (CRIS), and Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL) converge within an equity-centered practice of continuous improvement, empowering educators to become not only more effective but also more just.

Carter, a Latinx veteran high school history teacher and NBC facilitator, exemplifies the profound impact of culturally responsive instructional supervision when anchored in the core tenets of AAT, CRIS, and CRSL. With over two decades of experience in middle and high school classrooms, Carter has developed a pedagogical approach grounded in reflective inquiry, responsiveness to student needs, and equity-centered transformation (Ladson-Billings, 1995; NBPTS, 2016). His work is deeply aligned with the NBPTS (2016), which posited that accomplished teachers are committed to students and their learning, know the subjects they teach, are responsible for managing and monitoring student learning, think systematically about their practice, and are members of learning communities. After earning his NBC, Carter made a radical move uncommon among veteran educators: he redesigned his entire curricular framework across four content areas—World History, U.S. History, Government, and Economics. He said:

I've lesson planned the entire year for all my subjects. I now have a foundation upon which I can build through deeper reflection and revisiting of those lessons...always in the pursuit of something higher, something better, with more differentiation, more access. That's what National Board taught me.

This curricular overhaul reflected more than a technical adjustment—it signaled a paradigmatic shift toward a culturally responsive pedagogical posture, one that is iterative, student-centered, and equity-focused (Khalifa et al., 2016; Paris, 2012). Carter's leadership and facilitation modeled the core principles of CRIS and CRSL by foregrounding reflection as a daily practice and by positioning teachers—and himself—as intellectuals in service of student growth. His

culturally responsive supervision does not end with candidate mentoring; it reverberates in his own classroom practice. For example, he noted:

The reflective process is now automatic. When I'm working with candidates, I'm reminding them to think about what they're doing, why they're doing it, and how it connects to students. And then, I find myself doing the same thing in my own classroom. I cross-check myself.

Carter's approach illustrated how NBC can act as both a mirror and a blueprint for instructional transformation. By embedding the NBPTS core propositions within facilitation and personal teaching practice, he enacted culturally responsive supervision that pushes beyond compliance toward a reimagined curriculum responsive to the histories, identities, and needs of his students (Gay, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016). Through this dual role as teacher and leader, Carter exemplifies the transformative potential of CRIS and CRSL: supervision is not merely oversight, but a vehicle for liberatory teaching, reflective growth, and culturally affirming instruction (Cormier et al., 2024; Khalifa, 2018).

Research Question 2: In what ways, if at all, do NBC facilitators enact supervisory mentorship as a form of justice-oriented leadership?

Supervisory Mentorship as Justice-Oriented Leadership

Carter, Casey, and Cameron exemplified how culturally responsive supervision operates as an instrument of educational justice (Cormier et al., 2024). Through their facilitation work in the NBC process, they reframed supervision as an act of C.A.R.E., community uplift, and collective transformation within schools, their educational community, and among students. Anchored in the principles of CRIS and CRSL and grounded in our conceptual framework of AAT, their leadership advances a vision of mentorship rooted in reflection, identity, and pedagogical liberation.

Supervision Through Collective Inquiry and Facilitation

Carter viewed his role not as performative mentorship but as a responsibility. His supervisory stance embodies communal reciprocity, positioning mentorship as an act of restorative leadership within historically under-resourced school systems (Khalifa, 2018). For example, he said: "They need to spread that wealth and give back.... I need to work with them to get them where I'm at, so they can feel how I feel. And you can't assign a dollar amount to that." Carter's supervisory stance embodies communal reciprocity, positioning mentorship as an act of restorative leadership within historically under-resourced school systems. Justice-oriented instructional leaders expand the reach of mentorship by transforming it into a systemic lever for equity. Rather than limiting support to individual teacher growth, they embed culturally responsive mentorship in the very fabric of school leadership and professional learning (Khalifa, 2018; Mette et al., 2023). Casey exemplified this approach by using the tools of NBC not only to support candidates but also to recalibrate how her entire staff engages with teaching and learning. She said:

Well, it actually already has really made me even reflect as a leader. I'm like, why am I not focused on National Board standards?... Even before we started school this year, there was a standard around your classroom environment.... I had the K–2 teachers reading the Early Childhood Generalist section and the 3–5 teachers reading the Middle Childhood Generalist section...annotate this document. Underline what you're currently doing, circle something that you want to implement...because these are National Board standards.... So, let's reflect on that, and let's, you know, make some changes.... I'm actually trying to figure out how I could do this process with my entire staff next year.

Casey's reflection revealed how supervisory mentorship, when grounded in justice, becomes a vehicle for systemic transformation. By integrating the National Board standards into schoolwide instructional conversations, she shifted professional learning away from top-down mandates and toward reflective, teacher-driven inquiry. This practice honors the professional agency of teachers while holding space for self-assessment, growth, and collective improvement—all of which are vital in schools serving students of the Global Majority. Her facilitation was not limited to helping individuals pass assessments; instead, it reflected a deep commitment to building capacity and emancipatory reflection across her schoolhouse. This example embodied the principles of C.A.R.E. and CRIS (Cormier et al., 2024), which position supervision as a relational and culturally situated process. Through intentional use of National Board frameworks, Casey exemplified how supervisory mentorship can function as a justice-oriented practice, fostering critical reflection and culturally sustaining pedagogy among staff. Her actions also aligned with Khalifa et al.'s (2016) CRSL framework, which emphasized the role of leaders in developing teacher capacity to reflect critically on instructional practice and promote asset-based, inclusive learning environments. In this way, Casey's leadership did not replicate top-down managerial approaches but, rather, modeled equity-driven, participatory learning grounded in professional trust and pedagogical C.A.R.E.

Supervision Through Facilitation and Collaborative Professional Learning

Cameron operationalized this ethos through inclusive co-facilitation, naming feedback as both a tool and a value. Her approach exemplified a dialogic, relational stance that centered trust, mutual growth, and responsiveness to cultural identity—core tenets of culturally responsive supervision and culturally sustaining pedagogy (Cormier et al., 2024; Paris, 2012). For example, she said:

I give them feedback, and they give me feedback. I'm like, I really I need feedback, constant feedback, to learn and grow. So let me know how I could do better. Let me know what I missed. So, it's like, how that I think that was my biggest, my biggest growth when I told the other facilitators, like, I really want support with content, like, I want to make sure that I give the correct content. I want to make sure that I'm supporting all of our adult learners and anything in regards to adult learning styles, like, how do I become better at that?

Cameron's approach illustrated the CRIS (Cormier et al., 2024; Paris, 2012) principle that supervision should be dialogic, vulnerable, and grounded in the cultural identities of both educators and learners. Cameron's supervisory practice extended beyond shaping classroom

environments and mentoring individual teachers; it also involved a broader examination of school culture and the racialized logic embedded in U.S. educational structures. She was clear about the role that schools have historically played in erasing students' identities through policies of assimilation, monolingualism, and curricular exclusion (Ladson-Billings, 1995). For her, culturally responsive supervision must also serve as a platform for advancing racial justice. She said:

There's a lot of policing that happens in school. There's a lot of assimilation. If you look at the history of schooling—it's all about taking the child, the language, the culture, away from the child to be molded into a U.S. standard. Speak English. Know this version of history. And only this version. We still see that today. How is a teacher showing—not just one story—but the many stories in the room? Today's classroom had Afghani students, a Russian student, African American students, Latino students—everything.

Through this analysis, Cameron signaled that the work of the culturally responsive instructional supervisor is not only pedagogical but also justice-oriented. Supervisors must be willing to examine and disrupt the epistemic violence that undergirds traditional curriculum and discipline practices—violence that renders students' home languages, cultural narratives, and lived histories invisible (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Paris, 2012). Her disposition reflected what Khalifa et al. (2018) identified as a hallmark of CRSL: engaging with school-wide structures to dismantle systemic inequities rather than simply improving them within the confines of individual classrooms.

Together, these instructional supervisors offered a model for what justice-oriented supervision can look like in action. Their work moves mentorship from the margins to the center of instructional leadership, where teacher growth is not about compliance but about transformation (Khalifa, 2018; Mette et al., 2023; NBPTS, 2023). By grounding supervision in cultural responsiveness, relational trust, and a relentless focus on student learning, they modeled how supervision can serve as a liberatory force.

Table 3 maps key findings from the study to the C.A.R.E. Framework, illustrating how each participant (Cameron, Casey, and Carter) exemplifies the framework through culturally responsive instructional supervision and justice-oriented leadership. Across participants, C.A.R.E., functioned as a multidimensional model of liberatory instructional supervision.

Table 3: Participants Instructional Leadership Practices linked to the C.A.R.E. Framework

C.A.R.E. Component	Framework Definition	How the Overall Findings Reflect a Component of C.A.R.E.	Cameron	Casey	Carter	Theoretical Alignment
Culturally Responsive	Supervisors affirm the cultural, linguistic, and social identities of teachers and students, rejecting deficit-based and assimilationist ideologies.	Facilitators enacted culturally responsive supervision by affirming multilingualism, centering belonging, and integrating students' lived experiences into instructional feedback.	Rejected assimilationist early childhood norms and reimagined supervision that validated multilingual, play-based learning; ensured mentees were placed in culturally affirming school sites.	Drew on cultural and ancestral knowledge as a Black woman leader to help teachers connect classroom practices to students' identities and community histories.	Centered students' cultural backgrounds and voices when redesigning his curriculum across content areas to reflect the histories and experiences of marginalized communities.	CRIS (Cormier et al., 2024; Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) and CRSL (Khalifa, 2018) cultural responsiveness as a foundation for equity-focused leadership and liberation.
Accomplished Teaching	Teaching and supervision reflect mastery through reflective inquiry, evidence-based decision-making, and continuous professional learning.	Facilitators modeled accomplished teaching by linking NBPTS standards to culturally sustaining practices, helping teachers examine evidence of learning through student work.	Used NBPTS core propositions to mentor early childhood teachers toward child-centered, developmentally appropriate practices emphasizing joy and exploration.	Used NBPTS standards as tools for whole-staff inquiry, guiding teachers to align their instructional decisions with evidence of student growth rather than compliance.	Rebuilt entire curricular frameworks in History and Civics to include deeper reflection, differentiation, and culturally responsive assessment rooted in student evidence.	AAT (NBPTS, 2016) positions accomplished teaching as iterative, reflective, and student-centered.
Reflective Educators	Educators engage in ongoing cycles of reflection, feedback, and self-inquiry to deepen understanding of their practice and its sociocultural implications.	Facilitators fostered reflection as a dialogic process—teachers examined their instructional moves and engaged in feedback exchanges that built trust and collective learning.	Modeled reciprocal feedback with co-facilitators and candidates, encouraging vulnerability and continuous learning: “I give them feedback, and they give me feedback.”	Shifted teachers from compliance to reflective inquiry: “It becomes about ‘What can I learn from my students in order to help them even more?’”	Emphasized reflection as an automatic process in his teaching and supervision: “The reflective process is now automatic... I cross-check myself.”	CRIS (Cormier et al., 2024; Waite, 2021) reflection as emancipatory practice and collective inquiry.

Equity-Centered Practice	Supervision and leadership are explicitly justice-oriented, addressing systemic inequities through mentorship, collaboration, and community accountability.	Facilitators enacted mentorship as justice-oriented leadership—reframing supervision as a tool for systemic transformation and collective uplift within schools.	Confronted assimilationist schooling and advocated for representation in classrooms; viewed supervision as a platform for dismantling inequitable norms.	Used National Board standards to create collective, equity-driven professional learning with her entire staff, not just individual candidates.	Saw mentorship as communal reciprocity—helping others “get where I’m at” and redistributing pedagogical knowledge as an act of restorative justice.	CRSL (Khalifa, 2018; Mette et al., 2023; Watson & Baxley, 2021) equity and justice as central to leadership and supervision.
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Discussion

This study examined how National Board facilitators enacted culturally responsive instructional supervision as a justice-oriented practice. Drawing on the experiences of Carter, Casey, and Cameron, we found that supervisory mentorship can serve as a transformative lever for professional growth and systemic change. These findings aligned with and expanded on The C.A.R.E. Framework, which conceptualizes effective leadership as culturally responsive, grounded in accomplished teaching, sustained through reflective practice, and anchored in equity-centered commitments. The participants in this study demonstrated how culturally responsive supervision is not a neutral or technical process but, rather, one that is deeply relational, personal, and political (Bristol et al., 2023; Cormier et al., 2024; Gay, 2018). For Cameron, supervisory mentorship was shaped by her experiences as a multilingual, first-generation college graduate who experienced linguistic erasure and cultural invisibility in U.S. schools. Her commitment to affirming teachers and students from the Global Majority reflects the Culturally Responsive component of The C.A.R.E. Framework. By designing feedback loops that center empathy, inclusion, and belonging, Cameron repositioned supervision as a practice of recognition rather than compliance. Her focus on challenging assimilationist schooling practices echoed calls for culturally sustaining pedagogies that affirm students’ full linguistic and cultural repertoires (Paris & Alim, 2017).

Similarly, Carter’s work demonstrated how accomplished teaching becomes the foundation for effective supervision. After earning NBC, he overhauled his entire curriculum across multiple high school history courses, embedding reflective inquiry and differentiation into daily practice. His stance aligned with the Accomplished Teaching strand of The C.A.R.E. Framework and with NBPTS’s (2023) proposition that teachers must think systematically about their practice and learn from experience. Carter’s commitment to modeling reflective inquiry for candidates and practicing it himself underscored how certification is not a fixed endpoint, but an evolving pedagogical identity. His work supported findings by Khalifa et al. (2016) that CRSL requires school-based actors to act as models of reflective, student-centered practice.

Both Carter and Casey provided evidence of the Reflective Educators strand of The C.A.R.E. Framework. Their supervision was rooted in ongoing self-interrogation, not only about

instructional moves but also about the structural inequities that shape teaching conditions. Casey, for instance, transformed her facilitation into schoolwide professional development by asking teachers to annotate and analyze National Board standards as a means of guiding instructional dialogue. Her leadership demonstrated the potential of using accomplished teaching frameworks to build teacher capacity collectively—not as a managerial intervention but as a participatory, equity-driven learning process. This approach resonated with CRIS scholarship, which asserted that instructional leaders must not only recognize the sociopolitical context of schooling but also use supervision to interrupt inequitable systems (Cormier et al., 2024).

The facilitators' practices also advanced the final strand of The C.A.R.E. framework: Equity-Centered Practice. Their supervision intentionally targeted inequities in how multilingual learners, young children, and historically marginalized teachers experience professional development and instruction. Cameron's insistence that play-based, developmentally appropriate instruction is not only pedagogically sound but also racially just reflected a broader critique of early childhood practices that reproduce racial and class-based expectations of productivity and compliance (Delpit, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2017). Similarly, Casey's use of National Board tools as a schoolwide learning system—for more than just certification candidates—positions equity not as a differentiated track for some, but as the baseline for all instructional conversations.

The C.A.R.E. Framework proved especially useful in articulating how these facilitators embodied leadership practices that transcend traditional models of supervision. Rather than functioning as evaluators or gatekeepers, Carter, Casey, and Cameron demonstrated leadership grounded in humility, relational trust, and the pursuit of collective professional growth. These findings contribute to emerging literature that frames instructional supervision as a site of liberatory practice (Khalifa et al., 2018), especially when it is intentionally decoupled from deficit-based evaluations and reoriented toward justice and capacity-building.

Importantly, this study suggested that when supervision is situated within a culturally responsive and justice-oriented framework—such as C.A.R.E.—it opens space for instructional leaders to align everyday mentoring, curricular design, and staff development with broader goals of educational equity. The shift from supervision-as-compliance to supervision-as-liberation requires not only new tools and frameworks but also a reimagining of leadership identity. The facilitators' use of their own educational journeys—both affirming and exclusionary—becomes the foundation for cultivating more responsive and humanizing conditions for other educators.

Limitations

While this study offers important insights into how facilitators enact culturally responsive instructional leadership through their engagement with the National Board process, several limitations warrant acknowledgment. First, the findings are drawn from a small, purposively selected group of facilitators within a specific geographic region (California) and organizational context, which may limit the generalizability of the results to other instructional leadership settings. Second, as a qualitative inquiry, the study relies heavily on self-reported experiences and researcher interpretation. Third, the focus on facilitators' perspectives provides a rich understanding of leadership practices but this paper does not include the corresponding perceptions of teachers or principals they support, which could offer a more comprehensive view

of how culturally responsive instructional supervision is experienced across multiple participants. From a critical standpoint, the limitation of NB candidates perspectives primarily centers where facilitators' practices were transformative and equity-centered. While this focus highlights the potential of culturally responsive instructional supervision (CRIS) to disrupt the dominant paradigms, it may also obscure the moments in which elements of hegemony were reproduced within facilitators' discourse or practice. Moreover, it may well be the case that transformation and reproduction often coexist within the same pedagogical spaces; thus, by presuming primarily "good" or liberatory outcomes, the paper may understate the tensions and contradictions inherent in educators' attempts to enact justice-oriented leadership (Khalifa, 2018; Waite, 2021). Future research could more explicitly interrogate these dualities—examining how supervision both resists and reinforces systemic norms—to provide a more complex understanding of culturally responsive leadership as a situated and iterative process.

Lastly, while the study emphasizes the transformative potential of culturally responsive instructional supervision, this paper does not empirically include the changes in NBC candidates practice or student learning outcomes. Future research could build on this work by incorporating mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine how these leadership practices influence sustained instructional and systemic change in schools over time.

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

Regarding implications for research, given our findings about the culturally responsive and justice-oriented practices that facilitators employ when working with teachers pursuing NBC, future research should explore how facilitators learn these practices. For example, do facilitators develop these culturally responsive and justice-oriented practices from the context in which they are teaching (e.g., working in schools with historically resilient youth)? Or are they learning these practices through formal training aimed at prospective National Board facilitators? Or might it be a combination of both? Understanding how facilitators develop and refine these culturally responsive and justice-oriented practices may well inform the burgeoning field of the enabling conditions that support current and prospective educational supervisors. A second area of future research could explore candidates' perceptions of facilitators' culturally responsive and justice-oriented practices and their influence on improving student learning. Given that facilitators employ these practices to improve how teachers support student learning, it would be important to understand the degree to which teachers describe shifts in their work after engaging with facilitators who employ culturally responsive and justice-oriented practices.

One implication for policy is centered on the NBPTS cultivation of facilitators. Similar to the standards developed for teachers pursuing NBC, NBPTS should develop standards for facilitators working with candidates. These standards should focus on the cultivation of culturally responsive and justice-oriented dispositions and practices. Moreover, after codifying standards for facilitators, NBPTS should develop a micro-credential for prospective facilitators. Developing both standards and a micro-credential will ensure more common and shared competencies of facilitators who are working to prepare teachers to become NBCTs.

Finally, regarding implications for practice, as NBPTS develops standards and a micro-credential, the organization should partner with National Board resource centers across the

country to train facilitators. Future trainings should embed frameworks such as C.A.R.E. and CRIS into the professional learning of instructional supervisors or facilitators. Moreover, this professional learning for facilitators working with teachers who are pursuing NBC could also be extended to district- and/or school-based coaches who are supporting teachers as well as in leadership preparation programs for aspiring school leaders. Integrating C.A.R.E. and CRIS can help schools, districts, and principal preparation programs move away from hierarchical, standardized models of supervision toward models that build on the knowledge, identities, and cultural assets of their educators. Drawing on these frameworks when developing coaches has the potential to support both school- and district-level equity-driven transformation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study illustrated how culturally responsive instructional supervision, when enacted through justice-oriented mentorship, can serve as a powerful force for pedagogical transformation and educational equity. Through the lens of The C.A.R.E. Framework—Culturally responsive, Accomplished teaching, Reflective educators, and Equity-centered practice—facilitators like Carter, Casey, and Cameron demonstrated how supervision rooted in relational trust, reflective inquiry, and cultural affirmation reimagines the role of leadership in schools. Their work shows that NBC is not merely a benchmark of excellence. As schools continue to grapple with persistent inequities, this study calls on educational leaders to embrace supervision more than a mechanism of control; it is a liberatory practice that cultivates culturally sustaining environments for both educators and students.

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