

# Culturally sustaining instructional leadership: Perspectives from Native American public school principals in Montana and Wyoming

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## **Abstract**

*The purpose of this quantitative study was to gain a deeper understanding of principal beliefs of an emergent framework called Culturally Sustaining Instructional Leadership (CSIL) developed from a review of literature designed to support the implementation of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP). Through a detailed review of literature, six instructional elements and five cultural elements were developed to guide principals in the removal of barriers and in support of teacher implementation of CSP. Principals of public schools located on Native American reservations in Montana and Wyoming (USA) were surveyed regarding their beliefs about CSIL practices and if their beliefs differed between instructional elements and cultural elements. Through a reporting of means and paired samples t-testing, the results of this study indicated principals demonstrated a significant preference for working in instructional versus cultural elements. The lowest CSIL element was student empowerment signifying that the voices of Native American students were not being heard. The principals of this study did not have a clear definition of the Democratic Project of Schooling congruent with Paris (2012). The implications of this study are the need for training and awareness in CSP and CSIL to preservice administrators in training and in-service administrators in the field.*

**Keywords:** *Culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP); culturally sustaining instructional leadership (CSIL); democratic project of schooling; educational leadership; instructional leadership*

## **Introduction**

In 2012, Paris called upon educators at all levels to move beyond culturally relevant pedagogy to a pedagogy that is culturally sustaining – Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris, 2012). Ladson-Billings (2014) asserted that culturally relevant instruction has become a fixed mindset due to a lack of depth within multicultural classroom instruction and disinterest in the areas of socioeconomic and politics by practitioners who have instead opted for more politically correct forms of discourse or avoidance of the issues completely. While CSP explicitly resists the suppression of minority cultures and languages and seeks to foster multiculturalism and multilingualism for all students and teachers as ways of knowing and being to solve real-world problems (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014), barriers exist to the widespread implementation of CSP in classrooms across America. These barriers lie at the feet of the school principal, directly impact teachers, and reflect principal leadership practices.

Teachers have been long held in vulnerable positions due to pressures from parents and school principals and, as a result, often conform to levels of least resistance particularly in areas of curriculum and instruction (Blase, 1988). “Parents seemed to hold a traditional perspective toward education (a “basic” education was emphasized); innovation in curriculum and teaching methods was disfavored” (Blase, 1988, p. 129). With regards to principals:

Nontraditional (“controversial”) methods, even those suggested by educational research, were often discouraged directly or simply not supported, materially or symbolically. In other instances, the data indicate that principals restricted the teachers’ use of instructional materials (e.g., textbooks, literature) and opportunities to discuss certain topics (e.g., sex, dating, drugs,

abortion, religion, evolution, practices by state and local governments, business practices) that could provoke reactions from parents and community members. (Blase, 1988, p. 133)

Given this insight into teaching and teachers, it is no wonder Ladson-Billings' perspective regarding culturally relevant teaching, pedagogy, and multiculturalism emerged. This vulnerability and conformity support the control of curriculum and instruction by principals where teachers regardless of the classroom are strongly pressured to be on the same page of the textbook on the same day working in "perfect parallel" (Kelchtermans, 2011, p. 70). According to Bushnell (2017), while teachers have professionalism with presumed autonomy, "inappropriate and externally constructed surveillance" (p. 129) and the bureaucratic structure of schools and districts inhibits and disrupts that autonomy as well as subordinating teachers, and constraining their pedagogical options and intellectual freedoms. Examples of this external surveillance and control include district-constructed [and enforced] curriculum guides, online lesson planning platforms, and formative assessment systems focused on standards. Teacher vulnerability, conformity, control, pressure, and external surveillance run counter and in direct opposition to the ideals and propositions postulated by Paris (2012) and others in support of CSP.

Further, with regards to principal leadership, Finnigan and Steward (2009) found that in inadequate, low achieving, at-risk schools [those most in need of CSP] principals failed to lead, relying more on management practices than leadership, and did not improve their schools academically as a result. Specifically, these principals did not set organizational direction, develop teachers, and distribute leadership, running counter to the seminal calls for positive instructional leadership practices made by Cotton (2003) and Leithwood, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) to improve similar schools. Sleeter and Carmona (2017) indicated principals could exacerbate inequities due to their administrative actions that further place students, communities, and teachers on the lower rungs of power. Additionally, principals, due to weak instructional leadership, lack of support for the appropriate cultural instructional practice, and blind implementation of basal-based curriculum, create further distance between advantaged and disadvantaged students.

While Paris (2012) called for the need of a sustaining model to give all students equal footing as part of a democratic project of schooling, he did not, as has subsequent CSP research (Ladson-Billings, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014), call for support for CSP implementation from the educational leadership field, and principals in particular. A sizable number of administrators and pre-service administrators, when questioned about democracy and democratic practices within their schools, respond regarding shared governance and distributed leadership (Beauchum & Dentith, 2004) and/or as an institution of democracy (Gerstl-Pepin & Aiken, 2009). These responses are offered rather than education focusing on students' native culture and first language (Paris, 2012; Scheurich, 1998). Paris (2012) was precise in his vision for the democratic project of schooling as linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism. If teachers are to implement CSP to sustain and extend the richness of our pluralistic society (Paris, 2012), and if principals are to pursue visions of democratic projects of schooling corresponding with CSP frameworks at deep levels of implementation, then schools must move beyond current practices. Schools must respond with the necessary instructional leadership to foster, develop, and empower this type of education and embrace a new, congruent form of leadership to CSP called Culturally Sustaining Instructional Leadership (CSIL).

At this time, CSP has not been embraced by the educational leadership community, and there is a specific void in the instructional leadership field as it relates to CSP with regards to research. In this article, the authors draw upon literature and professional experience to offer the following primer on CSP, as well as introducing Culturally Sustaining Instructional Leadership to the field in the form of a quantitative study to address the following research questions from the perspective of principals leading Native American public schools in Montana and Wyoming:

- What are principals' beliefs about Culturally Sustaining Instructional Leadership practices?
- How do principals' beliefs about instructional practices differ from their beliefs about cultural practices?

## Conceptual framework

### *A Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy primer*

CSP is an attitude towards education that maintains fidelity to the values of American democracy yet pushes the boundaries of current U.S. society. It is a growth mindset. As a pedagogical model, CSP goes beyond just exposing students to non-dominant languages and cultures, to a position of deep understanding and critical examination of the issues affecting the members of non-dominant languages and cultures (Paris & Alim, 2014). Prime examples of this approach include the teaching of Native American languages within schools; the embracing and valuing of Hip Hop culture within the classroom; the acceptance of African-American English as part of instructional talk; and the exploration of issues such as disproportionality, poverty, and lack of jobs within classrooms (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

CSP is grounded in three critiques: (1) CSP is asset-based; (2) CSP is a forward-looking perspective grounded in historical teachings, cultural traditions, and community practices; and (3) CSP encourages each stakeholder to look reflectively inward with a critical eye to examine personal actions and, in particular, cultural practices that are more troublesome to society (Paris & Alim, 2014). First, as an asset-based pedagogy, CSP is more aligned to strengths-based leadership, appreciative inquiry, and transformation instead of change (McGoff, 2012). Essentially, CSP looks at what is right, good, and working in a culture, race, language, and person, building on these strengths instead of trying to tear them down and take them apart. It is not a pedagogy of fear. Rather, CSP by its very nature is both inclusionary and empowering, seeking to ensure the survivability and thriving of all cultures and languages. Second, one culture and language should not supersede another – all are important and relevant particularly in the educational space. Thus, CSP seeks to sustain heritage and community practices (Paris, 2012) as the way to connect the past, present, and the future. Finally, with all cultures and languages (dominant and non-dominant), positives and negatives exist. CSP asks us as individuals, educators, and as a society to look inward, reflect, and question what is right and what is wrong. Once we have done that, CSP asks society to keep what is right and to address what is wrong positively. Examples of this inner reflection and call to action include the loss by Native people of the ability to speak their Native language and lack of knowledge of tribal history, the violence associated with Hip Hop music, and dual language instruction without the corresponding dual culture instruction (McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014). For teachers to address these issues successfully in the classroom with CSP, leadership is needed, specifically, instructional leadership (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2004)



Figure 1. CSIL framework

### **What is Culturally Sustaining Instructional Leadership?**

CSIL aims to provide instructional leadership that will support, incubate, and empower the implementation of culturally sustaining pedagogy across classrooms and schools as well as spread the tenets of CSP into the community. As illustrated in Figure 1, CSIL is viewed as the container in which CSP rests.

Culturally sustaining instructional leadership comprises two main elements: (a) instructional focused elements, and (b) cultural focused elements.

#### **Instructional focused elements of CSIL**

Instructional focused elements within the CSIL context are all about supporting the implementation of CSP by teachers in the classroom; therefore, the principal-teacher relationship is essential to effective CSIL instructional leadership. Research has provided six elements that are crucial to establishing principal-teacher relationships aligned to the CSIL framework.

##### ***Element 1: Interdependency***

Teachers and principals are an interdependent unit (Johnson, 1983) acting in a reciprocal relationship to educate students (Hoy & Hoy, 2009). Blase and Blase (2000) found that principals who interacted with teachers as instructional leaders promoted teacher reflection and professional growth as well as teacher choice and discretion. These dispositions are necessary foundational factors for teachers to feel safe to implement CSP. It is only with safety and partnership that teachers can stop asking students to, “continue the age-old American saga of being asked to lose their heritage and community ways with language, literacy, and culture to achieve in U.S. schools” (Paris, 2012, p. 96).

##### ***Element 2: Communication-centered leadership***

The second foundational element within CSIL involves leadership and communication. Gaines (2007) grounded leadership in social practice constituted through leader language which occurs through leader interaction as an action performed among and with people. Thus, communication-centered leadership is vital for principals with regards to interacting with and supporting teachers when implementing goals of teaching and learning that move away from the dominant “White gaze” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86). Specifically, teachers working in schools, “to explore, honor, extend, and, at times, problematize [youth of color] heritage and community practices” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 86) need clarity, reduction in uncertainty, precision of mission and vision, expression of job concern, feedback, and clarification of cultural norms and expectations (Mayfield, 2009). Communication-centered leadership facilitates these processes and enables teachers to make decisions more accurately, make more decisions, and feel greater levels of self-efficacy towards their teaching (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2015). It is through this type of leadership and leadership communications that teachers can be empowered to make teaching decisions and take instructional stances in support of student learning for both the marginalized and the dominant alike.

##### ***Element 3: Walk and talk alignment***

“Leaders must realize, however that the most important element in communicating is congruency between their actions and their words,” according to DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many and Mattos (2016, pp. 14–15). When a principal’s word and actions do not align, teachers ignore the words and pay attention to the leader’s actions. This becomes problematic when a principal engages in leader speech 70% of the workday (Holmes & Parker, 2018). Paris (2012) discussed the current policies of education as “not interested in sustaining the languages and cultures of longstanding and newcomer communities of color in the United States” (p. 95), yet if principals as instructional leaders are going to ask teachers to do so by implementing CSP they cannot say one thing and do another. Principals cannot confuse teachers or, worse, place them at risk by not supporting them in their work with both their words and their actions (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

***Element 4: Trust***

Trust is vital. Trust in organizations is both glue that holds the organization together and a lubricant that allows the organization to move and to innovate; therefore, leaders must model and display the behaviours that establish and maintain trust (Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Examples of leader trust-building behaviours include walk and talk congruence, credibility, transparency, inclusiveness, clarity, and positive relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran, 2014). High trust organizations work well together and are ideal environments for CSP, innovation, and organizational commitment. On the other hand, low trust organizations work in silos and are death nail environments for CSP, risk-taking, and organizational citizenship.

***Element 5: Academic press***

Academic press is a relentless and intentional effort by educational stakeholders focused on continuous improvement, growth, and achievement of all students (the dominant and non-dominant). Mitchell, Kensler and Tschannen-Moran (2015) defined academic press, “as places where teachers [and administrators] set high academic expectations, create a learning environment that is orderly and serious, and make an extra effort to assist students to learn” (p. 228). In response to these efforts, students in schools with high levels of academic press respond positively and productively to the opportunities given them and, in turn, admire and support their peers who demonstrate a focus on academics. Scheurich (1998) characterized this type of high expectations environment as loving and energizing spaces where “children want to go everyday” (p. 463). Paris and Alim (2014) discussed the need for actions and pedagogies that were positive/constructive and to avoid negative connotations and movements such as the “achievement gap” (p. 86). Academic press embodies positive action and pedagogy.

***Element 6: Intentional instructional engagement***

Blase and Blase (2004) indicated three key elements are necessary to support success in the classroom: (1) instructional conferencing, (2) staff development, and (3) teacher reflection. CSP is progressive, deep, and thoughtful work. Ladson-Billings (2014) indicated that this work included, “the dual responsibility of external performance assessments as well as community- and student-driven learning” (p. 83). Given this, CSP is transformational and a substantial change from the status quo in classrooms; therefore, principals must be focused on their instructional leadership and cannot afford to be fragmented.

***Instructional conferencing***

Bamrick-Santoyo (2012) conceptually deepened instructional conferencing to include: (a) data-driven instruction, (b) observation and feedback, (c) instructional planning, and [when needed] (d) targeted professional development. He further viewed this instructional leadership from a coaching perspective that is intentional, transformative, and scheduled. Bamrick-Santoyo (2012) stated, “Read a principal’s calendar, and you’ll know his priorities” (p. 49). Instructional leadership from this perspective is not top-down but “pull alongside” leadership, working next to teachers in the development of curriculum and instructional quality to ensure student learning. This work supports meaningful goal-setting opportunities for teachers and empowers teachers to openly and deeply reflect upon both their success as well as opportunities for further growth and improvement in CSP implementation.

***Staff development***

DuFour (1991) stated, “School improvement is people improvement” (p. 7). People improvement is a professional development, mentoring, coaching, and leadership activity. People improvement is hard work that, like teaching, is part art, part craft, and part science. It is purposeful and focused work. However, a sizeable number of principals are not comfortable working in curricular and instructional areas due to a lack

of time, understanding, capability, and interest in doing so (Carraway & Young, 2015), and need additional training and support to do so. This is particularly important given the nature of CSP and the need to support and guide teachers in implementation.

### *Reflection*

CSP and CSIL are new territories in schools and classrooms – there is no roadmap for implementation; therefore, teachers and principals must turn inward to each other and to themselves for guidance in the form of reflection. Reflection can take many forms such as critical reflection (Brown, 2004), reflection-in-action (Jaeger, 2013; Schon, 1983), and reflection-on-action (Postholm, 2008; Schon, 1987).

Critical reflection is important because it fuses the positions of critical inquiry and self-reflection into a single process. Brown (2004) stated, “Critical inquiry involves the conscious consideration of moral and ethical implications and consequences of schooling practices on students” (p. 89) and is in direct alignment with CSP. Self-reflection is akin to the “gaze inward” of Paris and Alim (2014, p. 92) that involves a profound inspection of one’s internal belief system and inner thoughts. It is through the joining of these two positions into a unified process that challenges are met, ethical questions are addressed, moral issues are handled, and practices are refined for the benefit of students.

Reflection-in-action occurs during the action – during teaching, during Professional Learning Communities (PLC), during conferencing, during the work. It is analogous to the teachable moment, the freedom to make mistakes, innovation, problem-based learning, and inquiry learning. Reflection-in-action supports student-centered learning and teacher empowerment – concepts strongly aligned to CSP and CSIL. Jaeger (2013) asserted, “It is reflection-in-action that most deeply shapes professional behavior because it best approximates the day-to-day activity of the practitioner” (p. 90). Reflection-in-action is essential to CSP as a nascent concept because reflection-in-action provides for more concrete support than CSP’s emergent stance alone.

Reflection-on-action occurs after the action and is particularly impactful on the teaching and learning process when teachers reflect on their actions with others orally (Postholm, 2008). It is not only the power of the reflection-on-action as it is the expression of the reflection-on-action and discussion of the reflection-on-action that increases its power; in this respect, it is clarifying, attracting, and energizing (Houston & Sokolow, 2006). Finally, reflection-on-action is not a one-dimensional process looking just at what has occurred but is also forward-looking, action-oriented, and transformational (Postholm, 2008) making it a natural fit for CSP.

### **Cultural focused elements of CSIL**

Cultural focused elements within the CSIL context are all about the bigger picture supporting the ideals and principles of CSP beyond the classroom to the entire school and the school community. It is a move beyond cultural competence, relevance, and responsiveness. Research has provided five elements that are crucial to sustaining school and community stakeholder relationships aligned to the CSIL framework.

#### ***Element 7: Student empowerment***

Students are a source of great strength, information, and energy. They have great passion, and each one of them has a story to tell. They are the reason teachers and administrators are in education, and each one has a job. Within CSIL, students are the focus – they come first. School culture should be grounded in our students’ experiences, heritage, community, and interests. Students should have a voice in the governance and direction of our schools. Curriculum and instruction should be student-centered and not teacher-centered (Scheurich, 1998). The work in the classroom should build on the ideas of Freire (critical praxis) and Akom (2009) where student ideas and experiences are the heart of instruction, used to challenge the status quo, deepen student engagement, and foster new connections to learning.

***Element 8: Democratic project of schooling***

Education within the classroom should be inclusive of students' native culture and first language (Scheurich, 1998). This form of inclusive education must be at a meaningful and deep level beyond the culture-of-the-month variety. Still, the inclusive education must be reflective of the school's community and embrace the desires of the community. For example, not only should the Native language be taught, in Native communities, but the accompanying Native cultural heritage and tradition should be taught as well. This is a revitalizing and restorative practice (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Within the school settings, this inclusive education can include instruction that involves African American Language (AAL), discussion about Hip Hop culture (Paris & Alim, 2014) and/or the correct dialectic form of Spanish reflective of the local Latino community such as Mexicano or Chileno Spanish vs. Castellano Spanish in addition to corresponding community and historical cultural tradition. Culture and language instruction is not one-size-fits-all nor is it instruction at the surface level. It is work that is interwoven, complex, and profound. This is work that is enriching for all (the dominant and non-dominant).

***Element 9: Social justice***

The work of social justice for the school principal within the context of culturally sustaining instructional leadership occurs outside the gates of the school as well as inside the walls of the building. The principal is a leader in the community – period. Thus, the principal must work within the political space (Horsford, Grosland, & Gunn, 2011) and advocate not only for school issues but community issues as well (Khalifa, 2012). As community leaders, principals must focus on correcting the wrongs of the past, and they must take up the mantle for the community and add their voice to the other voices in the community fighting to right the wrongs of the community (Johnson, 2006). Examples of this can include fighting homelessness, battling urban decay, advocating for jobs and community well-being (Khalifa, 2012), supporting adult education programs, and discussing incarceration rates and gun laws (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Community support cannot only flow from the community to the school – it must be a two-way street.

***Element 10: Community***

Schools, districts, and communities are rapidly changing. Their cultural and demographic makeup is not the same in 2018 as it was in 1998 or 1978. Schools are often labeled by their predominant race as well as where they are located based on socioeconomic and/or cultural factors (Evans, 2007). In many instances, school administrators respond to issues of race reluctantly, reactively, and at times inappropriately due to their narrow views of race, racism, and lack of diversity within the position (Evans, 2007). It is clear that schools are mirrors of the communities in which they reside (Evans, 2007; Paris & Alim, 2014), and principals must work at the macro and micro levels to be effective in the community within the CSIL context.

Often in discussing the relationship between schools and the community (as stakeholders), school leaders think schools should be reflective of the community or engaged in the community, yet this is not enough. At the macro level, schools must be embedded in the community, and the community must be embedded in the schools. If you can imagine a Venn diagram, the overlap between school and community should be almost complete (Epstein, 2011; Khalifa, 2012; Scheurich, 1998). Principals must lead their schools from a stance that approaches the community from a service orientation and seek a horizontal peer-to-peer relationship with the community being an inclusive member of it – instead of a superior orientation. The school and community must be thought of as a symbiotic relationship – a loving, beneficial and mutually dependent relationship between both parties.

Further, given the oppressive and suppressive environments in which many non-dominant cultures and communities survive in our society (Paris, 2012; McCarty & Lee, 2014), parents from non-dominant cultures do not engage schools with the same level of vigour and level of participation as do parents of the dominant mainstream society, nor are they engaged by school administrators at the same level (Epstein, 2010). Thus,

if school administrators are to be effective and engaging at the micro level working to correct the wrongs of the past, advocate for parents, and “honor and value the rich and varied practices of communities of color” (Paris & Alim, 2014, p. 90), there must be a fundamental shift in the way principals interact and share power with parents. Specifically, in the spirit of Fred Ross Sr., principals must teach and support parents in how to organize, lead, and share power – how to truly become equal partners in the enterprise of schooling (Ross, 1989).

### ***Element 11: Curriculum***

As CSP is an emerging concept, the principal must be innovative, be free to make mistakes, and be an explorer working as a developer of curriculum (Johnson, 2006). Additionally, working to foster the practices of CSP, a principal must organically use the community as a source of strength (Dowden, 2011) to co-develop the curriculum with teachers from the bottom up. According to Corson (1998):

Policies of reform in indigenous education always involve the school’s community in its work, not just to communicate the work to parents, but to draw on the community’s knowledge, expertise, and cultural practices to shape the work that schools do and make it relevant to the lived experience of children from aboriginal backgrounds. In doing this, it is sometimes necessary for schools [and principals] to reduce the influence that other agencies outside the local community have over the school’s operations. (p. 239)

As a result of the community involvement in the formation of curriculum, Corson (1998) highlights the following benefits:

- Active parent and community involvement in the school decision-making brings children from disadvantaged or cultural minorities closer to their teachers, who are often from the advantaged or cultural majority;
- Minority parents grow in confidence and efficacy which positively impacts their own children’s learning;
- The harmful stereotypes of the advantaged or cultural majority teachers often held about their disadvantaged or cultural minority students, parents, and communities begin to positively change as they work with and collaborate with parents and the community at large; and
- The local community grows in self-respect and gains influence (politically, socially, etc.) as they take greater responsibility and ownership for their schools. (p. 246)

As the community becomes involved in the development of curriculum, “community attitudes are laid bare and discussed” (Corson, 1998, p. 247); heritage traditions and community practices are examined (Paris, 2012); and the past, present, and future are connected within the walls of the classroom.

From this conceptual framework, this paper now pivots to look at culturally sustaining instructional leadership in the real world through the view of principals leading Native American public schools in the states of Montana and Wyoming.

### **Methods**

The research questions identified for examination in this study were addressed using data gathered from an online survey. The survey was administered to principals identified by the Montana and Wyoming State Departments of Education as leading public schools serving predominately Native American students or public schools located on Native American Reservations within each state.

### ***Participants***

Superintendents in each district were contacted by email to ensure their approval. Ninety-five principals in Montana and Wyoming received an email invitation to participate in the study; with two follow-up reminders, and the survey response rate was 22% of the principals. While this might seem low, Morton, Bandara, Robinson

and Carr (2012) contend that, in the twenty-first century, studies with 20% response rates can be just as accurate as studies with 60% response rates and provide as consistent results. The demographic characteristics of the principals who participated in the study are illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Principal demographics

Category		Number	Percent
Gender	Males	12	57
	Females	6	29
	No response	3	14
Race	White	9	43
	Hispanic	1	5
	Native American	8	38
	No response	3	14
State	Wyoming	13	62
	Montana	6	29
	No response	2	10
School size	Less than 100	3	14
	100–250	7	33
	251–750	9	43
	No response	2	10

### *Setting*

The principals of the schools in Montana served the students of seven tribes (Blackfeet, Crow, Flathead, Fort Belknap, Fort Peck, Northern Cheyenne, and Rocky Boy) located on seven Indian reservations stretched across thirty-nine school districts. The principals of the schools in Wyoming were located within one county serving the students of two tribes (Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho) co-located on one reservation spread across six different school districts.

### *Data sources*

The survey consisted of 56 total items focused on the eleven CSIL elements (seven instructional elements and five cultural elements) plus relevant demographic information. The Likert response scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The internal consistency, measured using Cronbach's alpha, for the scale in this study was 0.93. Through a review of literature in the field of education, evidence of content validity was found for each of the items as detailed previously in the conceptual framework.

### *Data analysis*

The statistics utilized for this study are limited to a reporting of means to answer research question one and a paired samples t-test to answer research question two. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used for the analyses. Each of the 56 survey items was grouped into one of the eleven CSIL elements; an average for each element was then calculated. The means and standard deviations for the CSIL elements are illustrated in Table 2.

Average ratings for the six instructional elements ranged from 3.92 to 4.50 while average ratings for the five cultural elements ranged from 3.70 to 4.30.

A paired samples t-test was conducted to compare principals' beliefs regarding CSIL instructional elements and cultural elements. The mean for instructional elements ( $M=4.15$ ,  $SD=0.34$ ) was significantly greater than

the mean for cultural elements ( $M=3.9, SD=0.57$ ) conditions,  $t(19)=2.31, p<0.033$ . This is an indication that the principals had significantly stronger beliefs about instructional elements than about elements related to culture.

Table 2. Means and Standard Deviations for Each CSIL Element

Element		Mean	Standard Deviation
Instructional elements	Walk and talk alignment	4.50	0.62
	Interdependency	4.36	0.48
	Intentional instructional engagement	4.24	0.46
	Communication-centered leadership	4.10	0.46
	Trust	4.04	0.57
	Academic press	3.92	0.51
Cultural elements	Community embeddedness	4.30	0.57
	Social justice	4.21	0.70
	Democratic project of schooling	3.81	0.84
	Curriculum leadership	3.81	0.93
	Student empowerment	3.70	0.51

**Results**

The results of this study are bounded by the participants of this study, as well as limited by the number of participants in this study, yet much can be learned from the results. First, the principals of this study demonstrated a significant preference for working and operating in the CSIL elements of instruction over culture. The instructional element of *walk and talk alignment* was rated highest by the principals indicating a key foundational element for the implementation of CSP and CSIL was present within these schools. Holmes (2012) found *walk and talk alignment* was a critical factor in the leadership practice of continuously improving elementary principals over time (as measured by standardized testing) and a vital antecedent to effective and strategic principal oral language use (Holmes & Parker, 2018). The lowest rated element was *student empowerment*, suggesting that, despite being in public schools with a predominately Native American student population, the voices of the students in these schools were not being heard with a level of expectation in line with CSP and CSIL. O’Hair and Reitzug (1997) noted the importance of students being included as part of school discourse and decision-making supporting both inclusionary school climates and democratic leadership practices.

Second, the mean of the democratic project of schooling was 3.81, placing it tied for the second lowest mean within the cultural elements and second lowest element overall. Principals in this study when asked to define the democratic project of schooling responded with the following quotes:

*We work to build ownership in our school through collective decision making about curriculum and instruction.*

*I have not heard of this practice.*

*No Working Definition Here.*

*Unsure.*

*Skills taught to engage effectively in our society.*

*A Democratic Project of Schooling includes academic, social-emotional, and community integration.*

*I'm assuming that is where communities, students, teachers, and administrators have a say in what is taught in their school.*

It is clear from the principals' responses that uncertainty and a lack of consistency with Paris' (2012) definition of the democratic project of schooling exist.

Finally, principals in this study responded more positively to instructional elements than cultural elements. The principals of this study, when asked to offer insight into their cultural leadership practices, stated among their collective practice the following:

*Moving into my third year in leadership, we have continued our focus on implementing culturally responsive pedagogy as teachers learn more about the reservation where we teach. A huge focus has been on adjusting our behavioral expectations, processes, and procedures as we shift from punitive action to restorative practices.*

*Create an environment in which culture is infused into the school.*

*Tribal PIR yearly for all staff, we offer Native American Studies Classes, we offer Salish Language classes in grades 6–12, our standards are aligned to the Montana Indian Education for All teaching standards, we host a celebration of families powwow, as well as Native American Cultural Week.*

*Assisting in the integration of the Shoshone language in our classrooms and specials.*

*Recognizing Native American culture in our curriculum as well as other cultures present in our school/community.*

*We have increased the use of Native American lesson plans that are culturally relevant to our students and community.*

It is evident from these comments that cultural leadership efforts are occurring in these schools – the question is to what degree and to what level of sustainability (Paris, 2012).

### **The practical and scholarly significance of the study**

The practical and scholarly significance of this study is evident even though the work of scholars on culturally responsive school leadership (Kalifha, Gooden, & Davis 2016) and culturally sustaining leadership (Hattori, 2016; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2016) are already present in the literature. In this study, the principals significantly preferred instructional elements over cultural elements while leading public schools serving Native American students – a population most in need of cultural leadership. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) discussed that for principals and schools to be successful principals must work in both instruction and culture. If one was ahead of the other, “false positives” or efforts could be “crippled” (p. 9). Therefore, within the CSIL framework, instruction and culture are like the twin strands of a DNA helix and the elements of instruction and culture are the interconnecting bonds between them. In the case of this study, the helix of these schools are distorted and in need of cultural genetic splicing/engineering in the form of CSP and CSIL training and development.

Second, it is evident from the responses shared previously, that the principals in this study are not attuned to Paris' (2012) definition of the democratic project of schooling, further supporting the notion that principals may be in need of increased awareness in this area. This was supported by the *democratic project of schooling* having the second lowest overall mean rating out of all the CSIL elements. Thus, from the scholarly perspective, this paper begins to open and expand the field of instructional leadership for conversation, research, and teaching inclusive of the CSP perspective in terms of the definition of the democratic project of schooling as part of a larger contextual conversation of democratic leadership in the principalship (Woods, 2005).

Third, as the principals in this study shared their cultural practices, it is clear that these practices were on the right track; however, what was also clear from the CSP and CSIL perspective is that these cultural practices were simply *not* enough. Therefore, from a practitioner point of view, this paper starts to provide the principal with a starting point of why and how to move beyond limited implementations of culturally relevant or responsive leadership positions into stances that are deeper, more humble and sustaining in giving teachers foundational support for the implementation of CSP in classroom and schools.

### Discussion

Through a review of the literature, a potential derailing issue has emerged into the CSP field of study, which is the difficulty of implementation of CSP in classrooms due to the pressures, vulnerabilities, and stressors teachers face within the classroom by school administration. This warrants future study through the lens of CSP scholars. Additionally, through a review of research, in the call for the implementation of CSP a missing critical piece is support from principals in the form of instructional leadership. This is a critical oversight. In response to this, a new instructional leadership framework constructed from a review of literature has been proposed to the field and examined through the perspectives of principals leading Native American public schools in the states of Montana and Wyoming. This framework, CSIL, is emergent and in need of further development and study. Next, the principals in this study, in response to the research questions, have a clear preference for instructional leadership over cultural leadership practices, and a mixed understanding of the democratic project of schooling in line with Paris' (2012) vision. The implementation of cultural practices at some of the schools within the study are solid examples of culturally relevant instructional leadership but not examples of culturally sustaining instructional leadership or CSP. Therefore, based upon these findings and the absence of school administrators from the CSP literature, the authors invite the field to consider in future work how CSP can be implemented by both teachers and principals as they are interdependent and not separate and distinct units within the educational enterprise. By way of suggestion, an interesting follow-up study would be an exploration through the lens of teachers serving in Native American public schools and their perceptions of principals' culturally sustaining instructional leadership. Finally, the authors have introduced the concept of CSIL with open minds and hearts. They ask that the field receives this work similarly and, in that spirit, intend to continue exploring the CSIL framework quantitatively and qualitatively across a variety of settings and contexts, seeking to help students, teachers, and administrators in their CSP/CSIL focused efforts.

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