

Culturally Responsive Supervision as Humanization and Self-Determination

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Abstract

The studies represented in this collection illuminate a profound shift occurring in the field of instructional supervision and leadership. Although situated in different contexts, each manuscript converges upon the same deeply ethical and humanizing question: What does it mean to supervise, mentor, support, and evaluate educators in ways that restore dignity, honor community knowledge, and move schools toward justice? Here is what our field has missed: this is not a technical question. It is not about calibrating rubrics, tightening accountability structures, or mastering evaluation protocols. It is, instead, a question that reaches into the heart of schooling as a sociopolitical and historical project. Supervision is a site where power is enacted and contested, where the humanity of teachers and students can be either diminished or affirmed. It is a site where leaders decide whether they will reproduce colonial, corporate, and racialized systems of sorting, or whether they will participate in transforming them. Unfortunately, until now, it has largely been the former.

Keywords

culturally responsive supervision; humanization; instructional supervision; instructional leadership

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Afterword

Culturally responsive supervision and feedback as represented in these papers is not merely a new technique. It is a struggle for humanization. It is a process of decolonizing our professional relationships, our pedagogical commitments, and our institutional structures. And it is deeply aligned with the research on Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL), which insist that educational leadership must be community grounded, historically situated, critically conscious, and anchored in the lived realities of those most impacted by schooling. Ironically, for over 100 years, Western researchers have known that teaching and learning is contextual, and must rely on students' experiences and prior knowledges. But until now, this reality has not been reflected in how teachers have been supervised and mentored.

But across these articles, we see supervision reimagined as a collective activity rooted in justice-minded mentorship, reflective inquiry, and shared agency. Rather than reinforcing the traditional directional hierarchy of supervisor-to-teacher, these authors, and the courageous educators and leaders they studied, demonstrate how culturally responsive supervision builds relational trust, centers community epistemologies, and cultivates the critical self-reflection necessary for liberatory educational practice.

Racial and Histories of 'Making up Peoples'

The manuscripts also remind us that supervision and feedback are fundamentally racialized processes. The colonial legacies regarding how people would be described and then defined have become invisibilized around best practices in our current schooling contexts. Decisions about what counts as good teaching, what is valued or devalued, what is interpreted as rigor or deficit, are not neutral. They reflect sociopolitical histories of exclusion, anti-Blackness, Indigenous dispossession, and assimilationist schooling practices. To indigenous students and families, the word assimilation has often meant death. But some supervision tools would require supervisors to press for various types of Epistemicidal practices (i.e., assimilation that kills indigenous knowledges) in their instruction! As the literature review in this volume highlights, the absence of race-consciousness in principal supervisor standards is not merely an oversight, but it is an index of how deeply whiteness and Coloniality is embedded in the professional norms of supervision. By exposing these gaps, the authors call for a more explicit, historically grounded, and justice-oriented redefinition of supervisory leadership.

Community and Culturally Responsive Mentoring Supervision

In doing so, they align with the local community knowledges, uplift, and self-determination. For example, Black Radical Tradition and its emphasis on collective struggle, community protection, and epistemic freedom should be a consideration of mentors and supervisors. To educators, this tradition has always insisted that institutional change must begin with a recognition of the knowledge, moral authority, and lived experiences of marginalized communities. Similarly, Red Pedagogy and Indigenous educational scholarship remind us that supervision cannot be severed from questions of sovereignty, land, belonging, and self-determination. This is what our communities know and believe; how can we continue to discount this as educational leaders. Anti-colonial and anti-corporate critiques of schooling further push us to see supervision not as a

managerial mechanism but as a potential site of resistance against systems that commodify learning and constrain teacher autonomy.

The abstracts demonstrate how, when culturally responsive supervision is grounded in these liberatory traditions, it becomes a force that challenges deficit narratives, disrupts technocratic logic, and reorients educators toward relationship-centered and community-responsive praxis. What follows in the remainder of this afterword is an integration of the five abstracts into a unified reflection on the future of culturally responsive supervision and feedback.

New Learnings around Culturally Responsive Supervision and Mentoring

In the study on National Board Certification facilitators, Walrond and Bristol share how moving beyond compliance-based instructional supervision and into culturally grounded, justice-centered mentorship can happen. Using the C.A.R.E. Framework, facilitators transform the NBC standards from technical tools into catalysts for collective reflection and pedagogical transformation. Their mentorship is rooted not in bureaucratic oversight but in lived experience, community knowledge, and a belief in the collective capacity of teachers to enact culturally sustaining pedagogy. Supervisors become co-learners, not overseers; partners in pedagogical justice, not evaluators of individual performance. This confirms much of the prior research on culturally responsive leadership in its emphasis on critical self-reflection, deconstructing harmful ideologies, and cultivating new dispositions that position teachers as holders of community trust.

This transformation also resonates with the Black Radical Tradition's insistence on building pedagogical spaces where teachers reclaim agency and reject narratives that misrepresent or marginalize the epistemologies of Black, Indigenous, and global majority students. When supervision becomes a vehicle for dismantling deficit narratives, it moves from managerial oversight to liberatory accompaniment.

In another contribution, Waite deepens this conversation by centering ethical clarity, reflective inquiry, and identity examination as imperatives for culturally responsive instructional supervision. Through the CRIS framework and the RISA cycle of Reflection, Interrogation, Self-examination, and Awareness, the study underscores that supervision is not only relational but moral. Leaders cannot guide others toward responsiveness without first interrogating their own assumptions, identity positions, and epistemological orientations. The mixed-methods findings reveal leaders' desire for deeper critical engagement and their recognition that culturally responsive supervision requires ongoing disruption of the comfort associated with traditional leadership norms.

These insights echo the CRSL call for leaders to engage in deep, critical self-reflection as a precursor to transformative action. They also resonate with community experiential knowledges that insists ethical practice must be grounded in humility, relational accountability, and an understanding of one's own positionality within and around structures of power. Waite's contribution clarifies that culturally responsive supervision is not a static skillset but a cyclical, iterative, and emotionally demanding practice that requires leaders to sit with discomfort while moving toward justice.

Wiley et al. turn our attention to district-level leadership and principal supervisors. This literature review exposes a stark disconnect between the rhetoric of equity in professional standards and the realities of anti-racist practice. Standards that invoke equity but avoid race, power, and structural redistribution reinforce the very inequities they claim to address. Supervision that focuses solely on technical coaching or compliance-based evaluation fails to confront the ongoing racialized distribution of resources and opportunities. This paper pushes back on the assumptions that equity can be achieved through technical-rational and policy leadership moves. It brings to light structures power in an organization.

This critique aligns with anti-colonial scholarship, in that institutional standards often function to maintain existing hierarchies. It also connects to critique of schooling, where leaders are pressured to prioritize efficiency, metrics, and performance indicators rather than the humanizing work of community empowerment and cultural responsiveness. The findings highlight the urgent need for principal supervisors to become explicitly anti-racist actors, capable of guiding principals toward practices that redistribute resources, address racialized harm, and transform instructional inequities at their root.

In Britt's study, we see participatory action research enact culturally responsive supervision in a rural Early College High School setting. Using Community Learning Exchange (CLE) principles, the leader co-creates a learning community where teachers engage in iterative inquiry cycles, reflective dialogue, and equity-focused practice transformation. This approach challenges traditional supervisory hierarchies by positioning teachers as co-researchers and co-leaders. The study demonstrates how culturally responsive supervision, grounded in trust, dialogue, and evidence, can shift instructional discourse practices to center student voice, identity, and rigor.

Here we see the practical enactment of the core dimensions of culturally responsive supervising: building cultural competence, deprivatizing practice, engaging in critical self-reflection, and constructing professional learning communities that honor community funds of knowledge. The CLE protocols align with many liberatory traditions, as well as Indigenous pedagogical traditions that treat dialogue, story, and shared wisdom as central to collective learning. This study shows that culturally responsive supervision is not merely conceptual but possible, and operationally viable. Leaders can build sustained communities of practice that interrupt inequitable pedagogical norms and promote more humanizing classroom discourse.

Watson and Alston's narrative inquiry reveals how instructional leaders define and enact Culturally Responsive Instructional Leadership (CRIL) within the constraints and possibilities of urban school systems. Their narratives show how identity, community context, and lived-experiences shape leadership practices. The leaders describe tensions between district accountability demands and culturally responsive commitments—a tension that countless leaders across the country navigate daily. Their stories show that is not a neutral leadership orientation but a political stance requiring courage, relational skill, and the ability to negotiate conflicting institutional pressures.

Their findings reinforce the culturally responsive leadership principle that leadership must be culturally grounded and responsive to local community histories, needs, and aspirations. They also resonate with the long-standing calls within the Black Radical Tradition and other liberatory

pedagogies for leaders to stand with communities in resisting schooling practices that marginalize, surveil, or dehumanize students of color.

Recognizing Histories—Reclaiming Community and Critical Consciousness

Across all five studies, a coherent message emerges: *culturally responsive supervision is inseparable from critical consciousness, community accountability, and structural transformation*. It cannot be reduced to strategies or checklists. It must be understood as a continuous, relational, and justice-oriented project grounded in the humanization of students and educators.

Culturally responsive supervision demands leaders who reflect deeply on their identities, disrupt racialized and colonial practices in schools, and partner with teachers and communities to co-create liberatory learning environments. It requires rejecting technocratic, corporate, and compliance-driven paradigms that treat teachers as implementers rather than intellectuals, and students as data points rather than whole beings embedded in families, cultures, and histories. This volume shows us that while improved instruction is crucial to culturally responsive supervision, it is also about transforming the very purposes and relationships that define schooling. In doing so, it aligns with broader traditions of liberation: the Black Radical Tradition's commitment to collective struggle and epistemic justice; Red Pedagogy's call for sovereignty, healing, and anti-colonial resistance; and other community empowerment frameworks that demand schools honor the lived knowledge, histories, and self-determination of global majority youth.

Taken together, the manuscripts illuminate what culturally responsive supervision and feedback can become when anchored in humanization rather than hierarchy; in community wisdom rather than compliance; and in critical self-reflection rather than managerial neutrality. They remind us that culturally responsive supervision is not merely about directing or correcting teachers, but rather, much more about accompanying them in the shared project of educational justice and community uplift.

This afterword closes with a call consistent with scholarship on cultural responsiveness. Leadership preparation programs, school districts, and policy structures must re-envision supervision as a practice of liberation. This requires centering community knowledges, honoring teacher agency, restructuring evaluation systems, and building reflective, justice-oriented professional cultures. It also requires leaders who understand themselves as co-constructors of learning environments where all students' identities, histories, and communities are sources of strength. The future of culturally responsive supervision lies in leaders who embrace this as a commitment to the humanization and self-determination of those they serve. The scholarship in this collection provides a powerful foundation for that future.

Author Biography

Muhammad Khalifa is a Professor of Educational Administration and the Executive Director of Urban and Rural Initiatives at The Ohio State University. His research examines how urban school leaders enact culturally responsive leadership and anti-oppressive schooling practices. He is a leading expert on equity audits for school districts. He was previously a teacher and an administrator in Detroit Public Schools, and he has also contributed to community-informed education projects in Africa, Latin America, and Asia in various capacities. He formerly held the endowed Beck Chair of Ideas in Education at the University of Minnesota. He has contributed to education, development, or research programs in several contexts, including Canada, Brazil, South Africa, Pakistan, Australia, Somalia, Morocco, Ghana, Morocco, Guyana, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. He was awarded the prestigious AERA Division A Excellence in Research Award in 2024.