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Culturally Relevant, Socially and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership for Diverse School Communities

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The U.S. Department of Education published a report entitled Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates that addressed harsh and unfair exclusionary discipline practices pertaining to children of color, LGBTQ students, and children with disabilities. This research aligns the five guiding principles provided by the DOE with emotional intelligence (EI) competencies, and culturally competent leadership (CC/R) behaviors. Each is grounded in continuous critical self-reflective practices. Social and emotional intelligence is explored through the presentation of information, ideas, and assumptions originating from varied perspectives in research. In addition, leadership for diverse school communities is shown to encompass leadership abilities aligned with intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence skill development. The alignment indicates a need for further leadership growth centering on leadership cultural competence and social and emotional intelligence continuous professional development.

Introduction

The racial/ethnic distribution of public school students in the United States has shifted dramatically, as students of diverse races/ethnicities represented 54% of the student population during the 2020 academic year (NCES, 2022). While the minority population represents the student majority, the teaching population experienced limited change, with 75% of the teachers being white/non-Hispanic and 84% reported as female (NCES, 2022). According to researchers, many students attending public schools lack cultural connections with teachers and leaders, which may contribute to their stagnation in academic development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Lopes & Murphey et al., 2016).(Ladson-Billings, 1995a) As indicated by the U.S. Department of Education (2023, p. 4), “Current practices are in place that ostracize students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, students with disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQ.” This national research supports culturally competent, relevant, and responsive teacher and leader practices, as well as social and emotional intelligence development within diverse school communities. In addition, researchers have continuously examined the gap in academic attainment outcomes among Black/African American and

Hispanic/Latino children from low socioeconomic families and communities as compared to white and Asian American students (NCES, 2022; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994, p. 1995, 2010).

Khalifa (2018) defined the components of culturally responsive school leadership as 1) a clear understanding of cultural responsiveness; 2) having the acquired knowledge that cultural responsiveness will not flourish and succeed in schools without sustained efforts by school leaders to define and promote it; and 3) understanding that culturally responsive school leadership consists of several crucial leadership behaviors. Those behaviors are also inclusive of continuous critical self-reflection of professional practice, the development of culturally responsive teachers, the promotion of inclusive, anti-oppressive school environments, and the engagement with students' indigenous community contexts.

In addition, effective educational leadership requires a multitude of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. In contrast to traditional school leadership, a list of challenges facing school leaders today includes becoming culturally, socially, and emotionally literate. These intrapersonal competencies will be aligned with research-based best practices of effective school leaders, allowing authentic engagement with students and families who represent varied racial/ethnic, cultural, and socioeconomic home environments.

Background

Traditional educational leadership competencies previously encompassed school leadership skills that focused on management. A study centering on how principals affect students and schools (Grissom et al., 2000) provides a synthesis of quantitative and qualitative studies of 20 years of research centering on the four principal practices aligned with effective outcomes. The four practices identified are 1) engaging in high-leverage instructional activities, 2) building a productive culture and climate, 3) facilitating collaboration and learning communities, and 4) strategically managing personnel and resources (Grissom et al., 2021). The four areas encompass instructional leadership, collaborative and productive school culture and climate, and management.

In addition, there have been a plethora of school reform movements that have shaped the role of the school leader and caused fluctuations in the view of the primary responsibilities deemed as being the highest priority. Among the varied perspectives of effective whole-school reform, leader emotional intelligence within the role of transformational leadership has been an area of focus (Zurita-Ortega et al., 2019). Further, Day et al. (2016) conducted a review of international literature centering on successful school leadership and resolved that the critical attributes of effective leadership were inclusive of dimensions under the umbrella of social and emotional intelligence development:

- Defining and modeling common value

- Building relationships inside the school community
- Building relationships outside the school community
- Ensuring students' well-being and providing equitable access to support for all students
- Defining the vision, values, and direction
- Improving conditions for teaching and learning
- Redesigning the organization: aligning roles and responsibilities
- Enhancing effective teaching and learning
- Redesigning and enriching the curriculum
- Enhancing teacher quality - including succession planning (p. 6)

A study by Williams (2008) suggests a repertoire of specific competencies that may serve to differentiate principal efforts. The research further supports the development of an individual leader's cultural competence, social intelligence, and emotional intelligence skills that may aid in positively impacting students, teachers, parents, and community members (H. W. Williams, 2008). The competencies extend beyond the view of the leader as a mere school manager to further spotlight the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills needed for effectiveness.

Methodology

This analysis will initiate with a critical literature review identifying, analyzing, and aligning specified research concepts through the lens of effective school leadership practices for diverse school communities. The essential terms for the review were identified as cultural competence, cultural relevance, emotional intelligence, social intelligence, diverse school communities, and critical self-reflection. The following databases were utilized to accomplish an extensive review: ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSO. The recurring themes and research-based ideas that emerged from the critical analysis are then aligned with proposed practice-based indicators identified by the U. S. Department of Education in the following publication: *Five Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates* (U.S.DOE, 2023). The resulting analysis will align the U.S.D.O.E. suggested principles with research-based culturally competent/relevant leadership behaviors and social and emotionally intelligent leadership practices.

Review of Literature

The Role of Critical Self-Reflection

Critical self-reflection serves as the core of social, emotional, and cultural competence development. It may be defined as the sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of one's perceptions through consistency and consciously considering perceived assumptions (Brookfield, 2017). In alignment, leadership growth may be related to the ability to learn, which also involves continuously examining underlying beliefs and assumptions. Two types of critical self-reflection within leadership have been identified as the following: 1) reflection in action, which takes place within an occurrence, and 2) reflection on action, which takes place upon the conclusion (Cheng & Corduneanu, 2015). Thus, leadership growth and development are deemed as being "related to one's ability to learn, and learning involves examining or challenging one's underlying beliefs and assumptions. Hence, the connection of leadership to learning positions the use of critical reflection pedagogies as viable approaches for developing leaders" (Sweet, 2023, p. 604). Continuous critical self-reflection has the potential to be regarded as the foundation of school leader professional growth and development, as it serves as the precursor for authentically leading and implementing sustainable change within a school community.

Critical self-reflection is a deliberate and strategic approach for educational leaders to recognize and reflect upon their biases and assumptions intricately woven into their cultural backgrounds. Aspiring school leaders participating in preparation programs have the opportunity to cultivate their comprehension of multicultural and social justice issues through purposeful activities that necessitate self-reflection; these activities could include crafting cultural autobiographies, conducting life history interviews, participating in workshops focused on reducing prejudice and maintaining journals for reflective analysis (Brown, 2004). Practicing educational leaders may also have the opportunity to engage in continuous professional development opportunities within the school district or via local, state, or national professional conferences.

As an introspective endeavor that facilitates a comprehensive grasp of the multifaceted challenges and intricate relationships embedded in educational environments (Branson, 2007, 2010), critical self-reflection has the potential to be deemed as a foundational approach for personal and professional growth. It has also been determined to be foundational in the development of a profound sense of critical consciousness, which, in turn, nurtures the growth of a profound sense of heightened awareness (Brown, 2005). Hence, critical self-reflection assumes a pivotal role in guiding leaders not only to recognize but also to gain a comprehensive understanding of their biases and assumptions rooted in personal cultural backgrounds; this newly acquired awareness empowers leaders with the acumen and capability to adeptly

recognize and address prevailing social justice challenges within their roles as educational leaders (Furman, 2012). Thus, continuous critical self-reflection may be considered one's continuous personal and professional development throughout the extension of leadership roles.

Social and Emotional Intelligence

Intrapersonal areas of social and emotional growth and development have been denoted as a facet of multiple intelligences that vary among individuals (Gardner, 1993; Goleman, 1995; Mayer et al., 2016). "Social intelligence competency is the ability to recognize, understand, and use emotional information about others that leads to or causes effective or superior performance" (Boyatzis, 2009, cited in Emmerling & Boyatzis, 2012, p. 8). Broadly stated, social intelligence is the process of socially constructing reality (Sternberg, 2020, as cited in Sternberg & Kostić, 2020). Drigas and Papoutsi (2018, p. 4) define emotional intelligence as the ability to identify, understand, and use emotions positively to manage anxiety, communicate well, empathize, overcome issues, solve problems, and manage conflicts. According to the emotional intelligence (EI) model, it is the perception, evaluation, and management of emotions in yourself and others (Drigas & Papoutsi, 2018; Mayer et al., 2008). Emotional intelligence in leadership may be defined according to the attributes identified by Mayer, Salovey, Caruso, and Sitarenios (2003):

1. Perceiving emotion: detecting emotions in faces, pictures, music, etc.
2. Facilitating thought with emotion: employing emotional information in thinking
3. Understanding emotions: understanding emotional information
4. Managing emotions: managing emotions for personal and interpersonal development (p. 97)

As the view of effective leadership continues to advance in the field of education, research is increasingly recognizing the critical role that social-emotional learning plays in the holistic development of young minds. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (2020), social-emotional development is a process that empowers individuals of all ages to acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to navigate their emotions, set and achieve positive goals, show empathy for others, cultivate positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (https://casel.org/fundamentals-of-sel/) Mahfouz and Gordon (2021) outline five specific approaches in which social and emotional learning (SEL) may benefit educational leaders in their roles, including promoting their overall well-

being, facilitating effective leadership, fostering healthy relationships, establishing successful family and community partnerships, and enabling the successful implementation of SEL practices. By prioritizing SEL in leadership, educational institutions may create a culture of emotional intelligence, empathy, and responsible decision-making, benefiting students and staff alike.

Additionally, studies conducted by Williams (2007) indicate that exceptional principals who work in urban areas with economically disadvantaged, minority, special needs, and/or second language learner students develop emotional and social intelligence. This finding further underscores the value of social-emotional development relative to leadership positions within diverse educational institutions. As a school leader, developing social and emotional intelligence effectively enhances the capacity to lead staff and students (CASEL, 2020). Sadiku et al. (2020, p. 202) indicate that it is only possible to be an effective leader with skills in emotional intelligence. Through leadership practices that encompass the integration of social and emotional skills development, leaders may inspire, motivate, and influence others to be their best selves (Mahfouz et al., 2019).

A focus on enhancing social and emotional intelligence to further the academic, social, emotional, and cultural well-being of the school demonstrates the capacity required school leaders to develop the core competencies that have been deemed as fundamental for them to further develop empathy, an awareness of the diversity within the school, and a solid commitment to fostering the potential of others (Jacobson, 2021; Crawford, 2007). By acquiring emotional and social communication skills and interpreting messages from others, leaders may create a welcoming and inclusive school environment that promotes the growth and development of every student. Riggio and Reichard outlined an emotional and social skills model that summarizes the necessary traits for emotional and social communication, including expression, recognition, decoding of messages from others, and regulation and control of communication behaviors (2008). The model proposes three emotional skills: 1) emotional expressiveness, emotional sensitivity, and emotional control, and 2) three social skills: social expressiveness, social sensitivity, and social control (Riggio & Reichard, 2008, p. 171). The first phase, involving the expressiveness of social and emotional skills, allows the school leader to express empathy and understanding with teachers, students, and community members, which is foundational in developing a positive whole school culture and climate. Such enhancements in social and emotional intelligence have the capacity to positively influence the whole school community, inclusive of students, families, teachers, staff, and community partners. In addition,

Continuous growth in social and emotional intelligence is critical to effective leadership.

Managing emotions is fundamental for school leaders to achieve their goals, cope with the challenges of their position, and make positive changes in their schools (Blaik Hourani et al., 2021 & Beatty & Brew, 2004). Sensitivity

to diversity and a dedication to serving others and developing their abilities are essential qualities that each educational leader should possess. The manner in which educational leaders manage their emotions and interact with parents, students, and staff members may not only affect their personal well-being but also have the potential to positively enhance the environment and values of their schools (Beatty, 2007). By cultivating emotional and social intelligence, educational leaders may conceivably have the capacity to develop stronger relationships and promote a nurturing and supportive school environment where everyone can thrive. A study by Williams (2007) indicates that exceptional educational leaders who work in urban areas with socially and economically disadvantaged, minority, special needs, and/or second language learner students possess social and emotional intelligence. This finding further underscores the value of social-emotional development relative to leadership positions within educational institutions. As a school leader, it is vital to develop social and emotional intelligence to effectively lead teachers, staff, and students (CASEL, 2020). By leading with social and emotional skills, leaders may inspire, motivate, and influence others to be their best selves (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Thus, an effective school leader has the potential to center on endeavors that encompass a welcoming school climate and positive culture, and the end result is centered on the development of student's academic, social, and emotional well-being.

Culturally Competent and Relevant Leadership

Cultural competence in educational leadership serves as a precursor to the development of culturally relevant leadership. Cultural competence may be defined as

> a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enable that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. The word "culture" is used because it implies the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social group. The word competence is used because it implies having the capacity to function effectively (Cross et al., 1989, p. 13).

Functioning effectively within varied school communities is foundational for school leaders who lead schools where the student and family population's race/ethnicity and/or socio-economic status does not mirror their own. A culturally competent school leader's seamless nature is embedded in the ability to appreciate the uniqueness of varied community cultures. According to Barakat et al. (2021, p. 486), cultural competence in education relies immensely on research conducted in teacher education. Researchers have previously explored varying elements of the alignment between recognizing and celebrating student culture and their academic

achievement through research focusing on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2006) and multicultural education et al., Banks & McGee, 2004; Sleeter, 1995). In addition, researchers have centered their attention on culturally responsive practices of the teacher (Gay, 2000) and caring-centered multicultural education (Pang, 2010). For the purpose of this critical analysis, the co-author, M. Byrd, developed the following definition of culturally competent leadership within K-12 educational settings

1. The school leader's ability to self-reflect and self-critique personal belief systems about themselves, individuals, and groups of people within the school community.
2. The school leader's knowledge, understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of diversity within the school community.
3. The school leader's ability to demonstrate effective leadership behaviors that align with the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of student differences within the school community.
4. The school leader's ability to effectively lead within varied cultural settings within the school community while maintaining the growth and development of all students as the primary area of focus.

As a component of cultural competence, culturally relevant school leadership is built upon antiracist and cultural adeptness literature, encompassing theory, research, and practice (Horsford et al., 2011). It serves a vital role in shaping the school culture by instigating processes and providing support across the educational system to challenge prevailing social structures (Fraise & Brooks, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; McCray & Beachum, 2011). leadership draws from Gloria Ladson-Billings' (1995b) culturally relevant pedagogy, which emphasizes creating a school environment where students excel academically and develop cultural competence and critical consciousness to challenge existing social norms.

Within the realm of education, which is inherently political, numerous issues, policies, and factors impact the effectiveness and experience of schools (M. Brooks & Brooks, 2019). Leaders must comprehend the intricate ideological, philosophical, and political assumptions permeating their work contexts (A. H. Brooks & Normore, 2010). According to Horsford et al. (2011), culturally relevant school principals possess the skill to identify and navigate political contexts, particularly concerning educational applications and policy implementation.

Cultural relevance in education is inclusive of leader pedagogy that caters to students from diverse backgrounds, supports teachers' professional development and encourages the use of culturally relevant pedagogies in students' lives (Ezzani & Brooks, 2019). These pedagogies empower students

by cultivating critical social awareness, enabling them to identify, understand, and challenge inequitable social norms and practices (Banks, 1993; Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995a). By incorporating cultural references, culturally relevant pedagogy engages students socially, emotionally, and politically, enhancing their awareness, talents, knowledge, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994). By supporting teacher integration of cultural references within teacher pedagogical approaches, school leaders allow diverse student populations to experience elements of their cultures within the school setting. Thus, a deeper connection between school and home develops.

Culturally relevant leaders are introspective about their journeys (Horsford et al., 2011) and display self-awareness (Khalifa et al., 2016). Such self-awareness, a crucial prerequisite for learners in multicultural programs (Brown, 2004), involves acknowledging one's beliefs, assumptions, and biases toward diverse students and working to dismantle them (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Furthermore, developing a positive sense of self, including self-awareness and acceptance of their ethnic group, is essential for leaders to be open and understanding towards other ethnic groups (Banks, 1994). Freire (1994) describes critical consciousness as taking functional responsibility for self-discovery and developing social awareness, which can be facilitated through self-exploration of one's culture and societal experiences (Brown, 2004). Principals who support marginalized students need to address and break down barriers that negatively affect their learning (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). Failure to reflect on one's biases and adapt the curriculum accordingly perpetuates the dominance of a particular culture (M. Brooks & Brooks, 2019) and has lasting adverse effects.

Educational leaders are responsible for constructing a socially just and equitable school culture as part of their professional duty. This involves overseeing a positive school environment that embraces all students, regardless of their backgrounds (M. Brooks & Brooks, 2019), and fostering culturally relevant pedagogy (Gay, 2010). School leaders lacking sufficient knowledge and skills in culturally relevant leadership practices may find integrating diverse experiences and backgrounds into the school culture challenging, causing neglect of underserved students' cultural experiences and depriving them of equitable education (Terrell & Lindsey, 2009). As indicated by the studies cited, it is foundationally imperative that students experience elements of their cultures within school walls as it may allow for a transformation of the knowledge and skills obtained to their home cultures. Culturally relevant school practices may alleviate the compartmentalization of knowledge by underserved students, such as in school and at home.

Theoretical Foundation

The theoretical foundation for culturally relevant, socially and emotionally intelligent leadership for diverse school communities encompasses leadership abilities aligned with intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligence skill development. Critical self-reflection is the initial stage of development as it is

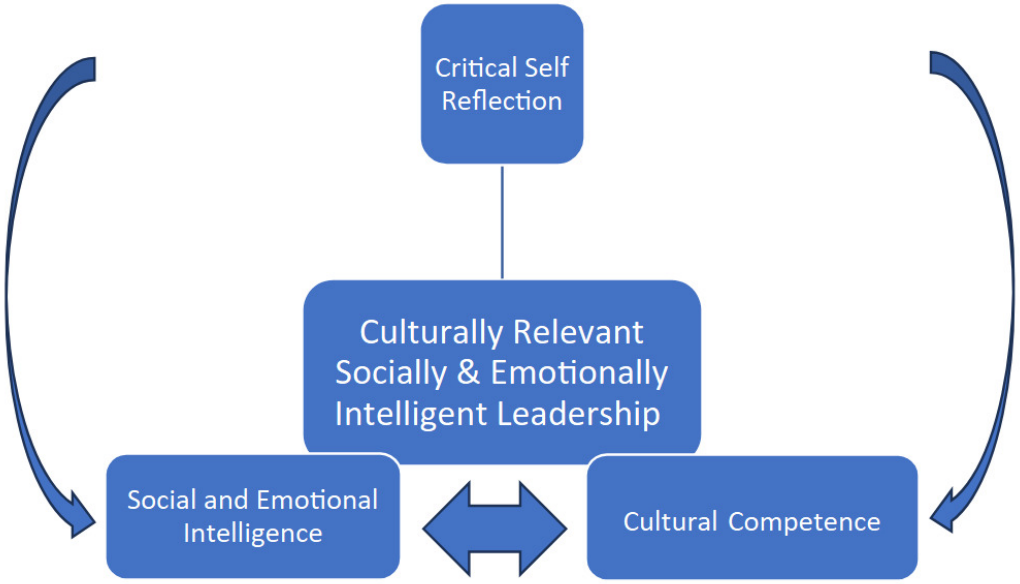

Figure 1. Culturally Relevant, Socially and Emotionally Intelligent Leadership

Figure 2. Five Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates

Number	Principle
1	Foster a sense of belonging through a positive, safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environment.
2	Support the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of all students through evidence-based strategies.
3	Adequately support high-quality teaching and learning by increasing educator capacity
4	Recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce
5	Ensure the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect (including through systemwide policy and staff development and monitoring strategies.

U.S. Department of Education (2023). Retrieved from: https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/guiding-principles.pdf

foundational and continuous throughout the process. Social and emotional intelligence and cultural competence development is possible through sustained critical self-reflection throughout leadership practices (See Figure 1).

Effective School Leadership for Diverse Student Populations

Results

The U.S. Department of Education (2023) underscored the imperative of fostering safe, inclusive, and equitable school climates in *Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates*. Recognizing the detrimental impact of punitive disciplinary measures and the disproportionate burden they place on marginalized groups such as children of color, LGBTQ students, and those with disabilities, the Department advocates for a shift toward holistic support systems. By prioritizing students' social, emotional, physical, academic, and mental well-being, schools can cultivate environments where all students feel valued, safe, and empowered to thrive.

Meeting the needs of the whole child requires attending to students' social, emotional, and cultural needs. "Research suggests that some of the disparities in student discipline can be attributed to differences in subjective interpretations of behaviors despite the absence of significant objective differences. For example, Black students are more likely than their white peers to receive disciplinary action for offenses that are subjectively characterized, like disrespect, disruption, or defiance" (U.S.D.O.E., 2023, p. 5). To address the discipline disparities in American public schools, the U. S. Department of Education developed five guiding principles identified to address exclusionary discipline practices that contribute to discipline disparities among underserved students (*see Figure 2*). The five guiding principles consist of 1) fostering a sense of belonging, 2) supporting the social, emotional, physical, and mental health of students, 3) increasing teacher capacity for high-quality teaching/learning, 4) recruiting and retaining a diverse educator workforce, and 5) ensuring the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect (2023). The principles challenge teachers and leaders to develop individual social and emotional intelligence and cultural competence and engage in culturally relevant practices. The principles also align with meeting the whole child's needs rather than centering interactions solely on academic achievement. Culturally relevant school leaders are responsible for modeling behaviors that enhance the school culture, climate, and adult capacity to ensure students' cultural, social, and emotional development.

Discussion of Results

By integrating emotional intelligence indicators, as outlined by Goleman (2004), with the components of cultural competence and culturally relevant leadership, we established a solid foundation for aligning these two crucial focus areas. Goleman's five critical components of emotional intelligence are inclusive of one area dedicated to social skills, therefore allowing for the inclusion of social intelligence. Emotional intelligence (EI) consists of self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2004). Goleman's critical components of EI will be referenced during this discussion. The culturally competent/relevant indicators were aggregated for a more robust analysis. Self-awareness (knowing one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and goals and their impact on others) also entailed the emotional intelligence hallmarks of self-confidence and self-assessment. The alignment with the culturally competent/relevant leadership components of self-reflection and self-critique is of note. Therefore, self-awareness serves as a component of EI and cultural competence as both entail consideration of the self (See Figure 3).

Further alignments involved the EI component of self-regulation, which is defined as controlling or redirecting disruptive impulses and moods and includes openness for self-criticism. The cultural competence component of self-critique of personal belief systems aligns with the EI indicator. The motivation EI hallmark of a solid drive to achieve may also be interpreted as

Figure 3. Five critical components of emotional intelligence: Culturally Competent /Relevant Leadership Components

Emotional Intelligence (EI) Component	EI Definition	EI Hallmarks	Culturally Competent /Relevant Leadership Components
Self-awareness	Knowing one's emotions, strengths, weaknesses, drives, values, and goals—and their impact on others	• Self-confidence • Realistic self-assessment • Self-deprecating sense of humor • Thirst for constructive criticism	Engage in self-reflection and self-critique of personal belief systems about themselves, individuals, and groups of people within the school community.
Self -Regulation	Controlling or redirecting disruptive impulses and moods	• Comfort with ambiguity • Trustworthiness and integrity • Openness to change. • Thirst for constructive criticism	Engage in self-reflection and self-critique of personal belief systems about themselves, individuals, and groups of people within the school community.
Motivation	Relishing achievement for its own sake	• Strong drive to achieve • Optimism, even in the face of failure • Organizational commitment	Organizational commitment to maintain the growth and development of all students as the primary area of focus
Empathy	Understanding other people's emotional makeup	• Expertise in building and retaining talent • Cross-cultural sensitivity • Service to clients and customers	Ability to demonstrate effective leadership behaviors that are in alignment with the understanding and appreciation of student differences within the school community
Social Skills	Building rapport with others to move them in desired directions	• Effectiveness in leading change • Persuasiveness • Expertise in building and leading teams	Ability to effectively lead within varied cultural settings in the school community while maintaining the growth and development of all students as the primary area of focus

Goleman, D. (2004). What makes a leader? *Harvard Business Review, pp.* 82, 82–91.

an alignment with the organizational commitment to maintain the growth and development of all students as the primary area of focus. The empathy EI's cross-cultural sensitivity may be affiliated with the cultural competence component of effective leadership behaviors that align with the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of student differences within the school community. Lastly, the social skills EI, which involves building rapport with others to move them in desired directions, may be likened to the culturally competent indicator of effectively leading within varied cultural settings in the school community.

Figure four highlights the guiding principles outlined by the U.S. DOE to address disparities in disciplinary practices and foster inclusivity for marginalized student groups, as identified in their publication (U.S. DOE, 2023, p. 3). These principles are harmonized with Goleman's (2007) five emotional intelligence components.

The first U.S. DOE principle focuses on nurturing a sense of belonging by cultivating a positive, safe, and inclusive school environment for students of color, LGBTQ students, and those with disabilities, thereby aligning with the importance of social skills and effective teaching (refer to Figure 4). The second and fifth principles emphasized by the U.S. DOE underscore empathy and the recognition of student diversity. In contrast, the third and fourth principles emphasize the significance of social skills and adept leadership in navigating diverse cultural landscapes within the school community while highlighting each individual's comprehensive growth and development.

Discussion

The alignment of the U.S. Department of Education's Guiding Principles, Emotional Intelligence (EI) competencies, and Culturally Competent/Relevant Leadership (CC/R) behaviors may be considered subjective. However, the extent of the analysis uncovered the skills in practice that the individual teacher solely constructs. Professional development centering on concepts beyond enhancing student achievement scores to focus on acknowledging the whole child aligns with the guiding principles and current research. Thus, it is imperative for teachers and leaders to view each of the *Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates* identified by the U.S. DOE (2023) through the lens of further whole school development centering on cultural competence (relevance) and social and emotional intelligence continuous professional development.

Cultural competence and social and emotional intelligence stand as multifaceted pillars within the landscape of professional growth, delineating individualized trajectories for each practitioner. They encapsulate intricate nuances, weaving together personal experiences, societal contexts, and ongoing learning processes. Unlike conventional passive learning methodologies, these dimensions cannot be effectively transmitted through mere information absorption. Instead, they beckon for dynamic engagement, inviting practitioners to immerse themselves in active exploration and continuous reflection.

Therefore, the role of the principal encompasses a personal and moral duty to engage in the self-reflective process, as the role of the school leader is inclusive of creating a school culture that is socially just and equitable. As indicated by Senge (1990), leaders are responsible for building organizations where people (teachers, students, and staff) continually expand their capabilities to understand complexity, clarify vision, and improve shared mental models that they are responsible for learning. Principals are responsible for fostering a positive school climate that embraces all students, no matter their background (M. Brooks & Brooks, 2019). The leader's

Figure 4. U.S. Department of Education Guiding Principles (USDOE) Alignment: Emotional Intelligence (EI); Culturally Competent/ Relevant Leadership (CC/R)

Self-Awareness	Self-Management	Social Awareness	Social Skill
USDOE: *Recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce*	**USDOE:** *Foster a sense of belonging through a positive, safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environment.*	**USDOE:** *Support the social, emotional, physical, and mental health needs of all students through evidence-based strategies.* *Ensure the fair administration of student discipline policies in ways that treat students with dignity and respect (including through systemwide policy and staff development and monitoring strategies.*	**USDOE:** *Adequately support high-quality teaching and learning by increasing educator capacity* *Recruit and retain a diverse educator workforce*
CC/R: Engage in self-reflection and self-critique of personal belief systems about themselves, individuals, and groups of people within the school community	**CC/R:** Ability to effectively lead within varied cultural settings in the school community while maintaining the growth and development of all students as the primary area of focus.	**CC/R:** Ability to demonstrate effective leadership behaviors that align with the knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of student differences within the school community.	**CC/R:** Ability to effectively lead within varied cultural settings within the school community while maintaining the growth and development of all students as the primary area of focus
EI: *Emotional Self-Awareness:* the ability to read and understand your emotions as well as recognize their impact on work, performance, relationships *Accurate self-assessment:* realistic evaluation of your strengths and limitations *Self-confidence:* a strong and positive sense of self-worth	**EI:** *Self-control:* ability to keep disruptive emotions and impulses under control *Trustworthiness:* a consistent display of honesty and integrity *Conscientiousness:* ability to manage yourself and your responsibilities. *Adaptability:* skill at adjusting to changing situations and overcoming obstacles *Achievement Orientation:* drive to meet an internal standard of excellence *Initiative:* Readiness to seize opportunities	**EI:** *Empathy:* skill at sensing other people's emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking an active interest in their concerns *Organizational awareness:* the ability to read the currents of organizational life, build decision networks, and navigate politics. *Service orientation:* the ability to recognize and meet customers' needs.	**EI:** *Visionary Leadership:* the ability to take charge and inspire with a compelling vision. *Influence:* the ability to wield a range of persuasive tactics. *Developing Others:* propensity to bolster the abilities of others through feedback and guidance. *Communication:* skill at listening and sending clear, convincing, and well-tuned messages. *Change Catalyst:* proficiency in initiating new ideas and leading people in a new direction. *Conflict Management:* the ability to de-escalate disagreements and orchestrate resolutions. *Building Bonds:* proficiency at cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships. *Teamwork and Collaboration:* Competence in promoting cooperation and building teams.

Goleman, D. (2007). Leadership that gets results. *Harvard Business Review, Ma*rch-April, p.*2–16;* U.S. DOE (2023). U.S. Department of Education (2023). *Guiding Principles for Creating Safe, Inclusive, Supportive, and Fair School Climates*.

ethical responsibility to engage in continuous personal development results in the valuing and encouraging cultural appreciation and understanding of the school community's diverse groups (M. Brooks & Brooks, 2019). In addition, according to Williams (2008), emotional intelligence competencies are associated with individual self-management. School leaders who have developed their EI competencies can better identify challenging and realistic

school improvement goals, focus amid instability, engage in decision-making that centers on creative solutions, and further their capacity to establish goals to benefit all students (H. W. Williams, 2008). The principal's commitment to ongoing personal growth and cultivating cultural competence and emotional intelligence enriches their leadership. It fosters a more inclusive and supportive educational environment for all stakeholders.

Conclusion

The embodiment of culturally relevant social and emotional development for school leaders of diverse school communities consists of continuous engagement in self-reflective practices. Intrapersonal and interpersonal skills provide the foundation for the continuity of improved practices. Being consciously aware of previously conceived personal perspectives about others during daily interactions with diverse people and perspectives is necessary for modifying former conceptions when encountering those who do not share the same race, ethnicity, gender, and culture. A leader who is culturally competent will incorporate and support a pedagogy of education that is culturally relevant for students of all varying backgrounds, races, ethnicities, and abilities. Cultural relevance empowers students and engages them socially and emotionally by including cultural references to develop their awareness, talents, knowledge, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1994). According to the U.S. DOE, school climates that reflect a holistic understanding of student development, inclusive of conditions that are safe, inclusive, supportive, and fair for all students, are effective in meeting the student's social and emotional well-being (U.S. DOE, 2023). If school leaders facilitate the support and recognition of the social, emotional, and cultural facets of the students and school community, the potential for conditions that are safe, supportive, and inclusive for students to achieve academically may lead to a positive effect on the long-standing academic attainment gap.

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SPECIAL EDITION: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Parental Involvement Within the Trauma-Informed School Counseling Culture

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Trauma-informed school counselors as leaders in the community can use a parental involvement model to support the academic, career, and social/emotional needs of students (Rock, 2022). Studies indicate a consistent need for increased parental involvement in schools (Bower & Griffin, 2011; Epstein & Van Voorhis 2010; Wells, 2020). Following ethical standards for practice and leadership, school counselors can facilitate parental involvement that implements a trauma-informed foundation to help meet complex needs of students (ASCA, 2022). Further, applying a Post-Traumatic Growth (PTG) model can be integrated to empower both students and parents towards creating a positive outcome for future success (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, Tedeschi & Calhoun 2004). Implications for incorporating trauma-informed models into a comprehensive school counseling program are discussed.

Parental Involvement within the Trauma-Informed School Counseling Culture

In 2014, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) developed a framework around trauma for use in education and other child service sectors. This framework became the defining standard for defining trauma in which "individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (Frankland, 2021; SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). Traumatic events can include the experiencing or witnessing of physical and sexual abuse, emotionally harmful experiences, loss, war, natural disaster, or living in an environment in which a caregiver has limited or impaired ability. An estimated 26% of children under the age of 4 will have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event in their lifetime (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 51). An alarming 46% of children under the age of 18 will have experienced at least one traumatic event during their childhood (Frankland, 2021). Brown et al. (2022) report that 10% of all children surveyed in the 2016 National Survey of Children's Health reported experiencing three or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Research indicates that 29% of children that are under the age of 17 in rural communities have experienced two or more ACEs (Frankland, 2021, p. 51). Childhood trauma exposure can have lasting adverse

effects throughout the lifespan, affecting cognitive, behavioral, and health components, including signs of depression, anxiety, aggression, substance use, and increased rates of suicide attempts (SAMHSA, 2014; Frankland, 2021). Additionally, within the school setting, trauma can negatively impact a student's cognitive and learning abilities and the ability to regulate emotion and behavior (E. C. Brown et al., 2022). Brown et al. (2022) have found that the current research shows a strong correlation "between childhood trauma and negative educational outcomes across all population groups, including lower grades, decreased performance on standardized achievement tests, and school truancy" (p. 664).

School counselors are instrumental as community leaders in identifying and supporting students affected by trauma. School counselors can provide evidence-based, interventional support and resources that promote resiliency and student success and mitigate the effects of trauma (Alvarez et al., 2022). The American School Counseling Association's (ASCA) position statement describing the school counselor's role as it relates to trauma-informed practices states:

> School counselors understand the impact adverse childhood experiences have on students' academic achievement and social/emotional development. Through the implementation of a school counseling program, school counselors strive to identify, support, and promote the success of students who have experienced trauma (ASCA, 2016, ASCA Position, section).

In 2014, SAMHSA outlined four characteristics of a trauma-informed program: realizing, recognizing, responding, and resisting (ASCA, 2022). Within the trauma-informed school, counselors and educators must realize their role as leaders in the community and the impact trauma has on students and have a thorough understanding that students do have the potential to recover from trauma. They need to know how to recognize and respond to the signs and symptoms of trauma students display (E. C. Brown et al., 2022). This knowledge must extend to integrating policies, procedures, and practices. Lastly, they need to be cognitively aware of their actions and responses that will allow them to resist the re-traumatization of the student (ASCA, 2022). Through the school counselor's advocation efforts to promote policies and procedures that focus on a trauma-sensitive framework, school settings can transform into a trauma-sensitive setting that fosters students' feelings of safety and being supported (ASCA, 2022). Additionally, fostering parental involvement in school can have a positive impact on meeting students' academic and developmental needs (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011).

The Relationship between Trauma and Attachment

Parental involvement is a critical factor in child development from birth. The ethological theory of attachment highlights the importance of early child and caregiver attachments from birth to ages two and beyond (Bowlby, 1969, 1988) Bowlby described how early attachments are instrumental in developmental growth across the lifespan. Children need feelings of safety, cognitive and emotional connection, responsiveness, and compassion to form secure attachments. Ainsworth et al. (1978) measured attachment, and further research found it can fall into the categories of secure attachment, avoidant attachment, resistant/ambivalent attachment, or disorganized/disoriented attachment (M. Main & Solomon, 1986).

A child lacking secure attachment may struggle not only at home but at school or in the community regarding interpersonal relationships or seeking support to meet their needs (Lldiz & Ayhan, 2022). Groh et al. (2012) reports youths with a history of disorganized attachments are at significant risk of expressing hostility with their peers, anti-social behaviors, and have the potential for internalizing symptoms. This disorganized attachment has been proposed to be associated with the caregiver's frightening or disoriented behavior with the child (H. E. Main & Hesse, 2006). The attachment figure is intended to be the source of joy, connection, and emotional soothing. Instead, the child's experience of developing disorganized attachment is such that the caregiver is the source of alarm, fear, and terror, so the child cannot turn to the attachment figure to be soothed (H. E. Main & Hesse, 2006). This finding provides important insights into the nature of the transmission of trauma across the generations. In addition, it offers insights to school counselors and teachers regarding how the child may react or respond to them within the school setting. Problematic behaviors may manifest when facing other types of traumas, such as natural disasters, sudden accidents, or the global pandemic. Advocating for students to secure necessary therapeutic interventions to address attachment related trauma is an ethical duty of the school counselor (ASCA, 2022). Through advocacy efforts, school counselors can apply existing research and applicable models that involve a multifaceted systems approach to support families, teachers, and the greater community (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

Parental Involvement

Parental Involvement or "caregiver involvement" can be defined as supporting the child at home with homework, navigating relationships with peers and teachers, helping volunteer at school, attending workshops, or getting involved in parent and teacher associations (Anthonyraj & Sasikala, 2019). Parents who build these positive relationships across child and adolescent developmental stages positively impact children's academic and personal success (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). Parents are the students' first teachers; therefore, school and parent partnering with those in the child's educational journey are essential. Parental involvement in their children's

education has been defined in several ways in the literature and appears to be a recurrent theme noted in the literature (Yuliant et al., 2022). Considering the parent has a long-standing history of connecting, advocating, and caring for the child, they can act as the child's most valuable trusted asset in terms of emotional, psychological, and cognitive development. The earlier a parent gets involved with their child's education, such as through volunteer methods, the more connected the parent can be with the student and school community.

Parental Involvement Models

Applying models from existing research can incorporate a broader trauma informed community approach toward health and wellness for best practices in school counseling. For example, the Epstein model (J. Epstein, 1992; J. L. Epstein & Salinas, 2004; Hutchins et al., 2012; Yildiz, 2021) can provide a framework for understanding the benefits of parental involvement. This model sees the student within a broader context of family and community (Bower & Griffin, 2011). According to Epstein (1992), how the school views and interfaces with the family system can impact the child's overall success. Epstein's model is grounded on the theory of spheres of influence based on Bronfenbrenner Ecological Model (1989). The three main spheres of influence are family, school, and community. To some degree each of these aspects requires a leadership perspective in modeling, supporting, and collaborating to offer children a healthy perspective of interpersonal and intrapersonal well-being. Some areas that may intersect include after-school programs, churches, faith-based communities, neighborhoods, recreation centers, and sports.

The Epstein model categorizes the following six types of parental involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community (J. Epstein, 1992). Using these categories can assist school counselors and leaders by providing a framework for communication and structure between family and school to support the student. In addition, secondary gains include awareness of self and others, perspective-taking, and facilitating the opportunity for deep, meaningful connection within a caring community. This deep, significant connection and process can create new healthy attachments within relationships towards students feeling the pillars of attachment such as, felt safety, a sense of being seen and known, the experience of felt comfort, a sense of being valued, sense of support for being and becoming one's unique best self (D. P. Brown & Eilliott, 2016). It is important to consider that preexisting attachment styles of parents and children can impact the type of parental involvement utilized within this model. Attachment style can also affect how the child responds within interpersonal relationships with teachers, peers, and school counselors.

When examining attachment, there are features of supportive, healthy parenting that aid in the development of the academic, emotional, and psychological well-being of children. Some of these features include 1.)

Establishing a daily family routine, 2.) Monitoring outside school activities the child engages in, 3.) Modeling the value of learning and self-discipline related to hard work, 4.) Expressing realistic expectations of what achievement is, 5.) Encouraging child developmental process at school, 6.) encouraging reading, writing, and discussion of what is learned with family at home, and 7.) involving children in community sports or lessons that can introduce them to mentors and role models (Henderson & Berla, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological model (1974; 1989; Berry, 2019) uses systems and community impact with a collaborative approach. Bronfenbrenner highlights the importance of the child's social surroundings, biology, and environment. Bronfenbrenner postulates that interacting with the environment is complex because the child is still developing. This interaction is even more applicable given the research on neurobiological aspects of trauma and the impact on the child's developing brain (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Bronfenbrenner's model brings into the foreground the developing person and the need for deliberately designed environments that foster collaborative relationships with all intertwining persons, roles, actions, and processes (Härkönen, 2011). This interrelated, complex understanding of the developing child considers biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of the self while simultaneously considering the dynamic nature of the environment and the greater system (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Within the context of the complex layers of child, family, school and community it can be understood that the focus of Epstein and Bronfenbrenner is to have a true, vested learning community (J. L. Epstein & Salinas, 2004).

Cultural Competency When Working with Diverse Family Systems

As counselors working in the school or community, we understand that it is important to apply multicultural counseling competencies with the students and families we work with. According to Hayes and Erford (2023), "multicultural counseling may be defined as counseling that actively considers the influence of the counselor and client's cultural identities on a counseling relationship, process, and outcome" (p.4). In addressing parental involvement in particular, it is imperative to understand all the various aspects of culture including shared values, practices, social norms, and diverse worldviews that are associated with individuals within the school community. A few of these diverse cultural components include students and families where English is their secondary language, and they may be first- or second-generation immigrants still attempting to acculturate. Other cultural components to consider may include lower socio-economic status families who may struggle due to limited resources making it difficult to be fully accepted or involved within the school system.

In addition, there may be several diverse blended families who are made up of various levels of intersectionality. Some students may come from same sex parent couples, and the aspect of family systems and dynamics are diverse in nature and can impact how the student and family interface with the school and community. Understanding the impact of collective

trauma on culturally diverse families is crucial for school counselors and this can be pivotal in taking the trauma informed perspective especially given that research has linked increase of stress and trauma with minority groups. "Violence and trauma are especially significant for clients who have suffered many oppressive experiences, particularly when tied to their intersecting identities. Understanding the role of intersecting identities on a client's ability to cope and process collective trauma is important" (Hays & Erford, n.d., p. 25). In addition, according to ASCA A1h. ethical code, school counselors are called to "Respect students' and families' values, beliefs and cultural background, as well as students' sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, and exercise great care to avoid imposing personal biases, beliefs or values rooted in one's religion, culture or ethnicity" (ASCA, 2022, p. 7). A systems approach to multicultural counseling competency is necessary to assist school counselors in facing biases and potential ethical concerns head on. School counselors are mandated to consider and apply the influence of family, community, and other environmental factors including social justice practices on individual and systemic levels (Ratts et al., 2016).

According to the multicultural counseling competencies, counselor self-awareness is first on the competencies concerning professional disposition of attitude and beliefs and includes the school counselor to have self-awareness and self-understanding of who they are, what social location they come from, and their own identity personally and professionally. Self-awareness requires insight and perspective taking in understanding how their social position, standing and cultural identity impacts others around them and how others perceive them. In other words, according to Ratts, et al. (2016), "Privileged and marginalized counselors are aware of their social identities, social group statuses, power, privilege, oppression, strengths, limitations, assumptions, attitudes, values, beliefs, and biases" (p.5) Further, school counselors can continually assess their own attitudes and beliefs about racial identity, which is an ongoing and developmental process (Day-Vines et al., 2021).

In addition to individual counselor awareness, it is necessary to explore the impact of the role of the school counselor within the community. To increase collaboration within the community, school counselors can acknowledge that school systems are comprised of diverse individuals who are impacted by sociocultural and sociopolitical experiences. Therefore, school counselors require skills to facilitate open conversations that include contextual dimensions of race, ethnicity, and culture. Culturally responsive school counselors can ethically connect with families from all racial, ethic, and cultural backgrounds to identify and meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students (Hughes et al., 2020). The American School Counselor Association (2021a) State-of-the Profession study noted efforts to increase cultural responsiveness through training for promoting diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI), and access. Specifically, 33% of respondents reported requirements for DEI training for all faculty, 27% reported DEI training was

included in student curriculum, and 16% reported positions were created for DEI specialists (p.13). Discussions on DEI can help build understanding and increase skills for broaching conversations with students and families.

Standards of Practice for School Counselors

School counselors are uniquely positioned professionals within the school setting to facilitate discussions on DEI. The roles and responsibilities of the school counselor are multifaceted and include supporting and advocating for each student while working collaboratively with teachers and families. Further, school counselors adhere to the highest professional standards of integrity, leadership, and professionalism (ASCA, 2022). The professional accreditations and professional and ethical standards that school counselors adhere to encompass a variety of professional organizations, including The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) (Johnson & Carrico, 2020). School counselors are mandated to adhere to the ASCA ethical and professional standards and competencies, which ensure that school counselors are appropriately promoting the academic, career, and social/emotional development of all students in the K-12 setting (ASCA, 2022). The ASCA National Model provides a comprehensive framework for school counselors to develop their school counseling program to meet all students' needs through support and advocacy. In addition, this includes the roles and responsibilities necessary to collaborate effectively and consulate with all stakeholders to promote all students' academic, career, and social/emotional success (ASCA, 2019; Rock, 2022).

The school counselors' mindsets and behaviors, outlined in the ASCA Professional Standards and Competencies, provide the framework for school counselors to equip themselves with the adequate "knowledge, attitude, and skills" that are vital to being an effective change-maker within the school setting (ASCA, 2022, p. 1). The ethical standards outlined in the ASCA Ethical Standards for School Counselors provide the ethical principles necessary to implement a comprehensive school counseling program that facilitates a school environment that supports and advocates for all students (ASCA, 2022). The ethical cornerstone of the school counselor's role is to support student's academic, career, and social/emotional development (ASCA, 2022, p. A.3). By applying their extensive knowledge of human development theories to practice, school counselors can provide all stakeholders with the knowledge necessary to understand trauma-informed practice (ASCA, 2019, M 7 & B-PF 1). School counselors must have a systemic understanding of the trauma-informed practice to best promote student outcomes through effective interventions and support. To ensure equitable outcomes for all students, school counselors exercise leadership to foster systemic change as necessary (ASCA, 2022, B.1.d)

School counselors are ethically bound and adhere to the belief that effective school counseling is a collaborative process that involves consulting and working alongside all stakeholders, including families, teachers, and school staff, to promote student development (ASCA, 2022, A.6; ASCA, 2019,

M 5, B-SS 5, B-SS 6). Therefore, school counselors must apply a systems approach alongside parents who collaborate on all levels to support students successfully. When using the systems mindset, it is essential to consider Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model. School counselors can understand that a child's social surroundings, biology, and environment are crucial when working collaboratively to support trauma-affected students. Even in parent-child relationships where the relationship attachment presents as flawed, the parent can be included as an integral contributor to the conceptualization and support plan.

By leading as an example, school counselors can demonstrate the importance of fostering self-awareness, addressing one's biases, and uncovering potential triggers and trauma responses to reduce negative experiences in trauma-informed professional settings. By modeling this behavior, school counselors can teach and support the ongoing dispositional development of other stakeholders. The Counsel for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) dispositional literature illustrates the importance of interpersonal and intrapersonal characteristics, values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors within communication, including commitment, openness, respect, integrity, and self-awareness (CACREP, 2016). Through this practice, school counselors can be integral in helping others understand how their unique reactions and responses to specific situations involving trauma can lead to parallel process reactive responses.

Fostering Parental Involvement

There are several theories and tools to consider in the face of adversity to cultivate healing and growth for students, parents, families, and entire school communities. Even when including parents indirectly, it can be further explored how counselors use case conceptualization in working with students within the context of the entire system. It may be best to include parents directly to support students' academic success, personal success, and overall well-being. However, there are instances where family conflict can be a barrier to desired student outcomes. Some considerations include children who have traumatic attachment backgrounds with their parents. Often these children may attend school to avoid family conflict, domestic violence within the home, or other types of defined abuse or neglect.

Confidentiality is essential for minors in challenging situations at home. This highlights the need to establish and maintain trusting relationships with school counselors (ASCA, 2022). School counselors regularly face ethical decision-making situations, including mandated reporting and other concerns where the counselor's assessment concludes that the parent or caregiver may not be the healthiest support for the child. Therefore, assessing whether the parent is an ally and advocate of support or a barrier to student success is crucial. This aspect of the parent as an advocate or barrier also stems from prior research on attachment theory (Lidiz & Ayhan, 2022). For example, insecure attachments to parents may hinder the student's ability to work

through trauma and manage symptoms experienced within the school setting. In such a situation, the school counselor may contact parents to include the support of the family system.

When contacting family or other members of the student's support system, school counselors adhere to the ASCA Ethical Standard that they must respect a student's ethical right to confidentiality while balancing this with a parent's legal right to guide their child's life (ASCA, 2022, A.2.g.). In addition, school counselors are ethically mandated to respect the rights of parents and work collaboratively with parents to "facilitate and advocate for students' maximum growth in the areas of academic, career, and social/emotional development" (ASCA, 2022, B.1.b.). Knowing when to exclude a parent and invoke a student's right to confidentiality is an ongoing dilemma for school counselors (Stone, 2017, p. 5). Stone notes that school counselors who build collaborative relationships and trust with parents are positioned to help parents better understand the role and responsibilities of the school counselor and the ethical issues that school counselors face when working with minors. In addition to a parent's legal right to guide their child's life, school counselors must also adhere to all federal, state, and local laws, as well as district policy, when working with students and families where the child's welfare is in question (ASCA, 2022, B.1.g.).

Because laws regarding minors can be complex, understanding the rules and regulations pertaining to minors is critical when working in a trauma-informed setting and with family systems that cause the student's trauma. The school counselor must use an ethical decision-making model when deciding what information should be shared with the family in these situations. While there are many models one can consider, the ASCA Ethical Standards decision-making model is appropriate for diverse situations (ASCA, 2022 F.a-l.). ASCA lists the Intercultural Model of Ethical Decision Making, Solutions to Ethical Problems in School (STEPS), and the Ethical Justification Model to consider when faced with an ethical dilemma. As social change agents, school counselors may face circumstances where they need to intervene on behalf of the student to address trauma within the family system. School counselors can also empower students with practical, data-driven tools they can implement to navigate through complex family systems. According to ASCA, "school counselors play an integral role in helping promote child welfare by providing direct and indirect student services. Those services include advocating for students' ends by addressing issues that could affect their academic, personal, and social/emotional well-being" (American School Counselor Association, 2021b, para. 3). A school counselor's primary obligation is to the student; therefore, in situations where the parents present a barrier to student success, school counselors should apply their professional judgment, seek supervision, and consult with their administration on best practices to make decisions that support student success and foster continued growth (Stone, 2017, p. 199).

Post Traumatic Growth

In facing trauma individually and collectively, counselors can begin to unearth triggers and disarm them with the knowledge of the trauma Four F's model by becoming self-aware and responding with a better understanding if someone is prone to fight, flight, freeze, or fawn (Walker, 2013). According to Walker (2013), people often react with an emotionally charged demeanor such as being ready to fight, run away, petrification or fawning by people pleasing the "offender." Understanding how we may be more prone to respond when triggered can give us valuable insight in responding more intentionally in health. School counselors can also access and reflect on organic resiliency features they may already encompass while building on training in others. In addition, counselors can exhibit and foster in others a specific model after exercising resiliency, known as Post Traumatic Growth or PTG. PTG is a theory that states transformation can occur following trauma. Developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), PTG posits that people who endure psychological struggle following adversity can see growth afterward. For example, Kristo (2021) stated, "Teachers, counselors, and parents should work together to both support high school students facing adversity and foster resiliency through discussion and exploration of new life perspectives arising from the pandemic" (p. 1605).

According to Calhoun and Tedeschi (1998; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004), people develop new understandings of themselves based on shifting their worldviews regarding ideas, thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about themselves, others, the world, and God. This new worldview offers a unique perspective on life. This growth is often seen within the self, applying deeper meaning, and is then used to empower others facing adversity. Within the school community, we can consider the Post Traumatic Growth Inventory, which evaluates growth after trauma as observed in the inventory created by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996). This inventory outlines five core areas: 1. Appreciation of Life, 2. Relationships with Others, 3. New Possibilities in life, 4. Personal Strength, and 5. Spiritual Change and Growth. According to research by Kutza & Cornell (2021), college students have demonstrated PTG post COVID-19 which indicates the potential for benefits from cultivating a strengths-based model with K-12 students. In addition to PTG Theory, there are several components of resiliency that may be related as well.

Resiliency. According to the American Psychological Association (2014), resilience is "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or even significant sources of stress" (para. 4). According to several studies, the Brief Resilience Scale has been used to study the scores and impact on participants who have experienced trauma and extreme stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Yu, Yu, & Hu (2021), High school graduates demonstrated resilience as illustrated in several facets that align with themes of finding a "strong willingness to seek meaning and accept the psychological distress brought about by the epidemic" (p.1066). There

appears to be a desire to find hope, meaning and purpose even in the midst of stress and collective trauma. According to Warbington et al. (2019, p. 64) "School support is one factor that helps to build resilience."

The Army Master Resiliency Program (MRT) is one model of resiliency that has been broken down into concrete dispositions or characteristics towards steps of growth. Some of the critical components of the MRT include having characteristics such as self-awareness, self-regulation, optimism, mental agility, strength of character, and connection. People who demonstrate higher ability towards resiliency often have the following characteristics and can tap into or facilitate ongoing growth and development: Optimism, altruism, moral compass, faith and spirituality, humor, having a role model, social support, facing fear, having meaning and purpose in life (2020, p. para. 4).

According to Taylor (2017), there are skills for building resilience, including remaining calm and in the moment, which can be connected to meditation and grounding techniques. An additional skill is using one's body as feedback to understand what the person is experiencing. Biofeedback and exercises towards physical awareness can prove beneficial to support the person in how they can "hear" what their body needs.

Another facet of regulation is accepting what is and embracing change or transition as it occurs. Throughout life, it is apparent that one thing we can rely on to be consistent is "change." The more counselors can support students, parents, and teachers in embracing change and ambiguity while learning to flex with the times, the better. In addition, nourishing oneself is essential for building and surrounding oneself with positive social relationships. Finally, finding purpose and deeper meaning in life is important while practicing each skill daily. School communities, and especially school counselors, are essential workers within the context of supporting students with services, and they can understand the culture since they are a part of the ecological system. "School support is one factor that helps to build resilience, and it seems as though school counselors who have personally experienced the same natural disaster [trauma] as the students seem to feel as though they are equipped to provide more empathetic support" (Warbington et al., 2019, p. 64).

Barriers to Parental Involvement

Since parental involvement is a key component of students' overall success, it is important to consider potential barriers and create strategies to help remove them. Barriers are varied and can be highly individual. However, common barriers include lack of parenting, potential insecure attachment styles, parental systems trauma, collective trauma, language barriers, and education level, which can impact parents' ability to be involved with their child's education. Parents may also feel insecure from their own negative childhood experiences in school or lack the time and/or financial resources necessary to be involved (Baker et al., 2016; Berry, 2019). School counselors can work to address these barriers in their program evaluation process to

further growth and change as leaders in the community. Barriers can be identified by asking parents to share their barriers or limitations for attending school events. It can be helpful to educate parents on potential barriers to aid in identification. Next, parents can be asked if there are any steps to take that might increase their involvement. Uncovering answers to these basic questions can be a starting point for increasing parental involvement through uncovering and understanding immediate needs and past experiences (Baker et al., 2016). Further, Vaishnavi and Aneesh (2018) state, "But when a school counselor effectively explains the process of counseling, ethics, and the problem of the child to the parents, parents become cooperative to counseling" (p. 363).

Schools lacking a systems community-based approach, can consider including Epstein's model, to increase parental involvement. "The Epstein model is one of the most widely referenced frameworks for parental involvement" (Bower & Griffin, 2011, p. 78). With each grade level, school activities to develop and maintain partnerships with families decline and drop dramatically during the transition to middle grades (Baker et al., 2016; J. Epstein, 1992). Helping parents and communities stay engaged as the child ages must be considered using a developmental perspective. For example, parental (PTA) involvement looks very different in K-5th grade as opposed to middle school support and later even high school connections. In addition, evaluating teacher and school counselor biases is a necessary part of cultural competencies and impacts how the school conceptualizes student and family needs. School counselors must use critical thinking skills, evaluate barriers, and exercise personal self-reflection to avoid biased thinking to best support parents and children in schools. The various models and strategies discussed can support school counselors in their personal work with students and in exercising leadership to advocate for any needed systemic changes. An overall goal for school counselors includes increasing parental involvement using a trauma-focused model to support students, families, and school communities.

Implications for Practice

In summary, the need for a systems approach utilizing a trauma focused model including parental involvement is a substantiated blueprint for social health and success. When applied, the Epstein model can be foundational in developing a plan for school counselors to integrate within a trauma informed plan of care in their school communities. Wells (2022) highlights the importance of a culturally responsive, trauma informed school counselor framework for best serving students and families. In addition, counselors are faced with also navigating state legal age of consent requirements, mandatory reporting procedures, and maintaining confidentiality, as these are vital factors that need to be considered when implementing a systems approach (ASCA, 2022). Ethical decision-making models are also helpful when evaluating complex situations involving these factors. These models can help organize and evaluate information obtained from the system including factors

such as informed consent, confidentiality, family members involved, the circumstances at play, and balancing boundaries (Forester-Miller & Davis, 2016). Other important considerations are ongoing disclosure and consent for the presenting problem and the client-aligned goals the school counselor is working towards achieving. Maintaining the professional role and responsibility as a school counselor is crucial regarding the professional relationship with the student. Maintaining such functions and high ethical standards while keeping professional counselor dispositions in check requires the support of ongoing close supervision and/or engagement in the professional school counseling community. Feedback, support, and resources obtained in supervision and engagement in the school counseling community can further support ethical and productive interactions when involving the family system and parents (Hilts et al., 2022).

Considering the biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects of the self while simultaneously considering the dynamic nature of the environment and the greater system can have a positive impact on students academically and personally (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Understanding the impact of parent and child attachment on a student's development can bring additional insight to student needs at various stages. Incorporating concepts from Walkers (2013) Four F's trauma response self-awareness model and integrating a PTG perspective while educating students and parents on individual factors for increased resilience can provide needed support and encouragement. This application can further cultivate a trauma-informed school counseling culture. Finally, working to remove barriers and create an equitable and optimal learning environment for all students is foundational to the work of a trauma-informed school counselor.

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SPECIAL EDITION: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Re-Contextualization of Ethical Leadership: Decentering Dominant Characteristics With Compassion in Leadership Preparation Programs

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Keywords: ethical leadership, educational leadership and administration, compassion, self-compassion, leadership preparation

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The Educational Leadership and Administration discipline requires a more expansive theoretical understanding of ethical leadership, contextualizing ethics with the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture. With critical analysis of ideology, the perception of normal order in the social world, and its function within disciplines, is questioned for a deeper understanding of ethical leadership. As a result, an interrogation of the implicit characteristics of dominant culture may prompt future educational leaders to re-evaluate their own personal guiding principles along with the ethical principles that influence their organizational climate. This article aims to critically examine dominant characteristics with the intention to facilitate a more critical understanding of ethical leadership and disrupt existing traditions that work against transformational change. An additional goal of this article is to advance counterculture principles like compassion by accentuating interdependence and intentionality in leadership preparation programs. An emphasis on compassion may positively affect advocacy skills in support of the communities that future leaders will serve, facilitate deeper understandings about empathy and how it influences interpersonal relationships, reduce the likelihood of professional burnout, and positively impact the performance of future leaders in the workplace. Practical suggestions are shared to support counterculture principles like compassion and self-compassion for leadership development.

The Educational Leadership and Administration discipline requires a more expansive theoretical formulation of ethical leadership, contextualizing ethics with the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture (Wright et al., 2018). In the social world, dominant cultural characteristics center on shared understandings of historically included members of society that set the standard by which historically excluded members must function (Brookfield, 2005). Dominant culture also establishes the theoretical perspective within a particular discipline, facilitating an interconnected and interrelated understanding about ethical relationships and how they work within that field (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Characteristics that often appear as normal order are uncritical internalizations of dominant culture (Bourdieu, 1974–1980/2010; Brookfield, 2014; Gramsci, 1929–1936/2010). Through critical analysis of ideology, the perception of normal order, and its function within disciplines, is questioned to facilitate a contextualized understanding of ethics and disrupt existing traditions that work against transformational change (Brookfield, 2014). This article aims to decenter characteristics of

dominant culture with counterculture principles of compassion to advance interdependence and intentionality in leadership preparation programs. An additional goal of this article is to encourage future educational leaders to transform rather than maintain the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture that influence educational institutions like schools, colleges, and universities.

A Re-Contextualization of Ethical Leadership

Ethical theory dates to Socrates (469–399 BC) and what we know from the writings of his student, Plato (Cooper & Hutchinson, 1997). Northouse (2004) shares how "the word ethics has its roots in the Greek word ethos, which means customs, conduct, or character" (p. 302). Socrates asserted that self-knowledge is foundational to all other forms of knowledge (Cooper & Hutchinson, 1997). Like Socrates, Nel Noddings (2015), a prominent scholar in the field of the philosophy of education, argues that "an education worthy of the name must help students to examine their own lives" (p. 238). Since ethical theory offers a code of conduct that guides leaders in their decision-making process (Kouzes & Posner, 2012), Noddings (2015) recommends discussion about character education, conduct, and care relations begin with an ethic's approach, including modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation in education.

First, Noddings (2015) suggests that ethical relationships must be demonstrated with the concern and goal of caring for others. In addition, the act of caring must be perceived by others as genuine for modeling to be effective. Next, engaging in dialogue about the act of caring is critical to personal development. A potential outcome of dialogue is the facilitation of reflection about personal guiding principles and its influence on daily practice, prompting a re-evaluation of how to establish caring and ethical relationships. In parallel, the practice of caring, and the continuous reflection on that practice, is also essential to the development of ethical relationships with others. Finally, Noddings (2015) highlights the benefits of confirmation— the act of affirming the best version of the self and encouraging the best in others— with elements of trust and continuity present in relationships. In general, ethics has to do with how leaders engage in relationship with the self and others, making ethical relationships a very important topic in leadership preparation programs (LPPs). That is why criticality about ethics are a key factor in leadership development, where future leaders play a large role in facilitating the ethical climate of an organization due to their power of influence—the ability to engage others with mutual goals and reinforce the organization's values (Northouse, 2020).

A critical understanding of ethical leadership facilitates a deeper understanding about the implicit characteristics of dominant culture, prompting future educational leaders to interrogate their own personal guiding principles along with the ethical principles that influence their organizational climate. Sensoy and Di Angelo (2021) argue that a naming/not-naming dynamic exists within organizations, where dominant culture

remains un-named to infer a universal neutrality to dominant groups. For that reason, it is important that future educational leaders engage in explicit discussion about dominant characteristics to name what often goes un-named within institutional culture (Brookfield, 2014). LPPs are invited to ground ethical theories in a critical framework to contextualize ethics with the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture. Without the re-contextualization of ethical leadership, LPPs may continue to lead future educational leaders in the uncritical internalization of dominant characteristics, perpetuating existing traditions and structures that center dominant culture within an organization.

Theorizations about ethics in leadership are often decontextualized from the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture. Some of the more prominent ethical theories in leadership development also lack this type of explicit contextualization. For instance, Heifetz (as cited in Northouse, 2020) argued leadership to involve the use of authority to encourage others to navigate through conflict values in the 1990s. Heifetz perceived this as an ethical issue because it deals with the values of others. In the late 1970s, Burns (as cited in Northouse, 2020) agreed that leadership includes a moral dimension, where leaders engage others in the process of assessing their own values and needs, facilitating a conscious awareness in pursuit of equality and equity in the workplace. In the early 1970s, Greenleaf (as cited in Northouse, 2020) theorized a slightly different approach to ethical leadership, calling it servant leadership. A servant leader is attentive to the needs of others, assumes a social responsibility in service to others, and recognizes others as equal contributors within an organization, emphasizing counterculture characteristics like that of unconditional positive regard. Northouse (2020) notes a common theme among the three perspectives, where each concept includes an interpersonal relationship based on a particular set of personal guiding principles that affect the ethical climate of an organization. However, the three common theorizations of ethics in leadership are limited in that the principles discussed are not explicitly contextualized with dominant culture to question and re-evaluate the myth of neutrality.

More recently, scholars are calling attention to the need for a more expansive view of ethical leadership, situating issues and relationships within the cultural, social, and political contexts it exists within. For example, Shapiro and Stefkovich (2016) advocate for the use of multiple ethical paradigms in leadership development to facilitate awareness of perspectives that leaders often use in their work. In doing so, Shapiro and Stefkovich aim to prompt reflection and critique about traditional values and the potential for unintended outcomes that affect personal growth, interpersonal relationships, and institutional climate. Similarly, this article emphasizes the importance of critiquing traditional narratives in education to uncover the hidden curriculum of domination that is deeply embedded in the ideological and structural premises that influence educational institutions.

Since this article aims to explore a theory of ethical leadership that could be described as critical, a brief explanation of criticality is also warranted. Brookfield (2005) writes, "critical theory [is] grounded in an activist desire to fight oppression, injustice, and bigotry and create a fairer, more *compassionate* [emphasis added]). world" (p. 10). With a critical lens, leaders have an opportunity to interrogate uncritical internalizations of dominant culture that are deeply embedded in the social world. Ideological critique facilitates a conscious awareness to help leaders decenter dominant characteristics that justify and perpetuate economic and political inequity. To do this, critical theory must be situated in a political analysis at a systems level, providing future educational leaders "with knowledge and understandings intended to free them from oppression" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 25). Further, critical analysis must integrate culture and context for a more democratic vision of the future. Brookfield argues that verification of critical theory is only possible once this vision is realized. To illustrate, dominant characteristics like "fear of open conflict," "sense of urgency," and "only one right way" work against the interdependence and intentionality necessary for a more democratic vision of educational institutions (dRworks, 2016, pp. 29–33). These dominant characteristics accentuate conflict avoidance to maintain personal comfort, a false sense of urgency to sustain power imbalances, and one right way to qualify a single approach to leadership (dRworks, 2016). In the next three section, these characteristics are examined further with the intention to facilitate a more critical understanding of ethical leadership, and its implications for ethical relationships in the workplace, to center counterculture principles like compassion by accentuating understandings of interdependence and intentionality in leadership preparation programs.

Fear of Open Conflict

Interpersonal relationships provide opportunities to make sense of institutional culture, facilitating an understanding of shared goals to help move the organization forward. To do this, Yang (2015) identifies interdependence as a key feature among working teams to increase cooperation. However, leaders are often faced with the challenge of facilitating collaboration when conflicting values and perspectives arise. Yang (2015) argues that the way leaders handle conflict affects emotional and cognitive experiences in the workplace. For instance, leaders who engage in dominant or compromising strategies may be perceived by others as adopting neglect or avoidance behaviors, impacting perceptions of fairness and trust in the workplace. Gelfand et al. (2008) describe avoidance behaviors as actions that are both agreeable and passive to manage conflict in the workplace. In addition, Brown (2012) links fear of interpersonal conflict with the desire to control the situation at-hand. In both cases, the underlying assumption is that conflict is dangerous and should be avoided to maintain conflict-free interpersonal relationships (Gelfand et al., 2012). Findings from a study by Gelfand et al. (2012) suggest that conflict avoidance negatively correlates with psychological safety—when employees feel secure enough to engage in

creative thought, experiences, and/or interactions with interpersonal risk at work (Edmondson, 1999, 2018). Fear of conflict can be counterbalanced with an understanding of interdependence, engaging purposely with others, and listening to diverse perspectives. Healthy positive interpersonal relationships can lead to complex thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills to further the goals of an organization (Brown, 2012, 2018). Moving forward, LPPs are invited to consider acts of compassion, engaging future educational leaders with different experiences and diverse perspectives to help them navigate the complexities of their institutional culture with interdependence.

Sense of Urgency

A true sense of urgency provides opportunities to act on critical issues within an organization. Kotter (2008) distinguishes a true sense of urgency from a false sense of urgency, where the former is driven by determination and the latter by feelings of anger and anxiety. Kotter explains how feelings of anger surface from failures of the past while anxiety is triggered by excessive worry about the future of one's livelihood. Kotter states,

> anxiety and anger drive behavior that can be highly energetic—which is why people
>
> mistake false for true urgency. But the energy from anger and anxiety can easily create
>
> activity, not productivity—and sometimes very destructive activity ... [that may lead to]
>
> unproductive flurry of behavior that is a false urgency. (p. 4)

Kotter argues that a false sense of urgency is not sustainable in the workplace because it is founded on anxiety and anger, which can lead to burnout when a natural human limit is met.

Bradt's research (2010) also illustrates how common it is for individuals to engage in activity without intentionality, often reacting to a false sense of urgency. Findings from Bradt's study report 47% of participants think about something other than what they are doing. Similarly, Tolle (2004) relates a false sense of urgency with a false sense of self, where individuals over-identify with their thoughts and emotions because they interpret the world through memory from past experience and anticipation of future experience. In this case, a conditioned sense of self is formed by unconscious thinking. Tolle (2004) counterbalances a false sense of self with greater conscious awareness to disrupt unconscious thought patterns, freeing the conditioned self with focused attention to the present moment. Findings from research conducted by Mahfouz (2017) support a connection between conscious awareness and improved leadership skills, such as self-reflection, self-care, and positive interpersonal relationships. The study also indicates that participants who reported improved leadership skills also stated an

increase in self-awareness, self-management, and self-compassion, which is associated with pro-social behavior that positively affects institutional culture. Moving forward, LPPs are invited to consider acts of self-compassion, engaging future educational leaders with the need for pause and reflection to help them navigate the complexities of their institutional cultures with intentionality.

Only One Right Way

A Forbes article written by Britcher (2018) entitled, "Overcoming the Leadership Perfection Problem," links perfectionism with limitations to learning, authenticity, and transparency in the workplace. Perfectionism is interrelated with a mindset of only one right way, implying that there is no room for improvement to avoid experiences with failure and to control for negative outcomes. Neff (2011) links perfectionism with harsh standards and high expectations of the self, of which are then projected on others. To illustrate, perfectionism is associated with a micromanagement approach, attempting to control outcomes by controlling others. This type of protective leadership tactic may impede on motivation and creativity, leaving team members feeling stifled and leaders feeling over-worked (Britcher, 2018). Findings from a study by Otto et al. (2021) found self-reported perfectionism to negatively impact leadership behavior, where leaders with a higher level of perfectionism reported a lower tendency to forgive others in case of mistakes. The results indicate how perfectionism may hinder the development of positive interpersonal relationships and the facilitation of a safe climate for interpersonal risk at work.

Neff (2011) counterbalances perfectionism with understandings of the shared human experience and intrinsic human value. Findings from a study by Schabram and Heng (2022) suggest that both compassion and self-compassion practice replenish human resources like self-control, self-esteem, and social belonging. Specifically, the researchers argue that compassion disrupts cynicism and self-compassion eases exhaustion, which reduce possibilities of burnout when a natural human limit is met. Moving forward, LPPs are invited to consider both compassion and self-compassion practice, engaging future educational leaders with the openness and psychological flexibility needed to positively contribute toward human sustainability, interdependence, and intentionality in their organizations.

Critical analysis of ethical theories allow future educational leaders to understand ethical relationships at a deeper level. It is important to recognize that ethical leadership does not sit outside of the social, cultural, and political contexts it exists within. If LPPs are to disrupt the uncritical internalization and perpetuation of the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture, then a commitment to re-contextualize ethics in leadership is required. Research in areas of leadership, along with a more critical understanding of ethical theories, are further causes to de-center dominant

characteristics with counterculture principles like compassion, honoring interdependence and intentionality in pursuit of transformational change for a more democratic vision of educational institutions.

De-Centering Dominant Culture with Compassion

Compassion is demonstrated when an ethic of care is directed toward others. The origin of the term stems from the Latin meaning of "to suffer with" (as cited by Brown, 2010, p. 16). This implies that a foundational element of compassion is to bear witness to the lived experience of others. Neff (2011) explains the act of compassion as the recognition of the shared human experience with the acknowledgment of, and desire to alleviate, the suffering experienced by others. Brown (2017) argues that engaging with others in collective joy and collective pain can increase an openness about the world and diversify perspectives about how it works. A study conducted by Winburn et al. (2020) found that educational leaders who report higher levels of compassion are better positioned to advocate for the common good. The researchers collected data from 139 participants asked to complete the Empathy Assessment Index and the Advocacy Competencies Self-Assessment. Findings from the study showed a significant relationship between levels of empathy and advocacy competencies reported by educational leaders. According to the results, a high level of empathy can be an indicator of effective advocacy skills (Winburn et al., 2020). An emphasis on compassion in leadership preparation programs may positively affect advocacy skills in support of the communities that future leaders will serve.

The word compassion relates to other terms in the literature that emerge from interpersonal relationships, such as empathy and love (Neff, 2011). To further understandings about empathy, a study by Goleman (2017) identified three sub-areas that comprise the concept: cognitive, emotional, and empathetic forms of empathy. Cognitive empathy represents the ability to accurately perceive what others are intending to convey, emphasizing the cognitive information processing necessary to achieve a perceived listening experience. On the other hand, emotional empathy describes the capacity to recognize emotion in others. Finally, the recognition of unspoken needs from those in distress is understood as empathetic empathy.

A study conducted by Solomon (2017) demonstrates how power may interfere with the ability to empathize with others. Research findings show that elevated social power is associated with a reduced emotional response to the suffering of others, such as feelings of distress at another person's distress. Solomon (2017) collected data from 118 participants who were asked to complete the Sense of Power scale, Baseline Emotional Experience scale, and Decoding of the Partners' Distress questionnaire. During the experiment, partners were randomly assigned and asked to think about an event that caused emotional suffering, where one discussed the event while another listened. Findings indicated that participants who reported higher social power experienced less emotion (e.g., distress, compassion) in response to their partners account of suffering. The prioritization of compassion in

leadership preparation programs may facilitate deeper understandings about the empathy of future leaders, or lack thereof, and how it influences interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

An empathetic consideration of others and their basic human rights sets the foundation for genuine human connection. West (1993) argues that the decision to love is a conscious one, where the self is grounded in the humanity of others. In this vein, hooks (1994) calls to mind a practical element of love, where action in support of others can lead to connection and community. A study conducted by Sadri et al. (2011) found empathetic concern was a significant moderator of performance in a cross-cultural context. The researchers gathered data from archival database of multisource ratings from practicing leaders around the world. Data points from 37,095 practicing leaders from 38 countries were evaluated. Findings indicated that higher ratings of empathic concern from employees positively related to higher ratings of leader performance from their supervisor. Findings from this study also indicate that empathy plays an important role in leadership development across an international sample. A focus on compassion in leadership preparation programs may positively impact the performance of future leaders as perceived by team members and supervisors in the workplace.

Compassion is found in relationship, including the intrapersonal relationship within one's mind. For instance, in the literature, self-compassion is defined as including, "proactive behavior to better one's situation" (Neff, 2011, p. 12). Neff (2011) offers three sub-elements of self-compassion: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. The act of being kind toward oneself aims to reduce habits of self-critique and self-judgment. While an acceptance of the shared human experience aims to normalize both positive and negative emotions derived from lived experience. Whereas mindfulness aims for equanimity so that individuals avoid over-identifying with their thoughts and emotions, allowing them to respond at a level aligned with the way the situation is perceived. A study conducted by Biron and Veldhoven (2012) discovered that not-for-profit service workers who report higher levels of psychological flexibility also report lower levels of daily emotional exhaustion. The researchers recruited 170 participants to complete a questionnaire and a diary survey over the span of three consecutive workdays. Biron and Veldhoven (2012) suggest that elements of self-compassion may reduce the likelihood of professional burnout. A shift toward openness and psychological flexibility may facilitate acceptance of the range of human emotion rather than suppress or control for them, moving away from self-critique and/or self-judgement toward self-compassion at work.

Research in the areas of compassionate and caring leadership are beginning to document the following potential benefits: (a) plausible increase in advocacy skills, (b) probable improvement to interpersonal relationships, (c) possible boost on performance, and (d) likely reduction in professional burnout (Winburn et al., 2020; Biron & van Veldhoven, 2012; Sadri et

al., 2011; Solomon, 2017). In addition, research findings indicate that compassionate and caring leadership is associated with lower turnover and an increase in collaboration in the workplace (Melwani et al., 2012). Hougaard et al. (2018) surveyed more than 1,000 leaders and found 91% reported compassion as "very important" to leadership development. However, 80% of respondents stated that they did not know how to develop the skill. With these statistics mind, it is important to facilitate dialogue about character, conduct, and care relations with an ethic's approach in education, advancing counterculture principles like compassion in leadership preparation programs. The goal of the next section is to become better acquainted with acts of compassion through practical application of a helping skills module exemplar for LPPs (Krikorian, 2022).

Helping Skills for Leadership Preparation Programs

LPPs may further understandings of interdependence and intentionality through compassionate and caring leadership. For example, a helping-skills module may advance the study and development of helping skills for observation and communication techniques. Coverage includes detailed exposure to Carl Roger's (1960) Person-Centered Core Conditions with an emphasis on understanding theory and acquisition of basic skills. Rogers (1960) emphasized three core conditions to facilitate helping relationships: (a) congruence between those in relationship, (b) unconditional positive regard toward others, and (c) compassion for others. Rogers (1960) emphasized the value of empathetic concern in relationship with others, where trusting interactions invite the psychological safety necessary to engage in interpersonal risk at work. In parallel, psychological safety may encourage greater trust and self-acceptance to engage in creative thought and further develop problem solving skills to navigate complex situations. Rogers and Farson (2015) write,

> one basic responsibility of the [leader] is the development, adjustment, and integration of individual employees. [The leader] tries to develop employee potential, delegate responsibility, and achieve cooperation. To do so, [they] must have, among other abilities, the ability to listen intelligently and carefully to those with whom [they] work. (p. 1)

Rogers and Farson (2015) argue that listening is a crucial way to spur about change in people and organizations, bringing "about changes in their basic values and personal philosophy" (p. 3). In order to motivate people and bring change to organizations specific techniques for empathetic listening need to be taught and learned. The aims of Rogers' Person-Centered Core Conditions (2015) are to facilitate the proper conditions for learning, authenticity, and transparency in pursuit of positive organizational results. In the next five sub-sections, practical suggestions are included as part of a

helping skills module to encourage compassion in leadership development: (a) mixed reality simulation (MRS), (b) a listening journal, (c) storytelling, (d) a Note-to-Self exercise, and (e) a self-care plan.

Mixed Reality Simulation

Future educational leaders can be introduced to basic helping skills with mixed reality simulation (MRS), offering a greater understanding of ethical relationships with the self and others. The simulation-based technology aims to facilitate a safe space in a low-stakes environment for practicing helping skills like compassion practice. It offers an intervention tool for future educational leaders to address difficult situations in the field while engaging the class in ethical discussion and exploration. MRS offers an innovative approach that mimics real-world issues with scenario-based experiences to address ethical issues more holistically (Ireland, 2021). MRS has successfully been used in areas of education where participants report feeling like they interacted in a real-life scenario as opposed to pretending or gaming (Dieker et al., 2017; Straub et al., 2014). In a national study, researchers found that after four 10-minute sessions of MRS learning, participants significantly outperformed colleagues not exposed to the training in targeted behaviors (Mursion, 2020). Spencer et al. (2019) also compared role-play with MRS and found it to be significantly more useful practice tool in educator preparation. To date, research findings continue to support the effectiveness of MRS with educator preparation programs. An explanatory sequential mixed methods study conducted by Ireland (2021) recruited 52 educator preparation programs in the United States and found that respondents frequently reported MRS scenarios as most beneficial to future professionals. LPPs may consider integrating MRS as a practical component of a helping skills module, where future leaders take turns engaging with the technology to practice compassion grounded in Rogers' (1960) Person-Centered Core Conditions.

MRS scenarios may include, but are not limited to, simulations about: getting to know others; restorative justice circles; social, emotional, and cultural competencies; politically charged environments; and stakeholder (learner-caregiver-community members) conflict. Peer feedback can be incorporated by those who observe the MRS experience along with feedback from the instructor, where feedback is qualitative in the form of alternate perspectives and question-posing to further critical reflection about how to incorporate compassion practice in leadership. MRS experiences can be used to emphasize practical elements of compassion, shifting away from dominant characteristics of only one right way and fear of open conflict toward collaboration and conflict resolution that honors interdependence and intentionality in leadership preparation programs.

Listening Journal

In parallel, leadership preparation programs (LPPs) may ask future educational leaders to keep a self-reflective journal of their MRS experiences throughout the module. One purpose for the practice of compassion is to facilitate greater sensitivity to issues involved in listening to others who are different in significant ways (Norkunas, 2011). Southwest Minnesota State University (2023) offers the idea of a listening journal activity. The journal should include brief descriptions of all the listening experiences with MRS. It should also include an analysis of the ability to achieve a perceived listening experience and how individuals can learn to listen more effectively in the future. Finally, the journal should conclude with an honest assessment of listening competencies and articulate goals for how to become a better listener. The self-reflective journal is one way to facilitate pause and reflection about personal listening habits and how to improve them. Norkunas (2011) found that learners who wrote about listening reported a deep impact on content and performance, while also reporting how honesty, openness, and self-revelation eased discomfort in talking about social justice issues. A listening journal may emphasize empathetic understanding that can positively influence professional interactions, shifting away from dominant characteristics toward pause and reflection for intentionality.

Storytelling

Leadership preparation programs (LPPs) may also consider designing the helping skills module with instruction through storytelling, grounding stories about leadership in personal identity, reflexivity, and the cultural-historical self to inform leadership development (Raj, 2022). Palmer et al. (2010) recommend the use of stories during instruction to balance conceptual ideas, offering a more inviting space for brave conversation by relating lived experience with course content. Brave spaces are described in the literature as a place where members of a community share, question, and educate about different perspectives and openly take risks in challenging perspectives (Arao & Clemens, 2013). For example, story circles are one way to use compassion to support dialogue and transformational change in organizations (C. C. Martinez, 2019). Martinez et al. (2020) describes story circles as a group of six-to-ten individuals who form a circle and share stories from personal experience or hypothetical situations around a common theme. In this case, the circle may focus on operationalizing compassionate leadership, where the storytelling builds a deeper more complex understanding about ethical principles that makeup compassionate and caring leadership.

As a result, story circles, "can become practical interventions for building shared power and moving to action after hearing themes from the stories and building relationships between individuals" (C. Martinez et al., 2020, p. 4). This practice can be facilitated in-person or in a remote format as part of the helping skills module. Each circle is assigned a facilitator (e.g., instructor) who reminds participants of the general guidelines, is mindful of time, and makes

space for everyone to share equally. Story circles emphasize new or diverse perspectives, shifting away from dominant characteristics toward openness of our common humanity and interdependence.

Note-to-Self

Neff (2011) explains self-talk as internal dialogue that may be negative or positive depending on how individuals identify with their thoughts and emotions. Sometimes, individuals rely on self-judgement to motivate them to perform, which can lead to a false sense of urgency, anxiety, and professional burnout. With the Note-to-Self exercise, future leaders are prompted to reflect on a challenging MRS experience that they struggled with and are directed to write a note to themselves. In this note, they are asked to take a gentler approach as if they were writing from the perspective of a loved one. Once the task is complete, they are asked to read the note out loud and notice if the gentler tone reflects the way they typically engage in self-talk during challenging times. Neff (2011) argues that the more individuals engage with positive self-talk the more they will re-train their inner voice to assume a kinder tone and reduce self-criticism when experiencing something new or difficult. This exercise may emphasize positive self-talk, shifting away from dominant characteristics toward an empathetic understanding of our innate human value for intentionality.

Self-Care Plan

Planning in advance for self-care is also recommended as part of the helping skills module. A plan for self-care may assist future leaders in reducing professional burnout. Butler (2023) differentiates maintenance self-care from emergency self-care, where the former is what individuals require as part of their daily life and the latter are techniques to use when they are in crisis. There is no one right way to develop a self-care plan. However, Butler (2023) explains how there are commonalities among plans that offer the most benefit to individuals, which is one that attends to all the dimensions of an individual's life, including the mind, body, spirit, emotions, relationships, and work. When developing a plan for self-care it is suggested that individuals first identify their current coping mechanisms to manage stress. Butler (2023) encourages individuals to reflect on lifestyle habits that impact health, well-being, and negative or positive coping mechanisms. Within the self-care plan, add a goal to reduce negative coping mechanisms that may exacerbate stress levels (e.g., isolate from others). Next, reflect on existing self-care strategies for physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, relationship, and workplace self-care. Commonalities across areas may offer a starting point for strategies to include in the plan. As a next step, when identifying specific practices for *maintenance* self-care, it is important to understand that these are strategies that are employed on a regular basis and should reflect actions that can be used even during the most challenging of times (Robertson as cited by Corwin, 2020).

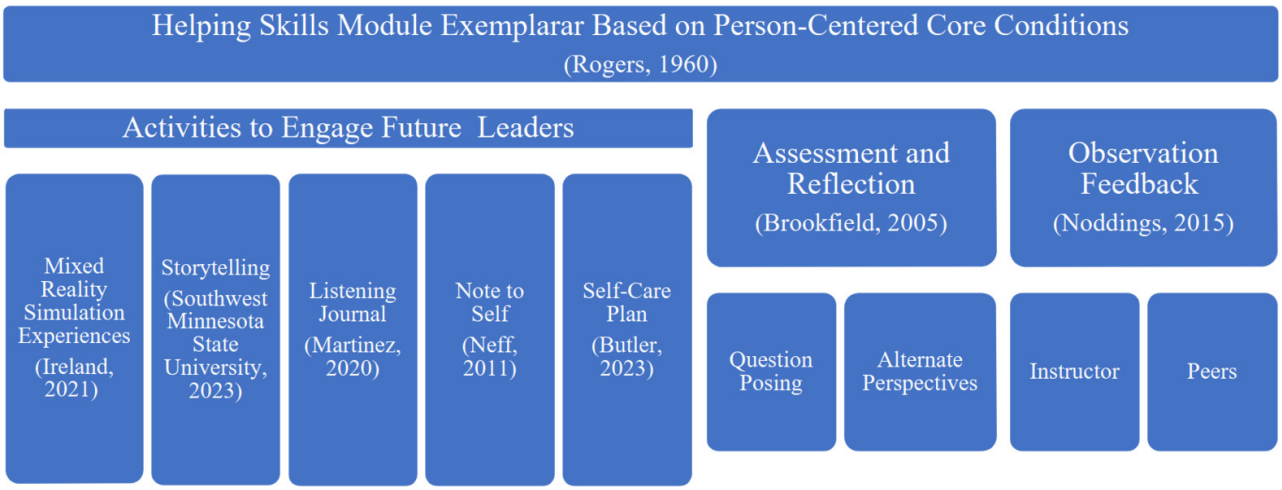

Figure 1. Helping Skills Module Exemplar

On the other hand, when identifying specific practices for *emergency* self-care, Butler (2023) suggests making a list that includes: (a) activities to do when upset that are healthy and positive, (b) people to reach out to if support is needed, (c) positive affirmations to recite during a difficult time, and (d) who and what to avoid in challenging situations. It is important to consider an emergency self-care plan much in the same way that one would think about preparing for other potential crises like natural disasters. To finalize the plan, articulate how and to what extent the plan will be implemented, share the plan with others for accountability purposes, and track the progress of the plan for revisions if needed. A self-care plan may emphasize boundary setting, shifting away from dominant characteristics toward balance and equanimity for greater intentionality.

In LPPs, a helping skills module is one way to facilitate compassion in leadership. In practice, it de-centers dominant characteristics that impede possibilities for justice-oriented practice and policy work. In parallel, it facilitates understandings about interdependence and intentionality to work toward building and sustaining institutional cultures that thrive as communities and individuals. The helping skills module may also be used in other areas of educator preparation to support leadership at every level (e.g., principal, teacher, counselor). For an overview of the helping skills module and accompanying activities please see Figure 1.

Overall, the helping skills module aims to support emotional well-being and the facilitation of institutional cultures of wellness with the practice of compassion in leadership development. A general purpose of compassion practice is to consider opposite viewpoints for understandings about our common humanity (Grace, 2011). When compassion remains a guiding principle for ethical leadership, future leaders are more inclined to acknowledge interdependence, recognizing "that our successes and failures—both individually and collectively—are inherently tied up with others" (Kaufmann, 2017, p.10). Additionally, a general goal of self-

compassion practice is to "actively comforting ourselves" (Neff, 2011, p. 42), which facilitates greater intentionality "to think carefully about the things we are doing" (Kaufmann, 2017, p. 13). When self-compassion remains a guiding principle for ethical leadership, future leaders are likely to pause and reflect in challenging moments to contribute toward human sustainability and reduce chances of professional burnout.

Conclusion

Leadership preparation programs (LPPs) talk about the importance of ethics in leadership but often fail to contextualize implicit dominant characteristics to ethically serve all individuals within an organization. LPPs cannot assume that future educational leaders have the language and understanding around ethical terms because they are immersed in relationships within their daily lives. A critical understanding of ethical theories is needed to facilitate deeper understandings about interactions with others and their implications for ethical relationships in the workplace. Criticality offers future educational leaders the language and understanding to name what often goes un-named within institutional culture, which may disrupt traditions that prioritize the interest of the few above those of the many (Brookfield, 2005). LPPs may decenter characteristics of dominant culture with counterculture principles of compassion to further develop interdependence and intentionality among future educational leaders.

LPPs are invited to contextualize understanding of ethics in leadership to assist in the minimization of potential distress in relationships with the self and others. Critical analysis of ethical theories is crucial to leadership development because engaging in relationship is an ethical process with potential costs and benefits that impact the lived experience of leaders and others, which makes ethics a very important aspect of leadership preparation programs. Future educational leaders play a large role in helping to dismantle the impacts of dominant characteristics within their organization. That is why there is great need to interrogate the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture, uncovering uncritical internalizations that work against transformational change.

This article contributes to ongoing discussions about ethical theories, advocating for a re-contextualization of ethics in LPPs to facilitate the proper conditions for leading transformational change. Counterculture principles like compassion are one way to situate interdependence and intentionality at the center of ethical leadership for a more democratic vision of educational institutions. Moving forward, LPPs are invited to facilitate conversation about ethics in leadership with a critical lens. In turn, this may enrich future educational leaders with a set of understandings that allow them to develop ethical relationships that "democratize production to serve the whole community and ... reconfigure the workplace as a site for the exercise of human creativity" (Brookfield, 2005, p. 17). LPPs have an opportunity to encourage future educational leaders to transform in place of maintain

the ideological and structural premises of dominant culture that influence educational institutions, situating ethical leadership within the social, cultural, and political contexts it exists within.

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SPECIAL EDITION: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Toward a Framework for Educational Leadership for Well-being

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In the United States, youth well-being is at risk. In October of 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics and others declared a national state of emergency in children's mental health. What is more, for the millions of students in U.S. public schools who are labeled English learners, the more universal challenges to their well-being can be compounded by factors such as losses during the immigration process, or discrimination and exclusion in schools and society. This paper responds to these obstacles for youth by working toward defining a framework for educational leadership for well-being. Informed by previous literature, our definition of well-being extends beyond individual wellness and involves equipping youth to create a better world. Further, we comprehend leadership as being distributed, extending across sectors, and requiring ongoing partnership with youth and their communities. Informed by both the literature and our research-practice partnership aimed at understanding and improving youth well-being, our framework emphasizes the following when thinking about leadership efforts to support well-being: 1) well-being is situated; 2) well-being can be supported systemically; and 3) supports for youth well-being should consider youth's conceptualizations of well-being, and of their community. This framework thus invites researchers and educational leaders alike to work in increasingly distributed ways, actively involving youth and the community when tackling matters of well-being and equity.

Toward a Framework for Educational Leadership for Well-being

In the United States, youth well-being is at risk. In October of 2021, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, and the Children's Hospital Association declared a national state of emergency in children's mental health (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2021). In that same year, three in five teenaged girls in the United States reported feeling persistently sad or hopeless — a 60% increase over the past decade (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023) — and the U.S. Surgeon General warned that young people "are facing 'devastating' mental health effects as a result of the challenges experienced by their generation, including the coronavirus pandemic" (Richtel, 2021, para. 1). What is more, for the more than 5 million students in U.S. public schools who are labeled English learners (ELs) (NCES, 2019), these more universal challenges to their well-being can be compounded by losses during the immigration process, pressure to learn the dominant language and culture,

and/or discrimination and exclusion in schools and society (Harklau & Moreno, 2019; Juang et al., 2018; Rishel & Miller, 2017). To put it simply, our young people — especially those most marginalized — are facing complex and often overwhelming obstacles as they strive toward wellness.

This paper responds to these obstacles for youth by working toward defining a framework for educational leadership for well-being. Like other scholars and practitioners, our vision of well-being includes equipping youth to build a better world, in addition to tending to their physical, mental, and social health (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2022; World Health Organization, 2020). Importantly, our focus on youth and community well-being is inextricably bound up in leadership efforts at equity, addressing those root causes that impact well-being (Bishop & Noguera, 2019; Germain, 2022). Further, given we grapple with how to enact educational policies and practices that enable young people to achieve and maintain well- being in all aspects of their lives, and not just academically, our framework is relevant to a moral vision of educational leadership.

The framework we develop here is informed by putting previous literature in conversation with the empirical research our team has conducted. Our longitudinal study focuses on a cross-sector initiative, the Children's Cabinet, that we have participated in establishing with our district partners in a small city in the Northeast. Children's Cabinet initiatives have been undertaken in primarily urban areas around the U.S. to provide a "designated forum for regular collaboration among all the government agencies and external organizations that serve children and youth" (Ed Redesign, 2019, p. 4). Our research team has been a core partner in this Children's Cabinet since its inception in March, 2021. The structure of the Cabinet is depicted in Figure 1; it includes over 30 institutional and community leaders and was spearheaded by the public school district and city manager. Our participatory design study has engaged these diverse stakeholders in a community process of understanding, assessing, and improving well-being as situated in one immigrant-serving community. In this way, we respond to calls to work across sectors and to involve the broader community when thinking about how to lead for well-being (Germain, 2022; Heineke et al., 2023; King et al., 2014).

This paper focuses on *leadership* for well-being. Previous scholars have already worked extensively to define and outline well-being; its subjective and objective dimensions, and its relational and interactive characteristics (e.g., Diener et al., 1999; Heineke et al., 2023; McGregor et al., 2007). Building upon their work, we argue that, in order to lead for well-being, it is important to recognize that well-being is situated, and that it can be supported systemically. What is more, when thinking through school and community supports for youth well-being, such supports should consider youth's own conceptualizations of well-being and of their community. Understanding such nuances in how the term well-being can be defined and

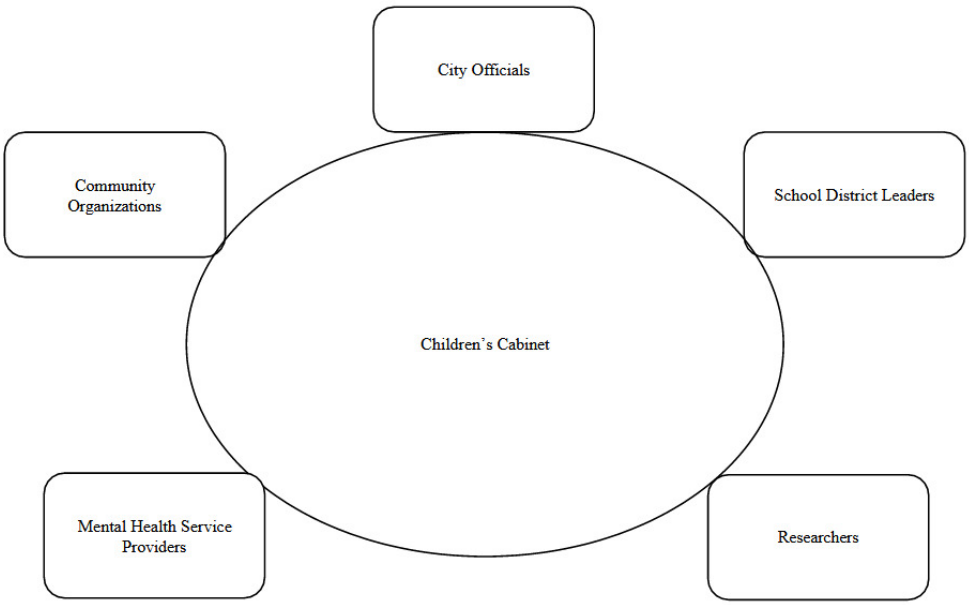

Figure 1. The structure of the Children's Cabinet.

operationalized is a step toward leading schools and communities through a process of integrating concern for well- being alongside concern for academic excellence and equity.

This paper proceeds as follows. We first review the relevant literature, and then outline a framework for educational leadership for well-being, which emphasizes the situated and systemic nature of well-being, and how the concept should be defined from the ground up. We then reflect on the ways in which our framework and our research-practice partnership have evolved and informed one another. Finally, we conclude with implications for research and practice pertaining to educational leadership for well-being.

Review of the Relevant Literature

In this section, we review three relevant themes from the literature, which inform our own theorizing about educational leadership for well-being. These themes relate to: 1) defining well-being; 2) well-being in schools; and 3) educational leadership for well-being.

Defining Well-being

Over the past few decades, researchers across disciplines (e.g., psychology, development, education) have worked to define and conceptualize well-being. This scholarship highlights that:

a) well-being is multi-dimensional; b) some dimensions of well-being are subjective, others are objective; and c) although dimensions of well-being have been validated across cultures and contexts, there is also a need to assess locally relevant indicators of well-being.

Scholars have defined multiple, sometimes conflicting, dimensions of well-being. For example, when discussing well-being as a construct for expanding equity, Germain (2022) discusses three interrelated dimensions of well-being: opportunity, trust, and agency. Harrell (2014, 2015) argues that well-being has two dimensions: *hedonic* (comprised of positive emotion and cognition) and *eudaimonic* (focusing on the meaning of life and self-actualization). Based on this framework, Harrell developed a measure of well-being that assesses psychological, physical, relational, collective, and transcendent aspects of well-being. Harrell argues (2014) that for children to be well, we must tend to them physically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually.

Despite multiple definitions of the dimensions of well-being, scholars recognize that well-being is comprised of both subjective and objective dimensions, as well as the interaction between the two. When discussing well-being, which they state ranges from misery to elation, Diener and colleagues (1999) explain the need to examine interactions between personal characteristics and situational factors, as different people will respond to the same situation in different ways. Similarly, McGregor and colleagues (2007) cite the need to combine subjective and objective dimensions when defining well-being. Such a conceptualization permits an understanding of both the agency inherent in individuals' actions and aspirations, along with the affordances and constraints of broader social structures. By considering both subjective and objective dimensions of well-being, we can better understand why some people are better able to achieve and maintain wellness.

Just as well-being can be defined in subjective and objective terms, the concept can be defined both universally and locally. In their literature review of well-being, even as they argue for the person-specific and culture-specific nature of well-being, King and colleagues (2014) cite seven foundational dimensions of well-being, stating these dimensions have been validated across multiple different cultures. The dimensions are: (1) material, (2) bodily, (3) social, (4) emotional, (5) psychological, (6) productivity/accomplishment, and (7) autonomy. Similarly, in their efforts to introduce a methodology for researching well-being, McGregor and colleagues (2007) offer one way to reconcile local and global definitions of well-being when stating, "we build the case for recognition that social and cultural resources are significant at a universal level for understanding how different households meet or fail to meet needs, but equally affirm that the local details of the processes involved are essential for correct interpretation of the results" (p. 128). In this way, well-being can be both universally and locally understood, and defined.

While some objective components of well-being exist, there are subjective aspects that will vary by individuals and situational context that must also be considered.

Well-being in Schools

Thinking about well-being in the context of schools has become an important topic globally (Buchanan et al., 2023). When Clark and colleagues (2018) synthesized several international studies relating to well-being, they

concluded that schools can positively affect the emotional health of children, as well as their academic performance and behavior. There is a body of international evidence that suggests school-based interventions that promote Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lead to long-term benefits for young people, including improved mental health, social functioning, academic performance, and positive health behaviors (Barry et al., 2017; Durlak & DuPre, 2008; Payton et al., 2008; Weare & Nind, 2011). The research also indicates that the development of social and emotional skills provides the skill base for the prevention of a wider range of problem behaviors, such as substance misuse, anti-social behavior, and risky health and sexual behaviors (Institute of Medicine Report (IOM), 2009; Weare & Nind, 2011). Thus, school support for youth well-being has promising short- and long- term implications.

In the United States, the recent uptick in discussion and action related to student well- being in schools has focused almost exclusively on one facet of well-being: SEL. This interest in supporting SEL predates the COVID-19 pandemic; school districts were spending over $20 billion a year on SEL in the United States, and teachers reported spending 8% of their time on it (Krachman & Larocca, 2017). However, in a 2021 survey, 84% of educators reported that SEL had become more important since the pandemic (Hanover Research, 2021). Today, many U.S. states have learning standards that are explicitly concerned with SEL; SEL frameworks exist, such as the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (Greenberg, 2023).

Alongside these standards and frameworks, there was Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funding to support SEL in schools (Bergin et al., 2023). In these ways, SEL is increasingly being supported within schools.

Even as schools have relied heavily on SEL programs, such initiatives have been critiqued for relying on individual strategies and models of self, while failing to address the systemic and community issues that hinder youth well-being (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2018; Hoffman, 2009; Jagers et al., 2019; Simmons, 2019). What is more, research on youth receiving school mental health care found that racial/ethnic minority youth were more likely to receive school-based mental health services in separate settings (J. G. Green et al., 2020). Despite this focus on SEL, there also exists research and action around promoting other facets of well-being in schools. For example, Challenge Success draws on previous research and their current partnerships with school communities to identify key drivers of student stress — grades, workload, and lack of sleep — and to promote practices to support student well-being in schools (e.g., rethinking assessment, starting the school day later, see Miles & Pope, 2023).

For the framework we propose here, we align our conceptualization of well-being to that which is put forth by other researchers (Shirley & Hargreaves, 2022) and organizations like UNESCO and WHO. Specifically,

in the term "well-being," we comprehend something that extends beyond SEL, and even more multifaceted wellness: the term also includes youth's efforts to build a better world, one in which achieving and maintaining such wellness is more viable.

When discussing educational leadership for well-being, then, we recognize that well-being exists on a spectrum from misery to elation (Diener et al., 1999) *and* that schools can equip youth to move the needle on that spectrum, for themselves and for the world at large.

Educational Leadership for Well-being

Leadership efforts to support youth well-being can and must necessarily extend beyond the classroom-level. Indeed, student well-being is included in each of the ten Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). Further, at the state level, more guidance and resources are being channeled toward social-emotional well-being supports (Yoder et al., 2020). As promising as these national and state-level supports may be, research suggests that district-level leaders are still in the early stages of conceptualizing and enacting care and support for student well-being (Kennedy, 2022). Given how omnipresent this term has become in response to the global pandemic and ongoing social tensions around race, racism, and identity, educational leaders need a framework for well- being that allows them to address the situated and evolving challenges facing youth.

When developing educational policies and practices, leadership efforts to support well- being must also strengthen relationships to account for the holistic, lived experiences of youth (Allbright et al., 2019; Kennedy, 2019). Scholars who address equity issues in schools have highlighted the role care plays in leadership practice, asserting that it is essential for leaders to embrace an ethic of care for individual students (Khalifa, 2020; Rivera-McCutchen, 2021).

Scholarship focusing on social justice has similarly emphasized the need for educational leaders to attend to the whole person to counteract dehumanizing structures and policies in schools (Scanlan, 2023; Theoharis, 2007). At the heart of these leadership perspectives is a focus on building relational trust and care (Bryk & Schneider, 2002), both among educators working in schools and with the youth they serve.

Recognizing the need to support the holistic experiences of youth, some scholars have highlighted that these experiences are not bounded by schools and call for a consideration of community assets when attending to the whole experience of childhood (T. L. Green, 2017). Taking this perspective, our framework conceptualizes leadership for well-being as necessarily bringing community efforts together to address well-being. In this vein, we recognize leadership for well- being as distributed, occurring among individuals and taking place through interactions and relationships (Spillane, 2012). Drawing on distributed leadership theory, we acknowledge that various actors engage in leadership individually and collectively (Harris, 2020; Harris et al., 2022;

Spillane, 2012), and we consider how both formal and informal leaders enact change across roles (Spillane et al., 2001). Our framework thus accounts for the ways in which educators, community members in various institutions, and the youth whom educators are seeking to support engage in leadership practices that can foster well-being.

In this paper, then, our view of leadership is as comprehensive as our definition of well- being. When defining a framework for leadership for well-being, we contend such leadership efforts are strengthened when they are shared, cross-sector, and in continual conversation with youth and the broader community. While some scholars have begun to consider the supports and practices district leaders need to further well-being within schools (e.g., Kennedy, 2022), our understanding of educational leadership here adds to that work by taking a more comprehensive perspective on leadership that moves beyond the boundaries of school and formal leadership roles.

Theorizing Educational Leadership for Well-being

We now propose a framework concerned with educational leadership for well-being, which resulted from putting the above literature in conversation with our own empirical work drawn from a case study of our ongoing research-practice partnership. As previously mentioned, this partnership centers a Children's Cabinet aimed at improving youth well-being in a small, urban, primarily Latinx community composed of recent immigrants and children of immigrants from various parts of Latin America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Within this community's schools, approximately 90% of students identify as Hispanic and speak a language other than English, and approximately 40% of students formally identified as English Learners in the 2021- 2022 school year.

Our research team has been a core partner in the Cabinet since its inception in March, 2021. We draw on the principles and tools of Participatory Design Research (PDR) to support our collaboration (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Ishimaru et al., 2018; Penuel, 2019), and we rely on case study methods to document and share insights from our design process (Yin, 2009). Data sources we are gathering for the project include: 1) semi-structured interviews with cabinet members; 2) semi-structured interviews with high school youth; and 3) ethnographic fieldnotes taken during planning and cabinet meetings as well as community events led by the Children's Cabinet. Given we are still undergoing formal analysis of the varied data sources, in this paper, we reference data not to report on empirical findings, but rather to reflect on the ways in which our framework and our research-practice partnership are evolving and informing one another.

In this framework, which is represented in Figure 2, we emphasize the following when thinking about leadership efforts to support well-being: 1) well-being is situated; 2) well-being can be supported systemically; and 3) supports for youth well-being should consider youth's conceptualizations of well-being, and of their community. In the sections that follow, we will

elaborate upon these assertions and begin to discuss their implications for educational leaders. When reviewing these sections, it is important to keep in mind our comprehensive definitions of both well-being, and of leadership. That is, well-being extends beyond individual wellness and involves equipping youth to create a better world. Further, educational leadership for well-being is distributed, extending across sectors, and requiring ongoing partnership with youth and their communities.

Well-being is Situated

To support well-being, educational leaders must recognize its situated nature. The experiences of youth are shaped by myriad features of their ever-changing context, including sociopolitical, cultural, economic, historical, and geographic. In light of this, our framework centers the notion that context-specific understandings of youth well-being are needed to explicitly address the systemic injustices these young people encounter.

Drawing on both the literature and our empirical work, in the sections below, we theorize that educational leaders must approach well-being as situated in two key ways. First, we discuss the ways in which well-being requires leaders to enact place-based strategies, recognizing that one key dimension of context for well-being is the particularities of location. Second, we explore the temporal dimension of well-being, considering how the particularities of time in the developmental trajectory of youth profoundly impact definitions of well-being. We conclude with implications that suggest leaders adjust their conceptualizations and approach to well-being in accordance with their context, and with changes in the broader environment across time.

Well-being is Place-Based

Youth well-being is situated in —and in constant interaction with — place. The physical, social, structural, and economic conditions of a community affect the well-being of the children, families, and individuals who live there (Duff, 2011; Liu & Berube, 2015). For example, emerging scholarship highlights how immigrant youth experiences of safety and belonging influence and are influenced by surrounding discourses, organizational practices, and the individual and collective identities of the communities in which they are situated (Bruhn & Gonzales, 2023; Lowenhaupt et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2022). Youth well-being is thus tied to the local resources, relationships, and histories which influence their lived realities. It interacts with both the formal and informal care arrangements youth experience across systems (Cooke et al., 2019). And, beyond solely influencing whether or not youth flourish, situated contexts can fundamentally shape what it means to flourish. Put simply, well-being looks different in different locations.

Given the importance of context, addressing youth well-being requires educational leaders to enact place-based strategies that consider these particularities. Enacting place-based strategies, in turn, requires leaders to fully understand the nuance of context and to acknowledge the reality that

youth and their families navigate multiple, often unaligned systems of care (Lowenhaupt & Montgomery, 2018; Miller et al., 2017). As such, leadership for well-being requires situated, cross-sector efforts to address the physical, social, structural, and economic conditions of a community that impact the flourishing of its children and their families.

Well-being is Temporal

Although much of the literature reviewed above does not directly address the temporal nature of well-being, our empirical work has surfaced the importance of time alongside considerations of place. For example, our recent research on youth experiences of the pandemic in a small, Northeastern city suggests that youth understandings of well-being shifted during and in the aftermath of disruption. Interviews with high-school youth highlight evolutions in their definitions of well-being, and their ideas of what best supported their well-being. That is, what these youth needed to feel a sense of well-being corresponded to changes in their surrounding environment: life pre-pandemic, life during lockdown, and life after students returned to in-person school, even as they dealt with the ongoing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, they expressed developmental changes in their sense of well-being that evolved as they got older.

Recognizing the ways in which well-being evolves over time, both for individuals and for communities, is an important consideration for educational leaders. While there are ways in which temporal and place-based understandings of well-being overlap, there are particular ways in which accounting for time and timing can shape how leaders approach efforts to foster well- being. For instance, there may be particular supports youth need to feel a sense of well-being when they first join a community, which may become unnecessary as they become more established. Additionally, as historical events such as the COVID-19 pandemic occur, what it means to flourish will likely shift. Leadership practices to support well-being will also likely need to shift as schools reckon with ongoing social upheaval caused by racial injustice, climate- related crises, and economic crises (Ladson-Billings, 2021). As such, attending to temporal and evolving features of context is an essential component of addressing the situated nature of well- being.

Taken together, previous literature and our own data suggest that, even as well-being is comprised of dimensions that are validated across multiple contexts and cultures, supporting well-being requires educational leaders to be mindful of both place and time. In addition to understanding how to leverage assets in the community context (T. L. Green, 2017), educational leaders can also identify ways to learn about community conceptualizations of well-being that may shape how schools seek to foster well-being in place-based ways. They must be cognizant of changes in the broader social and political environment, particularly when addressing more collective forms of well-being, which move beyond individual wellness and work toward building a better world for us all.

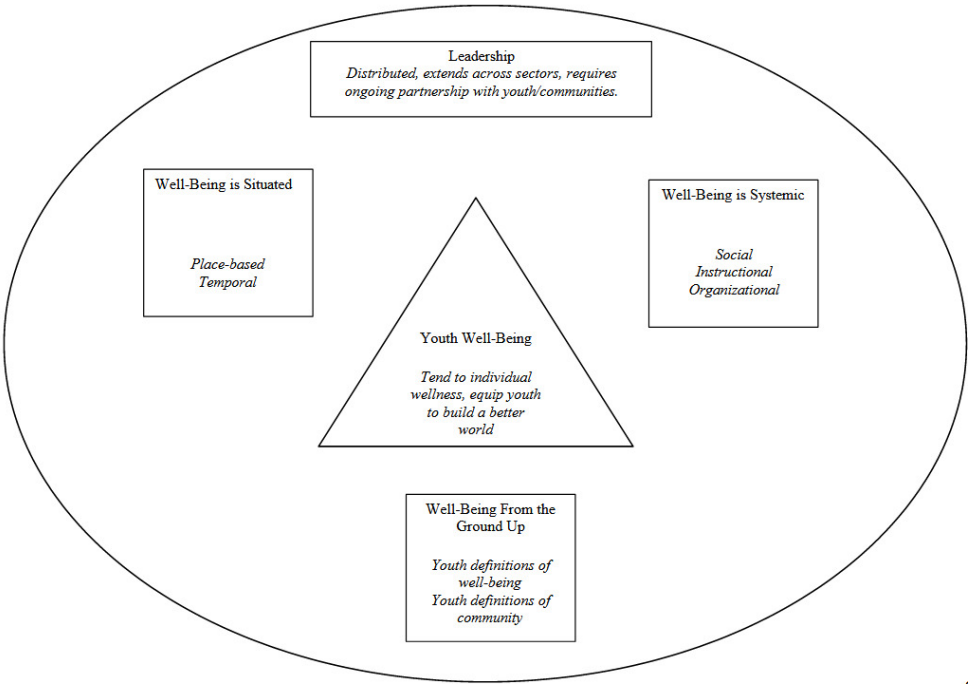

Figure 2. A framework for educational leadership for well-being.

Well-being is Systemic

In addition to recognizing the situated nature of well-being, our framework contends that leading for well-being must be a systemic effort. So, as can be seen in Figure 2, when thinking about supporting well-being within classrooms and schools, educational leaders might consider various instructional and organizational moves, in addition to focusing on more straightforward social interactions.

In the sections that follow, we draw on a framework that one of the authors outlined for mutual respect (Hegseth, 2024) — which she defines as the work of intervening on power asymmetries typically found in classrooms by way of according children increased equality, autonomy, and equity. In her framework, Hegseth contends that mutual respect can be operationalized instructionally and organizationally, as well as via social relations. We apply those ideas to thinking about educational leadership for well-being., and conclude this section with leadership implications related to systemically supporting well-being in schools.

Well-being and Social Relations

One way to support youth well-being systemically is by focusing on social interactions within the organization of school. With a growing emphasis on SEL in schools in the United States, there has increasingly been time allocated during the school day to work with students on thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors related to self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (e.g., Greenberg, 2023). There exist school programs that support the psychological health of students

by explicitly teaching them skills that foster emotional and social competencies (e.g., Bergin, 2018; Cipriano et al., 2023). Such programs focus, in part, on understanding, expressing, and regulating one's own emotions.

Another part of these programs works with students to develop perspective-taking, social problem solving, and conflict resolution skills. By implementing SEL programs and other programs related to well-being, and by making time for explicit coaching around healthy social interactions, educational leaders can help schools become more inclusive and affirming spaces.

As with SEL, in schools one may find myriad attempts to teach and cultivate respect via social interactions, and by way of stand-alone programs. The research suggests that schools teach respect in their efforts to ameliorate bullying (e.g., Langdon & Preble, 2008), increase tolerance (e.g., Burns et al., 2017; Donnelly, 2004), combat student disengagement (e.g., Cothran & Ennis, 2000; Keiler, 2011), or generally work toward school turnaround (e.g., Battistich et al., 1999; Dean & Galloway, 2008; Willie, 2000). By bringing in explicit teaching around respect, school leaders may hope students will improve; that they will become better behaved, more engaged, more....respectful. Further, many of these programs that teach respect could be added onto an existing way of schooling, combined with a whole array of other initiatives and/or academic standards (e.g., Dean & Galloway, 2008). Such character education programs are not holistic ways of schooling themselves.

Thus, the research suggests — for both respect and for well-being — there exist programs that can be layered onto the technical core of schools, and that aim to support youth by focusing, in large part, on social interactions.

Well-being and Instruction

In addition to operationalizing respect via social interactions, mutual respect can also be integrated into instruction, in order for such efforts to become part of the technical core of schooling. For example, when working to intervene on power asymmetries between adults and children, and among diverse groups of children, a teacher might accord children more autonomy by permitting them choice over a topic they research, and a final product they produce to demonstrate their learning (Haddix & Sealey-Ruiz, 2012; Rubin, 2008). Or, this same teacher may mutually respect her students by according them more equity, ensuring students have frequent and easy access to resources that provide them with the required support or enrichment. These are just some examples, which are further discussed elsewhere (Hegseth, 2023a, 2023b, 2024), of how to integrate mutual respect into instruction.

In similar ways, the framework we sketch here contends that educational leaders can integrate efforts to support well-being into instruction.[1] In addition to stand-alone time to learn mental health strategies and cultivate interpersonal skills, teachers might integrate well-being into instruction by selecting relevant texts for students to read (e.g., discussing anxiety with Francesca Zappia's *Eliza and Her Monsters,* or depression with Adib Khorram's *Darius the Great is Not Okay*), or by crafting related writing prompts. And, to support a more comprehensive view of well-being, teachers and leaders might design learning experiences that train young people in leadership and advocacy. Through such instruction, teachers and leaders can support student wellness while also cultivating agentic youth who work to create a world in which wellness is more attainable.

Well-being and Organization

Finally, mutual respect can be supported via school and classroom organization. For example, when working to intervene on power asymmetries within a classroom or school, a teacher or leader might organize for equity, ensuring students are grouped in ways where they learn the value of diverse experiences, skills, and perspectives (e.g., Boaler, 2006). Or, a leader may adjust how the school day is organized to permit students more autonomy when determining how long they work on a given task before moving on to the next one.

In terms of leading for well-being, this framework similarly asserts that school leaders can organize to systemically support student well-being. As previously discussed, schools might support well-being by organizing for late start times, being mindful of the sleep adolescents need to feel physically well (Miles & Pope, 2023). Educational leaders might also facilitate organizational routines in which teachers meet and coordinate their homework and testing calendars, ensuring both are manageable for students, and thereby mitigating student stress and anxiety. Finally, in terms of supporting a more comprehensive view of well-being, educational leaders might organize the school day in ways that permit students to leave school and get credit for working with and learning from the broader community, perhaps through partnerships with local community-based organizations working on relevant issues such as environmentalism and addressing poverty. By engaging with the broader community, students could gain real-world experience related to improving wellness in society at large.

Defining and Supporting Well-being from the Ground Up

As educational leaders strive to enact meaningful strategies to support well-being, our framework highlights the importance of listening to, learning with, and collaborating alongside young people to better understand their

1 Bergin and colleagues (2023) similarly discuss ways to integrate SEL into instruction and organization.

definitions and perceptions of well-being. As can be seen in Figure 2, our framework emphasizes the need for leaders to engage with youth's understandings of well-being, and of the community that could best support their well-being. In the sections that follow, we review the literature and our empirical data that inform these assertions. We conclude with some discussion of how educational leaders might engage in more participatory processes when determining how to support youth well-being.

Youth's Definitions of Well-being

Youth are often lauded as partners in their own education, but are rarely central to school decision-making (Bertrand et al., 2020; R. Hart, n.d.; R. A. Hart, 2008; Wilson et al., 2023).

Some strands of educational researchers have sought to address this lacuna of youth as agents via processes of learning and leading in their schools and communities. For instance, youth participatory action research (YPAR) aims to incorporate young people's interests and ideas about what aspects of their lives are important to study, but even thoughtful YPAR practitioners struggle with the contradictions between youth voice and adult-centric school structures (Brion-Meisels & Alter, 2018). Beyond school walls, young people in recent years have mobilized to address gun violence and climate change (March For Our Lives, 2023; Sunrise Movement, 2023). These powerful, politically astute movements have caught the public's attention, and in some cases, made a dent in policies to address the epidemic of gun violence and climate devastation. Schools, however, continue to be places where young people are situated as objects of study and in need of remediation, rather than authors of their own worlds, learning, and well-being.

To lead for well-being requires adults to move away from their own needs and perspectives and toward a system of education that centers youth's ideas, hopes, and understandings. Our partnership with the Children's Cabinet provides one example of taking steps to include youth voice and ideas for supporting their well-being. In the early stages of the Cabinet, the research team interviewed cabinet members to understand how different community members defined and worked to support youth well-being. From these interviews emerged three key areas for the cabinet to address in order to bolster well-being, which included building out- of-school opportunities, ensuring college and career readiness, and supporting mental health. In addition to these adult perspectives, however, the research team gathered youth perspectives by interviewing high school students about their definitions of well-being, and their views of supports and barriers to their well-being. From these youth interviews we uncovered a range of conceptualizations. Some of their definitions corresponded to how the Cabinet is addressing well-being, such as helping students to stay on track so they can graduate high school prepared for their desired next steps. Importantly, however, some of the ways these youth conceptualized well-being were not central to the Cabinet's efforts. For example, some youth

emphasized needing to feel physically safe, and thus appreciating more supports like the lockdown drills and backpack checks that occurred at their school.

As leaders work to build systemic supports for well-being that are situated in the particular needs of their communities, youth perspectives must be a central dimension of defining and leading for well-being. By gathering youth's definitions and suggestions, educational leaders can learn to see the children and adolescents they serve as central to improving well-being. As they listen and learn from young people, leaders will have a better idea of how to support well-being in inclusive and multifaceted ways.

Youth's Definitions of Community

For adults and children alike, a sense of well-being is intertwined with a sense of community (Stewart & Townley, 2020). So as educational leaders incorporate youth's views on well-being, it is also important to understand the relationships between community and well- being, with careful attention to the structural inequalities woven into young people's experience of community, and to the shifting and expanding needs of youth over time.

One of the enduring features of life in the U.S. is the deeply entrenched racial and economic inequality that marks our neighborhoods and schools. While community and neighborhood are not synonymous – communities can emerge online, in religious institutions, in youth sports and other programs that aren't directly linked to the bounded neighborhoods where youth live – neighborhood inequalities profoundly shape young people's daily lives and routines (Candipan et al., 2021; Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). For low-income Black and Latinx youth, place-based community life is structured by housing policies that intentionally divested resources from minoritized neighborhoods and invested in middle-class white neighborhoods (Desmond, 2017; Taylor, 2019). Yet young people are not defined by these stark, racist inequalities; they contest, redefine, and embrace the strengths and challenges of their communities (Duncan-Andrade, 2009; Wilson et al., 2023). Leading for well-being, then, means grappling with these inequalities and how they impact young people alongside listening to youth's perspectives on the assets and power that emerge from the communities in which they are embedded.

While neighborhood change may be slow, how young people define their communities and what they seek from them evolves as they develop (Bruhn & Gonzales, 2023). When interviewing some of the young people we work with, we came to understand how they conceived of community in variable ways, mapping onto their needs as adolescents. For some, community was synonymous with extended family. For others, community was tied closely to people and programs affiliated with their school. Finally, some youth discussed community in a way that extended beyond family or school to encompass spatial features of their city, like public parks, friendly encounters on the streets, and a range of ethnic restaurants and businesses. Young children's conceptions of community may be more centered around their

immediate family and school encounters, while youth entering adulthood may shift their focus to the features of their neighborhood and communities that matter for employment or post-secondary educational opportunities.

As leaders consider how best to support youth well-being, it is important to consider how young people define community in variable and developmentally-contingent ways, and to garner youth perspectives on which facets of their community may best support their well-being. Young people's voices should thus inform and be a part of leadership decisions, community engagement, cross-sector partnerships, and advocacy efforts to meaningfully enhance youth well-being at scale.

Reflections From the Field: Evolving Partnership, Evolving Framework

In the preceding section, we proposed a framework for educational leadership for well- being, in which we emphasized that well-being is situated, it can be supported systemically, and supports for youth well-being should consider youth's own conceptualizations of well-being, and of their community. In this section, we briefly reflect on our partnership, discussing how this partnership and our framework are evolving together, in constant conversation with one another. Again, given we are still undergoing formal analysis of the varied data sources, the data we reference below are not meant to be interpreted as empirical findings. Rather, these examples from our data serve to animate our evolving framework.

Well-being is Situated

Our research-practice partnership helped confirm previous scholarship that asserts the place-based nature of well-being (e.g., Duff, 2011; Liu & Berube, 2015). Additionally, however, it was the specific period of time in which our partnership persisted that helped us appreciate the temporal nature of well-being. By engaging with the topic of well-being throughout different stages of the pandemic — interviewing cabinet members and high school youth at multiple points between 2021 and 2023 — we learned to emphasize time as much as place when discussing the situated nature of well-being in our framework.

From our initial interviews with institutional and community leaders, some themes about well-being emerged that might be generalized to other dense, urban areas, such as the need for welcoming, safe spaces for teenagers to congregate and more recreational outdoor spaces. Other areas of focus, however, were uniquely situated in the community context of the city. For example, several members of the cabinet shared that the intergenerational, bilingual, and bicultural community would benefit from providing youth opportunities to support younger children and learn from elders in more hybrid spaces and programs. One community leader elaborated that the specificities of this work require much coordination:

> I do feel that there needs to be more coordinated work, and because I think everyone has been so focused on their own area of priority that the connections that really need to happen in order to share resources more efficiently.... I do feel like the resources are there and available. It's just a matter of how to coordinate and collaborate better.

A strong commitment to engaging in service, advocacy, and education was voiced by youth in their interviews as they described their own understanding of well-being in the close- knit, community-oriented city. At the same time, many youth in this community need to work outside of school, but have little access to paid opportunities for work that do not interfere with these commitments and can conflict with school schedules. As we continue to partner on initiatives to support well-being, we have seen the need for place-based approaches that center on the shared values, culture, and community of the small, vibrant city in which we are situated.

Our partnership began more than two years ago, at a particular time of crisis in the city when students had just finished a full year of remote schooling. These youth had limited access to additional supports, and the community as a whole was struggling with pandemic disruptions leading to ongoing health issues, increased food insecurity, and evictions. As district leaders navigated the return to in-person schooling, we learned from youth about the specific supports needed for their well-being as they shifted back to the daily life of school. In interviews, some youth expressed a sense of loss with the return to in-person schooling, making observations like, "it was more comfortable just being at home."

In addition to taking comfort in the routine of home, some youth were surprised to find they appreciated how remote schooling permitted more space and time to reflect on their own needs and pursue their own interests. For these students in this moment in time, the return to the social dynamics and relentless schedule of in-person schooling emphasized for them the need for space. Space and independent time as a form of well-being became central to their coping through school closures. Thus, both our framework and our partnership have evolved to emphasize how leaders must account for the specificities of time and place when designing supports for youth well-being.

Well-being is Systemic

As previously mentioned, we applied one of our author's frameworks related to mutual respect to our own considerations of leading for well-being. With the help of this mutual respect framework (Hegseth, 2024), we understand how schools can systemically support well-being with instructional and organizational practices, as well as with more social supports.

Additionally, however, it was our ongoing partnership with community members alongside the school district that helped us appreciate ways to extend beyond the school system when considering systemic supports to youth well-being; we emphasize this in our framework for educational leaders.

As the partnership has evolved over the past two years, the research team and members of the school district have continuously endeavored to center community voices, ensuring the Children's Cabinet is truly cross-sector, as opposed to simply being a district initiative. For example, the research team interviewed community leaders as well as youth, sharing themes from those interviews as part of the agenda for Cabinet meetings. As previously mentioned, three themes identified in initial interviews with cabinet members were the shared desire to focus on: after school activities, college and career readiness, and mental health initiatives. Additionally, ongoing refining of meeting structure ensured that community leaders had opportunities to add to or change the agenda of the meetings, in addition to having enough time and space to voice their perspectives within those meetings.

By partnering in a more distributed way, we have learned — and thus incorporated into this framework — how to design systemic supports that extend beyond school walls. In Cabinet meetings, leaders of after-school and recreation programs, mental health clinics, the library, and police all share insights about how issues facing youth span their varied organizations. Engaging in these cross-sector conversations surfaced ways to coordinate resources and services across these organizations to address well-being systemically. For example, in one cabinet meeting, school staff expressed the concerns that waitlists for mental health needs in the area were very long. Another cabinet member responded by noting that their team had received funds to conduct group mental health services, and that these could be placed in schools to address student mental health needs quickly. Similarly, one could imagine that, in future meetings, representatives from the community college may partner with the district to design instructional supports that cater to the facet of well-being concerned with equipping youth to build a better world. These are just some examples, empirical and hypothetical, of ways that community providers might offer social, instructional, and organizational supports to youth well-being, in addition to the school district.

Through our cross-sector partnership, then, we have gained a deeper understanding of the systemic nature of well-being for youth who navigate multiple institutions and communities that shape their experiences. Our framework has evolved as we continually strive toward more distributed leadership.

Defining and Supporting Well-being from the Ground Up

Incorporating youth voice has been one of our guiding principles throughout this research-practice partnership. When speaking about his work with one of the leaders of our research team, a district leader said "[she] was adamant about having youth voice present." Importantly, the more we solicited youth voice, the more we recognized a need to scaffold and equip

youth to partner with us in our efforts to understand and improve their well-being. Youth interviews inspired our increasingly authentic collaboration with young people as co-leaders in the partnership, which, in turn, informs our emphasis in the framework on defining well-being from the ground up.

Our project began in 2021 as an adult collaboration between one of the authors and a district leader who has a strong interest in using research to guide educational leadership. As the Cabinet was established, it remained a coalition of adults working across sectors to serve young people in the community. But, even as the research team interviewed youth to garner their perspectives of well-being, in the initial years of the Cabinet, no young people had a seat at the decision-making table.

Noticing and naming this problem led to the development of a youth leadership initiative, where high school teachers and leaders recruited a diverse group of students to participate in a week-long institute in the summer of 2023 at the authors' institution. The aim of this program, which will also occur in the summer of 2024, is to support youth's leadership skills and to better understand their perspectives on the strengths and challenges of their community. These initiatives serve as a launchpad for more ongoing collaboration with youth participants.

We are still actively contemplating ways to integrate youth with the Cabinet, and to equip them to research and advocate for improved well-being for themselves and their peers. As we consider how to structure time and resources for their continued efforts related to the partnership, we are ever-mindful of how much we have learned about well-being and community from their insights and those of their peers. Thus, both our framework and our partnership are evolving to collaborate with youth in increasingly authentic ways, so that they become true leaders in efforts to support youth well-being in their community.

Conclusion and Implications for Leadership Practice and Future Research

By working to define a framework for educational leadership for well-being, we endeavor to address the many obstacles youth are facing as they strive toward wellness, and toward building a world in which wellness is more attainable. With our expanded conceptualizations of both well-being and of leadership, we suggest a framework that emphasizes the need for leaders to recognize the situated and systemic nature of well-being, and to incorporate youth perspectives of well-being, and of the community that can best support their well-being.

It is important to note that, as our partnership continues, and as we proceed with data collection and analysis across time and with diverse stakeholders, our framework will also continue to evolve. Indeed, in the previous section we reflect upon the ways in which our partnership and

our framework have already evolved and informed one another. Though this framework continues to develop, it has enough of a foundation to suggest some implications for both leadership practice and future research.

Our evolving framework has important implications for leadership practice. First, in conceptualizing well-being, educational leaders need strategies to develop a clear, specific and situated understanding of how youth in their particular school conceptualize well-being, and how those conceptualizations may evolve over time. Facilitating regular discussions or empathy interviews with youth about their current needs, concerns, and ideas for support might be one useful approach to this. Additionally, leadership practices that structure and strengthen meaningful relationships will also help leaders build this understanding. Through developing new opportunities to strengthen caring relationships, leaders might center relationships as they review and refine existing policies and practices in their schools. For example, examining current discipline practices and their impact on well-being might yield opportunities to make changes that strengthen relationships and improve well-being.

A second implication for leadership practice is this: addressing well-being in a situated way requires coordinating roles, resources, standards, etc. to promote well-being in an integrated way throughout the school (and across schools in a given district/system). Building infrastructure — such as structured time for vertical and horizontal collaboration — can support coordination among teachers across departments, as well as with youth and their families. Additionally, given that nearly 25% of public school students have at least one immigrant caregiver, coordinating language learning structures in a way that attends carefully to students' and families' well-being should be a top priority for leaders. For instance, how, when, and from whom children receive additional support for English learning should consider the socio-cultural, geographic, and political contexts for learning and should take into account young people's strengths as multilingual people embedded in multilingual families and communities. Such design and coordination of infrastructure is crucial for deepening commitments schoolwide to supporting well-being in responsive, systemic ways.

Third and similarly, recognizing well-being as situated within communities requires leaders to coordinate beyond school and in partnership with other youth-serving organizations. Cross-sector initiatives such as the Children's Cabinet may provide useful models for how to coordinate caring relationships across organizations and ensure that communities work in sync to support well-being. Importantly, our framework calls for the active participation of youth in both defining well-being and designing supports for their well-being that account for the subjective, situated components of most consequence to them.

In terms of implications for research, the framework we propose here motivates the need for researchers — much like educational leaders — to work in distributed ways. That is, just as our framework emphasizes how

educational leaders should partner with youth and with community when determining how best to support youth well-being, educational researchers should be similarly intentional and persistent with their partnerships. By ceding some control over the various stages of the research cycle — for example, inviting and compensating youth to co-lead data collection, analysis, and/or writing (e.g., Conner et al., 2023) — researchers can conduct studies that are increasingly supportive of school and community needs. This is particularly important when addressing matters of well-being and equity within educational research.

A second, related implication for research is to both honor and cultivate youth agency when examining their well-being. Throughout this paper, we have endeavored to emphasize an expanded notion of well-being. It is not solely up to adults to ensure the well-being of youth; rather, an integral part of well-being is scaffolding skills and attitudes that enable youth to work toward a world that makes well-being more attainable. We are attempting just that with our youth leadership initiative. Thus, there is a need for future research that places a particular emphasis on the practices and policies, within and beyond schools, which can help youth learn to build a better world. So, too, is there a need for more research focused on youth agency as it pertains to their own well-being and the well-being of others.

Well-being matters as young people develop from infants to children to adolescents and into adulthood, allowing them to feel a sense of positive life satisfaction and a sense of efficacy in responding to obstacles that are often out of their control (Keyes, 2006; Park, 2004; Stewart & Townley, 2020). For example, a young person with relatively high levels of well-being may have managed the stress and uncertainty of the initial school closures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic differently than a similarly situated peer who had lower perceptions of their own well- being. While structural factors, such as stable housing, immigration status, or environmental pollutants may impact youth's holistic well-being, they are not the only or final determinant in young people's ability to move toward well-being and thriving (Schüssler-Fiorenza et al., 2016). Schools, and educational leaders, can be important sites of intervention, offering pathways to well-being even when children and youth face significant, and unjust, racial and economic inequalities. The framework we offer here is an initial step toward better equipping educational leaders to support youth in the multifaceted ways they deserve.

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SPECIAL EDITION: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

A Framework for Studying School Student-Family Reunification: Towards an Empathetic Approach to School Safety

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Keywords: educational leadership, student-family reunification, learning sciences, conceptual paper, crisis management

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This theoretical paper proposes a conceptual and methodological framework for educational leadership to contribute to productive student-family reunification practices in school emergencies using politics of education literature and participatory design methods. A critical, scoping review of current reunification literature in disaster and emergency medicine research identified themes and needs in school emergency preparedness research. Findings from the critical review of family reunification literature indicate a need to understand families' epistemologies and ontologies in school emergencies. In particular, reunification researchers should make sense of how families are included in decision making processes and the impact of leaders on reunification policies and practices. As schools and communities design student-family reunification procedures, learning sciences approaches hold promise for ensuring their designs are equitable.

Every school shooting brings to light our continued struggle with protecting students in the United States. In particular, the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary in 2012 and Robb Elementary ten years later demonstrate our need to better understand the current practices for student-family reunification during crises (E. Douglas & Beeferman, 2022; Levenson, 2022; Williamson, 2022). Learning from the reunification experiences of the Columbine shooting, Sandy Hook Elementary, for example, had a secondary location off-site where students and families were reunited (Williamson, 2022). However, in both cases, many families of the shooting victims did not know their children had been killed until everyone else had been reunited (Candiotti & Aarthun, 2012; Yipp, 2022). Furthermore, some parents of the Robb Elementary victims were asked to provide DNA samples to help identify the remains of children who could not be visually identified (Levenson, 2022). This repeating of compounded trauma caused by family-student reunification practices leads us to ask how could new, empathic practices be created?

Learning from the history of responses to school shootings, educational leadership scholars and practitioners must consider the trauma families may experience as a result of school safety and crisis response practices if we are to develop more compassionate schools (Polizzi & Frick, 2023). In other words, our goal is to decrease further trauma of children and families from schools' own practices during an already disturbing experience. Truly, school

emergency management requires school leaders to be "tough-minded and tenderhearted" (Yoon, 2017, para. 3) in planning for and responding to school incidents. Instead of balancing between laws and individual liberties, ethical, empathetic educational leadership requires a human-centered approach for creating compassionate school safety practices.

As educational leaders face difficult procedural and axiological questions related to family reunification, schools and communities must learn together to develop new knowledge, perspectives, and practices for more empathetic school safety methods. This theoretical paper puts forward a conceptual and methodological framework for educational leadership to contribute to empathetic family reunification practices in school emergencies using politics of education literature (e.g., López, 2003) and participatory design methods (e.g., Bang & Vossoughi, 2016). Politics of education literature guides our framing for highlighting "who gets what, when, and how" (Lasswell, 1936). In other words, we are interested in who is involved in making decisions about student-family reunification processes, how, and with what consequences. More than simply *being involved*, participatory design methods illuminate and generate new forms of participation in an effort to create new systemic processes. An example of youth participatory action research, Bertrand (2018) demonstrates how youth's involvement in decision making, project and research design, and research dissemination acted as a means of studying how youth power was or was not taken up by adults within the school. In this way, participatory design methods authentically engage voices who would not typically be involved in decision making processes. The combination of politics of education with participatory design methods allows us to build on the preceding research to imagine a new future of compassionate school safety through student-family reunification processes.

Our framework uses a learning sciences lens to propose studying learning in student-family reunification for impacting school and district crisis planning decision making through an empathetic approach. In this paper, we refer to student-family reunification as the process that schools and districts plan "to take before, during, and after an emergency to ensure students are reunited with their families" (REMS TA Center, 2023, para. 1). This learning approach can empower both the individual and the organizational learning that must occur when creating new social and organizational practices. Critical learning sciences research methods and theories expand the current research on family reunification by centering the experiences of those most impacted and bringing them authentically into decision making processes. This centering frame for reimagining and creating new student-family reunification processes is central for educational leaders and researchers in leading with love (Byrnes-Jimenez & Yoon, 2019). In other words, empathetic student-family reunification processes through a learning sciences lens de-centers organizational needs while deliberately focusing on the needs, goals, and values of the people most impacted by the process.

This paper proposes two frameworks – conceptual and methodological – for studying student-family reunification planning in schools from an ethical and empathetic perspective. The conceptual framework brings together school safety and emergency management literature with family involvement in schools to frame the topic of student-family reunification in schools. Then, we propose a methodological framework for co-designing a student-family reunification plan as a way of empathetically studying learning in school emergency preparedness.

We conducted a critical, scoping review (Sadler et al., 2010; Striepe & Cunningham, 2022) of literature to develop the conceptual and methodological frameworks for centering family epistemologies in school student-family reunification planning. Literature on family reunification, school emergency preparedness, and family involvement in schools was found through searching databases such as Google Scholar and ProQuest. Because there is little literature on this topic, we used terms such as "school safety," "family reunification," and "family school involvement" then added relevant terms based on found, peer-reviewed literature. Identified articles were thematically analyzed for similar and unique findings. Based on our politics of education and participatory design frames, articles were critically reviewed based on the groups involved in or missing from decision making, structural or social power dynamics, and the conceptualizations of leadership responsibilities by those impacted by decisions.

Conceptual Framework

Studying student-family reunification in order to both understand the impact of these practices and develop new, compassionate processes requires understanding how student-family reunification practices are situated within schools and the various kinds of roles families play in schools. In our proposed conceptual framework, we explore literature on school safety, family reunification, and family involvement in schools (see Figure 1). While student-family reunification is an element of school safety, the lack of school student-family reunification research prompted us to explore family reunification during disasters more broadly. Likewise, to understand how families are impacted by and impactful on school processes, family involvement literature sheds light on how these interactions center family experiences empathetically. From the reviewed literature in this conceptual framework, we then present a methodological framework that flows from these findings and centers empathy and compassion in school decision making.

School Safety

School safety is a broad concept for many practices and perspectives such as school resource, police, or security officers (SROs, SPOs, and SSOs, respectively); lockdown drills; social-emotional well-being; and physical accessibility. Although this paper focuses predominantly on the emergency management and preparedness aspect of school safety, we must also

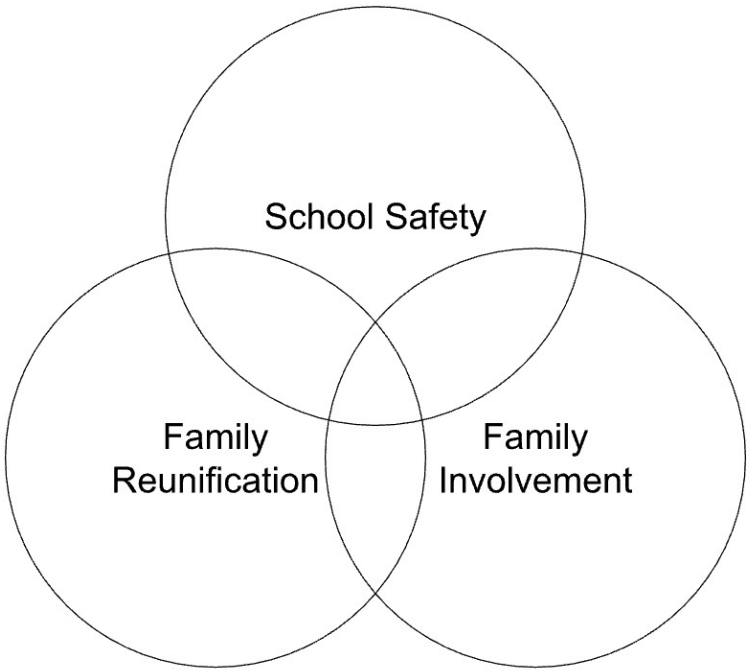

Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework for studying school student-family reunification.

acknowledge the difficult history of this topic in the U.S. School safety was the supposed rationale for continuing school segregation even after the Supreme Court determined its unconstitutionality in 1954 (*Brown v. Board of Educ.*, 1954; D. M. Douglas, 2012; Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Educ., 1971). More than just keeping weapons out of schools, as has been the current focus of school safety measures, understanding and reflecting on the racist, transphobic, and unethical practices implemented in the name of "keeping children safe" allows educators to think critically and develop new ways of creating safer schools.

More recently, research has shown that some standard school safety programs, such as implementing SROs, may decrease some school crime violence while having no effect on guns in schools and increasing racially and (dis)ability disproportionate school discipline outcomes (e.g., Hoffman, 2014; Lacoe, 2015; Sorensen et al., 2023; Theriot & Orme, 2014; Yang et al., 2021). Despite being an ineffective or negatively effective practice, school leaders may still continue to implement such practices as an "easy" win to demonstrate continued efforts for keeping schools safe (Turner & Beneke, 2020). Indeed, centering race and other marginalized identities reorients how we define and assess school safety (e.g., Edwards, 2021). This reflection, in particular, guides our empathetic perspective towards identifying and developing new ways for student-family reunification. By attending to these cultural and historical power relations and dynamics in school safety, Mirra's (2018) notion of "critical civic empathy" informs how school leaders and researchers may put themselves "into the perspective of another person" (Mirra, 2018, p. 4) to create ethical school safety practices. However, as

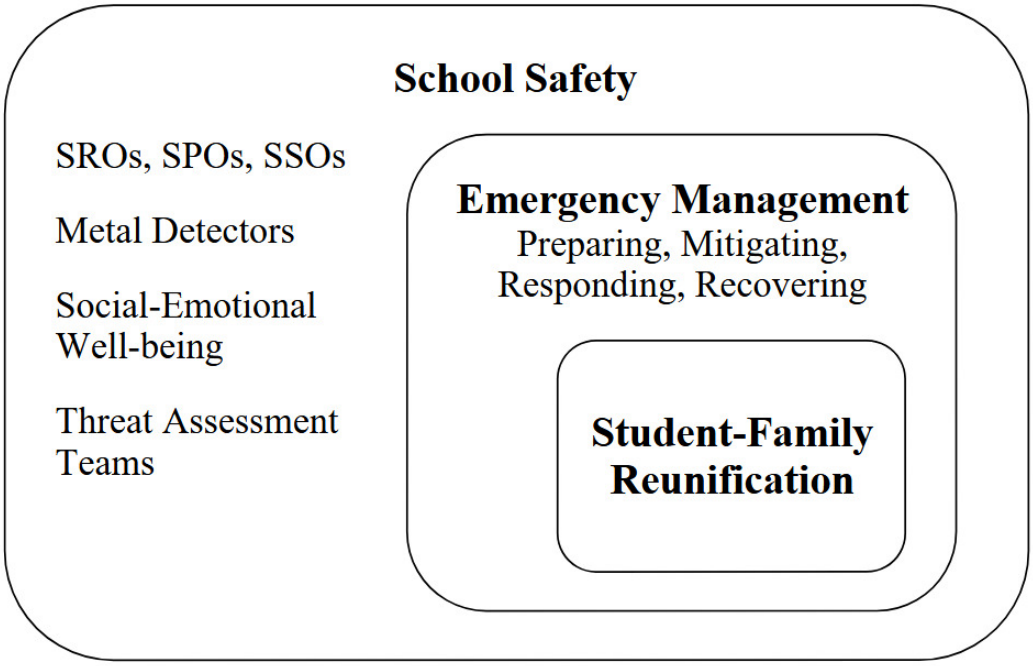

Figure 2. The connection between school safety, emergency management, and student-family reunification.

history has shown, unreflective empathy without considering power dynamics has led to racist, sexist, and transphobic practices for the sake of creating "safer schools."

Emergency management is a specific aspect of school safety that focuses on preparing for, mitigating, responding to, and recovering from incidents such as fires, tornados, medical crises, or even shootings[1] (Figure 2; FEMA, 2020). An emergency may be as concentrated as a broken leg requiring an ambulance or as wide reaching as a hurricane affecting multiple states and school districts. The bedrock of emergency management is creating and reviewing the emergency operations plan (EOP). Some state-level educational policies refer to these as "safety plans" (e.g., Education Commission of the States, 2022, para. 4). This is the guide around which the emergency response for an organization will focus (Ready.gov, 2021). EOPs should be minutely detailed for all-hazard response and recovery for every organization involved in responding to the emergency: governmental and non-governmental. Furthermore, because emergency management and EOPs come from a firefighting and military lineage, there are specific terms (such as EOPs and mutual aid agreements) and cultural norms (such as neutrality; Sweeting & Haupt, 2023) that are appropriated into schools. Lastly, changes in school safety practices often occur because of a horrible incident, similar to how the 9/11 attack and Hurricane Katrina completely transformed the United

1 Despite the mediatization of school shootings giving the perceptions that school shootings in the U.S. are regular occurrences, students are still more likely to die from diseases such as pneumonitis than being killed in a school (Kupchik et al., 2022). This does not negate the cultural and societal fear of school shootings, but instead reframes school shootings as a rare, albeit horrific, school emergency.

States homeland security and emergency management structures (Bullock et al., 2021). School safety, leaning into the social and historical aspects of emergency management, often appropriates and implements standard emergency management practices with good intentions.

Drills, for example, started in schools because of the Collinwood School fire disaster in 1908 which killed 175 people (Crosswy, 2016). With the increase in concerns of school shooters, more intense shooting drills and exercises have been incorporated into school emergency practices with conflicting impacts (e.g., ElSherief et al., 2021; Schildkraut & Nickerson, 2020). Drills, an important aspect of emergency preparedness, have become hotly debated due to stories of staff and student injury and traumatization occurring during these practices. Who makes decisions and their experiences, values, and beliefs impact whether or not they choose to implement firing blanks or dressing up as a school shooter during a drill. In other words, the topic of school safety has multiple cultural influences, has changed because of historical events, and is political by decision making power and influence.

A key element that is unique to schools compared to other governmental (and non-governmental) organizations is considering how to reunify students with their families. In their EOPs, schools and districts should have an annex that defines the student-family reunification plan including reunification sites, transportation, and means of authorizing adults for taking custody of students (U.S. Department of Education et al., 2013). Organizations like the I Love U Guys Foundation have created templates and guides for student-family reunification based on their experiences with school shootings and in collaboration with school emergency management experts (I Love U Guys Foundation, 2018). Beyond anecdotal accounts of student-family reunification during and after incidents, student-family reunification in schools is a significantly under-studied aspect of schools and educational leadership.

Family Reunification

With little empirical research on student-family reunification for schools, literature in disasters and emergency medicine provides a foundation for making sense of general family reunification processes. Children are more likely to have negative outcomes if they become separated from their parents during a disaster (Carney & Chung, 2017; Chung & Blake, 2014; Nager, 2009). Often, separated members connect on their own within a few hours of separation (Richardson et al., 2016). However, interrupted telecommunications and transportation services can make this automatic reunification difficult. Backup means of contact and reunification sponsored by governments (e.g., Richardson et al., 2016) or other organizations (e.g., Toma et al., 2012; Pearson et al., 2012) promote faster reunification. Therefore, organized processes for reunification positively impact reunification rather than strictly relying on organic means. Because schools

retain responsibility for students until they have been physically reunited with their parents/guardians, school leaders must carefully consider their reunification process to decrease time and stress.

Chung and colleagues (2012) surveyed emergency management professionals to identify preferred aspects to a child-family reunification tool. 85% of respondents indicated preference for showing unedited photographs of living children (with about half of these respondents also stating a preference for showing unedited photographs of deceased children), thereby showing parents the full extent of injuries for possibly increased identification rates (Chung et al., 2012, p. 159). However, a significant number of the respondents also indicated that viewing these unedited photos may be traumatic for parents, and only 40% of respondents indicated having children themselves (Chung et al., 2012, p. 158). Further research is needed on the goals of families in identification and reunification in addition to alignment or conflict with emergency management professionals' understandings. In particular, aligning goals of families, school leaders, and emergency responders likely promotes safer reunifications and emergency responses. For example, conflicting goals of families and emergency responders during the Uvalde school shooting likely led to families being restrained by police when attempting to enter the school (Kitroeff et al., 2022). Towards creating an empathetic, human-centered reunification process, school leaders must not only consider the impact on families but deeply understand the goals and needs of families for embedding them in the reunification process.

Furthermore, reunification methods may not be known or interoperable – shared amongst partnering organizations – during an emergency. After Hurricane Katrina, a significant number of children were evacuated to shelters in states different from their families (Blake & Stevenson, 2009; Gubbins & Kaziny, 2018). Therefore, partnering organizations such as schools and law enforcement must be aware of and abide by a shared student-family reunification process to avoid increasing undue stress and trauma on families and decrease unintentional interference by parents and guardians (Charney & Chung, 2017). Authentically including families in making decisions about the reunification process further extends how family goals are integrated beyond just school leadership to include first responders and their practices.

Sharing personal information about children may accelerate reunification but with the potential for privacy loss, especially in times of crisis. Charney and colleagues (2019) found that parents were willing to share some of their child's personal information with medical organizations for faster reunification in addition to expressing some concerns about information privacy. However, they found that Parents and Guardians of Color were more concerned about the security or misuse of personal information than White parents/guardians (Charney et al., 2019). Further investigation is needed regarding historically marginalized families and their involvement in

reunification processes to increase trust and ensure equitable and socially just practices, especially for schools with different regulations than medical organizations (e.g., FERPA and PPRA; U.S. Department of Education, n.d.).

Lastly, ethical school safety requires navigating the complexities of laws and regulations with compassionate practices. The goal is always to reunify students and families safely and quickly when an incident occurs in a school. Unfortunately, as the Sandy Hook and Uvalde examples described in the introduction illustrate, student-family reunification is not always possible because of a student's death. Schools must, therefore, prepare for the eventuality of identifying and notifying families that their student has died during an incident on their campus. Laws and regulations regarding identification and notification that surround schools may prevent incorrect notification (e.g., notifying before complete identification) thereby limiting family suffering in these horrifying times. However, the same laws and regulations may also increase family suffering as they remain at the reunification site long after all the other reunited families have left. In the case of Sandy Hook, the Connecticut governor was eventually the one who overrode the regulations and notified the families that their children had died (Williamson, 2022). During an emergency, school leaders could be presented with a similar situation of ethically balancing following regulations with easing the suffering of traumatized students and families. Empathetic student-family reunification plans consider and detail how schools will compassionately notify families that their student has died on campus.

Family Involvement in Schools

Because of the limited student-family reunification literature, we examined studies looking at the effects and processes of family involvement in schools. Family involvement in youth's education, more commonly identified as parental involvement, has been associated with positive academic, behavioral, and social outcomes (Anderson & Minke, 2007; Park & Holloway, 2017), and therefore is considered best-practice for schools (Hamlin & Flessa, 2018; M. Smith, 2022). While the effects of parent involvement appear straightforward, the processes and means of parent involvement are complex, especially when considering the political nature of defining school safety. Parents that are involved in their children's education do so in both informal and formal ways, such as helping with homework, volunteering for field trips or being present in discussions about school policy. However, in a present-day context of attacks on teachers, curriculum, governmental leaders, and books pushed by certain parent groups representing a small number of parents, such as Moms for Liberty, parental involvement has taken on a new connotation; one that can hinder children's education and create inequitable and harmful learning environments for students (Dier et al., 2022). This highlights how the implementation and implications of family involvement can be complicated by the characteristics, decisions, and beliefs of school leaders, teachers, and parents along with broader cultural and socio-economic factors. Empathetic school leadership, through the lens of

critical civic empathy, "is about imaginatively embodying the lives of our fellow citizens while keeping in mind the social forces that differentiate our experiences as we make decisions about our shared public future" (Mirra, 2018, p. 7). With this context, research in parent-school relationships must consider how parents can be involved in ways that support an equitable classroom and school environment.

Overall, literature involved in improving positive parental involvement looks at how parents can become involved in the schools, how students benefit from parental involvement, and ways that educators and policy makers can improve parent-school relations (Epstein, 2008). In connection to school safety and culture, research around parental involvement focuses on two main areas: investigating how parental involvement influences certain aspects of school culture or student life and exploring how and why parents become involved in schools through relationships and policy.

Investigating the relationship between parental involvement and school safety, studies have shown that parental involvement tends to be associated with lower crime and violence in schools. Hamlin and Li (2020), focusing on "disadvantaged urban neighborhoods" (p. 366) using the School Survey on Crime and Safety, found that formal parent volunteering was associated with lower crime and violence in schools, as well as lower bodily harm. Lesneskie and Block (2017) found in a correlational study that while parental involvement, school climate, and informal community involvement were all associated with lower levels of school violence, school security was associated with higher levels, and formal community involvement was not associated at all.

Research focusing on how and why parents become involved in schools has explored what aspects of individuals, cultures, environments, and school policy influence parental involvement. While school security measures like security guards, metal detectors, or sign-in areas are associated with a decrease in parental involvement (Mowen, 2015), invitations from teachers, parent self-efficacy, levels of resources (Anderson & Minke, 2007), and parent trust (Adams et al., 2009) were associated with an increase in parental involvement. Epstein (2008) and Hamlin and Flessa (2018) have developed policy models for increasing parental involvement in schools, which include communication and partnerships between schools and communities, inclusion in school decision making, and support for family and student well-being. Ishimaru (2014b) suggests a more equity-focused model related to district-community collaboration by including parents' participation as educational leaders, understanding goals as a shared responsibility between schools and communities, building relationships as a primary method for change, and understanding educational reform as a political process that considers the communities and contexts those schools are in.

When seeking to include parents and communities, school leaders should move beyond an apolitical process of education reform to consider equity issues, including aspects of race, class, and immigration that could affect how

parents are involved in schools, both formally and informally (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). This includes avoiding deficit approaches toward non-dominant parents and students when considering what might impact parental involvement (Baquenado-Lopez et al., 2013) or how the traditional or normative role of parents within different communities may be in tension with normative methods for building and understanding parent-school trust and involvement (Ishimaru, 2014a). For example, non-dominant groups tend to be more informally involved with their children's education instead of more normative and formal involvement that can be expected from parents (e.g., chaperoning field trips, participating in children's sports, volunteering to help with other school activities). By working with communities and parents to understand the ways they are and want to be involved in their children's school, school leaders can better develop and implement policy toward parental involvement.

Across the literature around parental and community involvement, most scholars seem to agree that encouraging involvement of families in their children's education and school has positive outcomes for both students and schools across academics, safety, and school culture. However, the implementation of family involvement can be complicated by the characteristics, decisions, and beliefs of school leaders (Mowen, 2015), teachers (Anderson & Minke, 2007), and parents (Adams et al., 2009) along with broader cultural and socio-economic factors.

Synthesizing School Safety, Parental Involvement, and Family Reunification

While school safety is one facet of school policy, the increased mediatization of school crises including school shooters has promoted more attention to this aspect of schooling. Every family expects that their students will come home safe and whole at the end of every school day. Indeed, as *in loco parentis,* schools are expected to act in the place as parents until the student is returned or reunified with their family. Because of this, schools cannot, like other organizations, assume that students and families will organically reunify by themselves, but rather must create an explicit process for reunification. As a vital piece of school safety planning, student-family reunification exemplifies the direct impact of school practices on students and families. Considering family norms, values, and equity when designing and implementing a reunification process, builds, or builds off of, a trusting school-family relationship in a traumatizing situation. In this way, the high stress environment surrounding family reunification can magnify already existing relationships or tensions in ways that impact the potential ethical school safety practices. The Uvalde parents arrested for attempting to rescue their children from the building represent potentially disconnected relationships and practices that compounded the suffering and trauma experienced that day. With the research supporting positive outcomes from

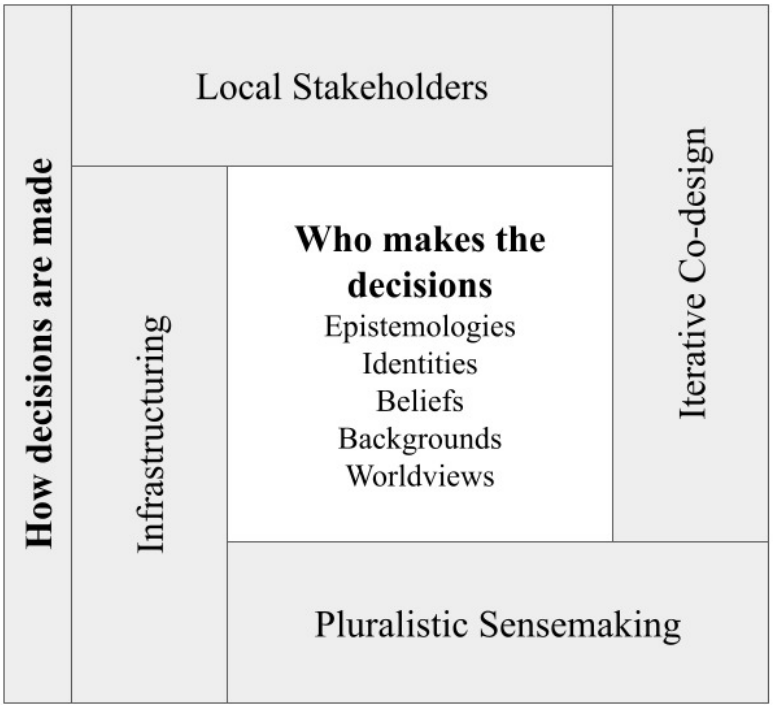

Figure 3. Proposed methodological framework for studying school student-family reunification.

family involvement in schools generally, involving families and students in decision making of reunification practices is consistent with school safety, family reunification, and family involvement literature.

Methodological Framework

Student-family reunification processes are one aspect within school emergency preparedness (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, 2019). Building on the conceptual framework of school safety, family reunification, and family involvement in schools, we propose a methodological framework for studying the development of student-family reunification practices. This methodological framework has two parts: who makes the decisions and how decisions are made (see Figure 3). Based on the scoping review in the conceptual framework, whether or not families are included in the decision-making process likely impacts the kinds of student-family reunification practices that are implemented. Likewise, how the decision-making process occurs, such as including families authentically or in an advisory capacity, impacts the resulting practices. Specifically, co-design methods using participatory design research (e.g., Bang & Vossoughi, 2016) and design-based implementation research (Fishman & Penuel, 2018) frame our approach to studying the decision-making process. In this way, we propose studying the development of who is involved and how decisions are made for understanding the social and organizational learning in student-family reunification.

Developing ethical and compassionate school safety practices means developing something new. This requires individual and organizational change, or learning. Learning sciences provides a productive approach not

only to studying that learning, but also to developing new practices in an empathetic and ethical way. We view individual and organizational learning (Huber, 1991) through collaborative design (co-design) as a form of learning through changed perspectives, knowledge, and practices. This understanding of learning also encompasses the relationships and interactions (Barab & Duffy, 2000) amongst all those impacted by decision making. Because of the limited research on school student-family reunification, we lean on the broader school emergency preparedness literature in addition to family involvement and the politics of education research – which focuses on who is involved in educational decision making and with what subsequent effects (López, 2003) – to inform this framework. Findings from the scoping review of family reunification literature, as described in the conceptual framework, indicate a need to understand family epistemologies and ontologies in school emergencies. Indeed, there is a strong need to authentically bring historically marginalized families into school emergency preparedness decision making for organizational learning.

More than just the demographics of decision makers, learning sciences literature provides a lens for understanding the cultural and epistemological heterogeneity of individuals and organizations in the creation of policies and practices that have farther reaching impacts. In this way, educational leadership and school student-family reunification research benefits from synthesis with learning sciences concepts and methodologies when centering trauma-informed practices in order to decrease student and family suffering in schools.

Who Makes Decisions

Best practices for school emergency preparedness recommend that "all stakeholders be part of the [planning] process from the beginning, including first responders, community partners, parents, students, staff, and those who represent the interests of persons with disabilities and others with access and functional needs" (U.S. Department of Justice, 2014, p. 3). Regular and sustained meetings between individuals can increase willingness to share new learnings (Redding et al., 2018). Indeed, the code of ethics for emergency managers further undergirds this point by highlighting the importance of having trusting relationships in planning for and responding to emergencies (FEMA, 2022; S. M. Smith & Feldmann-Jensen, 2024). More than just right and wrong or legal and illegal, school safety ethics, therefore, embraces empathetic and human-centered approaches to caring decision making.

As Barab and Duffy (2000) note, "Work is collaborative and social. Meaning is a process of continual negotiation" (p. 97). Participants interact with each other and with materials such as policies, processes, and artifacts. Participants bring personal experiences (Chen, 2020; Rosebery et al., 2010), prior knowledge (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, & Medicine, 2018), epistemologies (Marin, 2020), and culture (Lee et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2020) into this social space. Participant identities influence the interactions and sensemaking negotiation. These identities are further developed

throughout interactional negotiation such as adjusting shared understandings of the role of law enforcement, school staff, and even parents in school emergencies. By including parents in decision making, new school safety practices may create new ways in which school staff and parents collaborate, thereby re-defining the identities of being a "parent" or "school staff member." In other words, an individual's identity cannot be disentangled from their interactions and decision making while concomitantly changing throughout those interactions.

School leaders do not make decisions in a vacuum even in an emergency. Beliefs (Trujillo, 2013) and understanding of content (Spillane, 2000) influence decision making by school and district leaders. A leader's sensemaking is further complicated by the social context in which it occurs (Rinehart Kathawalla & Mehta, 2022; Spillane et al., 2002). Consequently, who is involved in the decision-making influences policies, initiatives, and how they are implemented within a school or district (Kano & Bourque, 2008). Therefore, interactions between school and non-school individuals involved in the student-family reunification process will impact how a leader understands and makes decisions about this process. Likewise, larger organizational contexts and interorganizational negotiations add to this complex decision-making situation (Spillane et al., 2002). School leaders may lean strongly on emergency management and law enforcement knowledge and practices under the belief that those organizational actors have more "expertise" in school emergencies.

Parent/guardian participation presents an under-researched aspect of school safety and emergency preparedness. Increased parent involvement in schools is correlated with decreased school crime and violence (Hamlin & Li, 2020). Parents may be more involved in advisory committees or developing safety plans but may not be involved in training or actual exercises (Kano et al., 2007). Simultaneously, public knowledge of a school safety plan, including the student-family reunification process, is feared by many school and emergency response leaders to decrease the overall safety of a school or district (discussed more later). However, not including families in the preparedness process goes against recommended best practices; potentially misses out on important information from parents/guardians; and may further the marginalization of certain groups of students and families. In terms of empathetic school leadership, then, the exclusion of parents in school safety decision making directly contradicts leading with love (Byrns-Jiménez & Yoon, 2019). Authentically including parents in making decisions about school safety practices, then, likely has a positive and equitable impact on the whole school climate in addition to which and how school safety practices are implemented.

School leaders influence implementation throughout the whole district including deciding who is involved (e.g., Honig et al., 2017; Leithwood et al., 2004). Interaction with and inclusion of students and parents/guardians renegotiates their involvement by reshaping policy and practices for future

decision making, even beyond school safety and emergency management. More than just school leaders *putting themselves in the shoes* of students and families (Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2022), the direct inclusion of families in decision-making may result in decreased school violence and increased positive school climate and culture. Therefore, studying student-reunification plan implementation through understanding who is at the table, their backgrounds and worldviews, and who is missing from the table, allows researchers and practitioners alike to study and reflect on the messy, complex nature of school decision making through an empathetic, equity-oriented frame for building more compassionate practices.

In our current research project interviewing school safety leaders, they have openly talked about the desire and difficulties of including families in updating Emergency Operations Plans (EOPs) generally, including student-family reunification plans. While they often collaborate with their local emergency response agencies such as fire, police, and emergency management, they struggle with finding the time and space for bringing parents to the table for reviewing and revising the safety plans. This exclusion is not through any malicious attempt of their own, but their own difficulties in balancing the requirements to have a safety plan in place, their understanding of the best practices for including stakeholders as discussed above, and the regret about not being able to find a timely, responsive way for including parents because of work and school schedules. Their unhappiness about the imbalance of these three pieces supports our argument that who is authentically at the decision-making table is a necessary requirement for any compassionate school safety plan.

How Decisions are Made

Participatory design methods provide a way for authentically supporting equity-oriented decision-making processes for school emergency preparedness research. We draw upon both participatory design research (e.g. Bang et al., 2010; Bang & Vossoughi, 2016) and design-based implementation research (DBIR; Fishman & Penuel, 2018) as methods of inquiry in student-family reunification processes. We weave these two sets of methods together through four methodological principles (see Figure 3): local stakeholders, iterative co-design, pluralistic sensemaking, and infrastructuring.

Participatory design research is the family of research that includes (youth) participatory action research (PAR/YPAR; e.g., Bertrand, 2018), research-practice partnerships (RPPs; Farley-Ripple et al., 2018), and even community-based design experiments (Bang et al., 2010). Broadly speaking, participatory design research deliberately brings traditional research participants into the research decision making process. This strategic restructuring of power is consequential towards creating new relationships, practices, and futures that were previously unimaginable in the traditional research dynamic. While similar to participatory design research, DBIR typically focuses on the systemic implementation for organizational change and learning (Fishman & Penuel, 2018). Infrastructuring, as a key element of

DBIR, examines the ways in which a newly designed change can be effectively brought into already existing organizational processes or if those processes must also be modified. The cohesion of upending power dynamics with organizational learning provides the foundation for the four principles of our framework, as explored below.

Local Stakeholders. First, school emergency preparedness is a horrifically persistent problem of practice in United States schools. Compassionate school leaders planning for school emergencies will seek to understand and alleviate their communities' suffering during a future incident (Polizzi & Frick, 2023). As the social context of each school and district is unique, the design of the student-family reunification plan must be situated in the knowledge and interactions of the local stakeholders (Fishman & Penuel, 2018). Not including families — particularly historically marginalized families — authentically in the design process at best perpetuates that historical marginalization and, at worst, increases stress and trauma in the event of a school emergency. Therefore, this methodology must understand and seek to disrupt traditional power dynamics whereby those most impacted (e.g., families) by decisions are not part of the decision-making process (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016; Engeström, 2011). In this disruption, decision making participants then imagine new futures and infrastructure both within existing or reimagined processes (Penuel, 2019b).

Iterative Co-design. Second, as with all school initiatives, this co-design process must be tested, reviewed, and re-designed iteratively (Fishman & Penuel, 2018). Knowledge about emergencies and relationships amongst school, families, and emergency partners will change over the design process. Similarly, as other changes occur within schools and emergency partner organizations, new and redesigned processes will impact emergency preparedness generally and the student-family reunification process specifically. Therefore, ensuring continued collaborative re-design requires utilizing equitable access to involvement such as for working parents/guardians (Ishimaru, 2014; Penuel et al., 2020). Iterative co-design not only brings partners together authentically, but also reifies the perpetual process of individual and organizational learning necessary for (re)building ethical school safety practices.

Pluralistic Sensemaking. Third, school personnel may lean strongly into emergency partners' knowledge and epistemologies as this work is not the typical day-to-day of schools. School leaders, like all people, actively make sense of their world. Spillane (2000) presents one framework for unpacking how an individual makes sense for decision making. This sensemaking theory triangulates individual cognition (e.g., prior knowledge and experiences), the local social situation (e.g., social interactions and community), and the policy environment (e.g., regulations) as the primary lenses through which a school leader makes sense of their world. However, in the situation of school safety, where a school leader may not have a strong background, leaning on others' expertise (e.g., social situation) in connection with state law

(e.g. policy environment) makes sense for understanding and implementing various practices. This approach risks funneling school emergency preparedness through one epistemological lens rather than developing pluralistic sensemaking (Rosebery et al., 2010). For example, leaning strictly on the view that the best school safety drills are those closest to a real situation perpetuates engaging in practices such as having a fake shooter which may exacerbate unnecessary trauma for students, staff, and families rather than promote positive readiness. Therefore, careful attention must be paid to fully understanding families' epistemologies and ensuring their decision-making power within the co-design process (Barajas-López & Ishimaru, 2016; Ishimaru & Takahashi, 2017). This process will require intense relationship- and trust-building (Denner et al., 2019), especially with populations of historically marginalized communities or with a history of government distrust. Therefore, schools and their partners must be prepared to take the time necessary for building an authentic partnership with families (Penuel, 2019a). By emphasizing pluralistic sensemaking, particularly of family epistemologies, human-centered school safety practices holistically synthesize the understandings, goals, and needs of all the stakeholders involved in school crises.

Infrastructuring. Fourth, co-designing the student-family reunification process with an eye on infrastructuring the process into existing practices or by redesigning existing practices promotes sustainability (Fishman & Penuel, 2018) and disrupts systemic inequities (Gutiérrez & Jurow, 2016). Deliberately designing a new practice to fit into existing practices or redesigning those existing practices is not limited to technical organization processes such as a particular curriculum or bell schedule. More nebulous social infrastructures such as school climate and culture or student-teacher-family relationships both impact and are impacted by implementing something new. Therefore, reflectively analyzing the current social, technical, and organizational infrastructures that support or hinder new efforts is necessary for developing a new, compassionate school safety future. During an emergency, staff, students, families, and emergency response partners must be able to quickly activate all necessary processes with only a moment's notice. This activation requires shared knowledge and trusting relationships amongst individuals for collectively engaging in the processes (Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). For example, parents and guardians who do not understand or do not trust school or emergency personnel may inadvertently create interference. Concurrently, implemented practices that are not compassionate may compound already occurring trauma and suffering for students and families. The co-design process, then, promotes creating new processes systemically so as to minimize trauma and increase effectiveness.

One important ethical consideration of studying decision making in student-family reunification is keeping safety and emergency plans secure. Keeping school safety plans secure comes from the fear that public access to these plans will soften schools as potential targets and make potential

incidents more deadly and damaging. This perspective has been particularly highlighted after the Parkland shooting, where a false narrative[2] about the shooter using knowledge of the school's security plan for his attack spread (Schildkraut et al., 2022). This consideration, however, must remain responsive to family involvement in school safety planning rather than overshadowing any authentic, deeply impactful family interactions thereby reinforcing harm and suffering either in the case of school incidents specifically or general notions of family involvement in schools. Ultimately, school leaders should ask themselves, "Are we addressing the needs of others with empathy and compassion?" (Smith & Feldman-Jensen, 2023, 2024, "Utilizing and Ethical Lens" model) during school safety decision making. This self-reflection question reframes the security versus rights debate of balancing liberties (Kettl, 2014) to a compassionate stance that emphasizes human-centered, trauma-informed approaches for researchers and practitioners alike.

Significance and Conclusion

In this paper, we proposed a conceptual and methodological framework for studying empathetic student-family reunification practices and their development in schools. The conceptual framework brings together literature in school safety, family reunification, and family involvement in schools to unpack each of these elements and their interaction in school student-family reunification practices and implementation. By considering the impacts of school culture, safety policies, families, and school leaders within each of these bodies of literature, researchers can help build new compassionate student-family reunification practices. Building from our conceptual framework to expand this literature, we developed a methodological framework that studies creating new, compassionate school safety practices.

In particular, the cultural and historical nature of school safety, the role of emergency professionals in decision making, and the impact of family involvement in schools launched our methodological framework in two ways. First, to study student-family reunification, we must understand who is involved in the decision-making process for implementing these practices. Second, how decisions are made through a co-design process can particularly promote empathetic school leadership and decision making. Understanding the traumatizing impact of school practices during a school emergency empowers more compassionate school leaders to decrease the suffering already occurring during these events.

This framework is anticipated to generate practical lessons for supporting student-family reunification for all students and families both for schools and in emergencies more broadly. Through the interaction and negotiation

2 Like implementing school safety practices that have not withstood research evaluation (see our discussion of SROs in the School Safety section of this paper), we believe that this narrative is influential because it is "easy" to see someone using a school safety plan for planning an attack, thus reaffirming this fear.

of sensemaking in co-design, educational leadership literature is extended to studying how beliefs, epistemologies, knowledge, and values are infrastructured in organizational learning. Furthermore, this framework provides a novel way of studying the influence of school leaders and how they situate their own knowledge and experiences for ethical and compassionate decision-making regarding partnerships and non-standard activities such as emergency preparedness. Lastly, recentering who and how decisions are made in student-family reunification planning promotes leading through love (Byrnes-Jimenez & Yoon, 2019) and reifies the central role schools play in supporting physically, mentally, and socially healthy communities.

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SPECIAL EDITION: SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL, AND ETHICAL EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Leading With the Possible in Mind: Educational Leaders' Experiences Engaging Imagination in Practice

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This research seeks to better understand the theoretical and practical dimensions of imagination as a practice that supports relational and ethical leadership. Specifically, this article shares focus group data that was part of a larger case study looking at educational leaders' conceptions and practices of imagination. Data from a focus group involving seven participants reveals educational leaders' understandings of imagination and leadership, and the practical ways they enact imagination in their own leadership practices. Participants' descriptions of their imaginative practices and how they are received in their school cultures highlight the opportunities, challenges, and tensions of being imaginative in educational leadership contexts. It is risky to be imaginative, and while leaders find space to be imaginative, they often engage in covert use of imagination to avoid judgement and condescension. This research contributes to deepening understanding of relational, whole-hearted, and ethical approaches to leadership in hopes of addressing misconceptions of imagination and developing cultures that support and promote imagination for all leaders.

Educational Leaders' Experiences Engaging Imagination in Practice

How to lead in complex, rapidly changing and increasingly contentious times is a significant question for all leadership contexts. The paradigms and related practices that informed leadership and leadership education in the world a few decades ago, do not suit the demands of a post-pandemic, globalized, knowledge-driven, climate changing world of today (Anderson, 2023; Hopkins, 2019; Judson & Dougherty, 2023; Thomas & Brown, 2011). Of course, scholarly and practical responses to this question will vary, reflecting different beliefs, values, positionalities, and priorities. Our response is situated within relational leadership theory and practice—specifically, relational leadership that is focused on supporting equity and social justice. We are concerned with *ethical* leadership and how leaders can develop and enact empathy to support the well-being of others (Branson & Gross, 2014). We understand, theorize, and enact leadership in ways that acknowledge the emotional nature of human beings. We understand that human beings are *perfinkers*, a term coined by American psychologist David Kresch (cited in Egan, 2005, p. 89). That is, human beings never just *think*—rather, human beings *perceive*, and they *feel*, and they *think* at the same time; they *perfink*. Thus, like Byrnes-Jimenez and Yoon (2019) we acknowledge that "as scholars,

we are intellectual *and* emotional human beings" (p. 2). This seemingly simple—even obvious—statement has profound implications. Primarily, it means that navigating the "white water world" (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018) of today requires *heart*.

In an article entitled "Leadership as an Act of Love: Leadership in Dangerous Times", Byrnes-Jimenez and Yoon (2019) outline a "whole-hearted" conception of leadership. They suggest that four "habits of the heart" are required to lead whole-heartedly and ethically: harmony, wisdom, courage, and imagination. Imagination is arguably the least studied of these four leadership habits and is largely misunderstood in the context of educational leadership (Judson, 2020, 2023). Accepting Byrnes-Jimenez and Yoon's (2019) invitation to question, extend, and elaborate their framework, this paper contributes to understanding the imaginative dimensions of *leading with heart* as an ethical practice. Of course, we do not see imagination as a separate and self-contained process; it is closely connected to harmony, wisdom, and courage. However, given the limited understanding of imagination overall, we also consider the value in honing in on the imaginative practices of leaders. Moreover, given that imagination is always emotional (Egan, 2005), knowledge of imagination contributes to understanding leadership as a whole-hearted practice.

Imagination is both the *what is* and the *what could be.* In this research, imagination is defined as "the ability to envision the possible in all things; it is the generative feature of mind that enables understanding of the self, and others, and that fuels creativity and innovation" (Judson, 2020, p. 8). Imagination plays an integral role in a range of leadership practices, including in processes of connecting, empathizing, collaborating, and envisioning (Judson, 2022, 2023). Imagination allows us to understand—to perfink—what *is* in relation to self and other. That is, imagination contributes to a leader's sense of self (Asma, 2017; Stephenson, 2009) and their understanding of the other (Greene, 1995; Guare, 1999; Nussbaum, 1997). Through imagination, leaders can self-reflect, and empathize with the experiences and understandings of others (Clarke, 2018). This imaginative process of exploring self and others in context allows for new possibility. When leaders engage their imagination, and the imaginations of those they are working with, they can collaboratively envision new possible outcomes and processes for reaching these outcomes, specifically ethical and inclusive outcomes. Of course, imagination alone is not enough; ethical leadership requires honesty, authenticity, intentionality and an unwavering commitment to what is best for all (Branson & Gross, 2014). Guided by what is right and best for all, imagination supports leaders in considering, with others and for others, what *could be* in support of a just future. In some cases, an unexpected, innovative outcome may emerge. Thus, we recognize the potentiality of imagination in ethical leadership, in cultivating empathy and envisioning the 'not yet' in ways that best support all members of

communities (Branson & Gross, 2014; Greene, 1995). Without imagination, we cannot envision how things may be better and how we can contribute to making them better (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018).

In other words, imagination is both an integrative and generative force (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018); imagination bridges the gaps between what is known and what is new as we perfink the world and as we engage in different forms of reasoning. Imagination also promotes speculation and experimentation—sense-breaking that allows us to see the possible within the actual, to push boundaries and surpass constraints to create space for new interpretations that move beyond the status quo (Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018). As a catalyst for sense-making and sense-breaking, imagination is a tool of learning and of leadership (Judson, 2023; Judson & Dougherty, 2023). Imagination enables unlearning and pushing beyond the 'we can't' to open up new possibilities. In the ever-changing contemporary landscape for leaders, there are increased calls for developing and using imagination (Brandon, 2023; Hopkins, 2019; Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018; Raptis et al., 2021).

To advance understanding of imagination's role in relational leadership, this paper shares findings from a focus group with seven educational leaders who were part of an imagination-focused Masters program in leadership. As follow-up to a study about how these leaders understand imagination and its role in their leadership following their program, this focus group—conducted approximately 18 months following completion of the program—allowed participants to discuss the practical ways they enact imagination in their own leadership practices. We explored how they enacted imagination in practice and how their school cultures may promote or suppress imagination. The participants' articulation of what they do and how it is received in their school cultures highlight the opportunities, challenges, and tensions of being imaginative in educational leadership. Participants shared how imagination contributes to their work and how they find spaces to enact imagination. However, participants enact imagination covertly, to avoid widespread misconceptions of imagination. These misconceptions can lead to judgement and condescension for some leaders; how leaders are received is connected to their positionality and implicit bias about their expertise and ability and the cultures within which they work. Building connections and having explicit conversations about imagination may promote more supportive school cultures. Relationships between people emerge as spaces of possibility in which change can be envisioned and enacted. Overall, this research contributes to understanding the *heart work* of leadership by illuminating the vital yet complex role of imagination.

On Relational Leadership as Emotional Work

Drawing on Bennis and Nanus' (1985) work, Anderson (2023) describes the contexts leaders navigate as increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, or VUCA, due to "social media; disinformation; climate change; eco-anxiety; epistemic crises; rising inequality; pandemics; opioid crises" and

economic conditions (p. 173). Within rapidly changing, challenging, and inequitable conditions, how leadership is enacted has real, material impacts on the lives of others. Thus, like Duignan (2006), we advocate the need for ethical, authentic leadership. By ethical leadership, we mean leadership that works for social justice, equity and inclusion. This involves recognizing and re-envisioning educational practices that reproduce inequality ("Inner Landscapes of Leadership," 2023; Strom et al., 2023; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). By authentic leadership, we mean leading with integrity and reflective practice that supports understanding who you are as a leader. This kind of leadership is not easy (Shapiro & Gross, 2013) and "isn't for the faint of heart" (Judson et al., 2023, p. 22). Leaders offer their genuine self—their whole heart—in relationship with others. This whole heartedness requires courage. The courage to be vulnerable. To take risks. To embrace not knowing as a generative starting place for collaboration. In their relationships with others, authentic and ethical leaders critically examine what is assumed to be true and demonstrate the courage to "challenge unethical and immoral policies and practices wherever they find them" (Duignan, 2006, p. 11). Ultimately this is *relational* leadership work.

Much has been written exploring 'effective' leadership theories, styles of leadership, and leadership practices. Our response to questions of how to lead in VUCA times centers on some of the emotional dimensions of leadership—emotional dimensions that cross theories, styles, or particular actions. Rather than emphasizing any specific styles or practices, therefore, we seek to more deeply understand leadership as a relational and emotional process (Uhl-Bien, 2006) that may include a range of specific approaches and actions. From a relational perspective, leadership occurs *between* people, *within* relationships. This greatly expands conceptions of "who" a leader is beyond those in formal leadership positions. Since leadership emerges within relationships, one may take on a leadership role in relation to other people, within certain contexts or environments, and in relation to specific content. From a relational perspective, roles and ideas of leadership come out of the collective (Uhl-Bien & Ospina, 2012). There is no specific style of leadership or leadership skill that is inherently effective; the types of interactions and the skills and traits necessary within those interactions are contextual to the specific collective (Blackmore, 2010). People take on roles as leaders and followers in that interaction, and the boundaries and expectations of the collective are distinct to that leadership interaction. Understanding, therefore, that everyone has the potential to lead creates a great deal of possibility and recognizes the power of each individual in envisioning and enacting change.

Methodology

Participants

In previous work (Judson & Dougherty, accepted/in press), we interviewed students engaged in a unique offering of an imagination-focused Master of Education in Educational Leadership program in a large, public research

institution in British Columbia, Canada. We sought to learn more about the students' reasons for engaging in this program, their developing conceptualizations of both imagination and leadership, their significant learning, and the processes that facilitated their learning. The analysis provided excellent insights into the relationship participants saw between imagination and humanizing leadership. As discussed elsewhere (Judson & Dougherty, accepted/in press), participants discussed unlearning traditional views of trait leadership and articulated the importance of connection and relationship in leadership. Specifically, participants discussed imagination as fueling connection and connection helping to further cultivate imagination in a cyclical process. Participants had an expanded view of who could be a leader and how one could enact leadership practices. For us, this generated additional questions about how imagination might be enacted in practice and what cultures or contexts may promote or suppress imagination, and for whom. We wondered, since graduating, how had the participants been enacting imagination in practice and what tensions did they experience in these enactments? How did their positionality influence how their imaginative practices are received? These questions are the focus of this paper.

To explore these questions, we invited the previous 13 participants[1] to a focus group, approximately 18 months following the completion of their graduate degree. Of the 13 interview participants, seven participated in the focus group. Topics for discussion included school culture and its role in promoting or inhibiting imaginative practices, the imaginative practices enacted by participants and how they are received, and how the participants see their own positionality influencing how their imaginative work is perceived.

Some background information about the participants' graduate program is necessary in order to contextualize their experience and their dialogue in the focus group. The MEd program was conceived as an imaginative project, where exploration of imagination, education, and leadership was woven into traditional educational leadership curriculum (including courses on leadership theory, organizational theory, policy, and research methods). The program applied a particular theoretical framework for imagination—called Imaginative Education—to educational leadership.

Kieran Egan's (1997, 2005) theory of Imaginative Education (IE) connects closely to educational practices and focuses on teaching and learning for adults of all ages. However, it is, more broadly, a unique sociocultural theory of human development that describes how our imaginations grow and change throughout our lives. In line with Lev Vygotsky's conception of human development, Egan describes how, as cultural beings, our imaginations and the meanings we make of our experiences in the world are shaped by the different thinking or cognitive tools we employ. These tools help us to

1 All participants had provided written consent to be contacted for follow up research.

think and to remember because they connect emotion, imagination, and knowledge. Egan's theory of IE outlines different sets of cognitive tools that come along with oral language (e.g., the story-form, dramatic tensions, vivid mental imagery, metaphor), written language (e.g., revolt and idealism, sense of wonder, extremes of experience and limits of reality), theoretical language (e.g., general ideas and their anomalies, sense of agency) and highly reflexive language (e.g., irony). While it is outside the scope of this paper to provide a detailed description of Egan's theory, we introduce it to explain participants' references to cognitive tools. When asked about how they engage imagination, this is the discourse they employ. In this program, IE was explored and applied to key leadership processes including understanding self and other, cultivating equitable communities, and communicating in meaningful ways.

A portion of each course in the MEd program was allocated to developing understanding of imagination and connecting imagination to the specific content of the course. The instructional team also employed cognitive tools in enacting the curriculum, to promote affective and cognitive learning. In short, the cohort of MEd students learned about imagination in educational leadership while also experiencing an imaginative learning process.

Given their professional and academic background, the focus group participants offer a very important perspective on the role of imagination in educational leadership. The participants are K-12 educators with varied backgrounds and experiences; many are involved in informal leadership (e.g., mentoring new teachers, providing professional development sessions, engaging students in various initiatives) and some hold formal administrative positions (e.g., head teacher, vice principal, principal). They chose an imagination-focused graduate program and have developed nuanced theoretical understandings of imagination and leadership. They are emerging leaders in practice who are enacting what they have learned in varied contexts. They view imagination positively and are motivated to enact imagination in their relational leadership. Even with this desire to lead imaginatively, these participants experience barriers and limits to enacting imagination in their educational environments. It is for these reasons that we sought their perspective on how imagination can be enacted in educational leadership environments, and how imagination may be perceived or understood by others.

Data Collection and Analysis

The focus group involving the seven participants—Martin, Sasha, Tanisha, Angela, Tracy, Jade, and Jasper (all pseudonyms)—occurred on Zoom, which allowed for automated transcription; we later cleaned the transcript using the audio for accuracy. We decided to analyze the text rather than examining other aspects of communication (see Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009); we individually coded the transcript from the focus group (see Miles et al., 2014) and then we compared codes. We collaboratively analyzed the transcript in a third stage in which we examined our individual analytic processes

and code creations; based on this discussion came to an agreement on the emergent themes we discuss here. These themes include: finding space to be imaginative; promoting belonging through imaginative practices; and engaging in covert use of imagination.

Findings

Finding and Creating Space to be Imaginative

In discussing their own leadership practices, participants tended to delineate their personal leadership actions from formal leadership positions. Several participants noted that while they engage as leaders with students, parents/caregivers, and other teachers, they do not hold a leadership position or lead the "school as an entity," as stated by one participant. In sharing their experiences with leadership, these relational encounters with various stakeholders seemed to be viewed as less important or meaningful than traditional school leadership enacted by administrators.

Although perhaps perceived as being more limited in scope, the participants discussed that they found ways to be imaginative within their positions. They clearly articulated how imagination enabled their relationships with stakeholders and the collaborative work they did together. When discussing how their imaginative practices were received, participants discussed how, in many cases, their efforts went unnoticed or, when noticed, were not associated with imagination.

One participant highlighted the need to find space to be imaginative. Martin[2] stated that people using imaginative practices in schools:

> Tend to navigate themselves towards an environment where they will be received...I don't really think that anyone in that context would look for an environment where their voice would not be heard. It's more really like where we are.

This demonstrates that leaders emerge and enact imaginative practices where they can be accepted. What matters, according to Martin, is "where we are" and what we can do within that specific context. This highlights the relational and contextual nature of leadership. It is conceivable that leaders are drawn into relationship with others who can cognitively and affectively connect to imaginative practices.

Sasha noted that while she sees several teachers and department heads in her school using imagination and cognitive tools (like storytelling and metaphor) in their practice, these imaginative practices are not noticed. She describes these imaginative practices as "small bursts" blossoming around the school; when asked how the administration creates or supports a culture for imagination, she stated:

2 All participant names are pseudonyms

> I actually don't think that they [administrators] notice. I don't think that that's been much on their radar. And I'm seeing other teachers really try [to use imagination] too, and not just because of me. But I think there's a group of us who have really tried to use imagination and storytelling and metaphors in our own practice. And there's other department heads that try to do that as well. And so, I think these things are happening in this school, in kind of these small bursts. But I think if I asked anyone on our senior leadership team if they had seen any of that, I think they would say no.

While Sasha's school culture does not impede imaginative practices, these practices may go unnoticed and, consequently, unsupported. She acknowledges how there is a small community of educators attempting to engage cognitive tools in their practice, but these imaginative approaches are not recognized by senior leadership. This appears to be a lost opportunity to further cultivate the motivation and innovation of these imaginative practitioners.

Tanisha noted that her school had a new administrative team, which led to things being "chaotic" and "feeling like we're still playing catch up." In terms of "school-wide feelings for fostering imagination" she noted that "...there aren't as many opportunities as there have been in previous years." Two other participants noted that changes to their schools' administrative teams led to "growing pains" and attempts to "figure out the lay of the land." Because of administrative changes at her school, Sasha noted, "it hasn't really been a great year for any innovation or trying new things."

Participants shared that changes to the formal leadership of the school can destabilize school culture and may limit the ability for educators to be imaginative and innovative. New administration may result in changes to school culture that influence imagination; imaginative practices are not fostered or cultivated as personnel attempt to adjust to the change. Another reason why these practices may go unnoticed is because of a lack of explicit dialogue about imagination. As described in more detail later, some participants explained that using the term "imagination" can be risky due to a lack of a shared understanding of imagination. In the following section, we examine specific, practical examples of how these wholehearted leaders are engaging in imaginative practices.

Promoting Belonging and Care through Their Imaginative Practices

The participants provided practical examples of how they have been engaging students, parents/caregivers, and other educators with imagination. These examples highlight the importance of the relationality of leadership. Sasha, one of the participants holding a formal leadership position in her school, explained that in her role with transition planning, she often uses imagination and cognitive tools to collaboratively plan with students and their families. She is explicit about asking students to imagine their futures,

using metaphor of journeying and exploring various paths. She explains that engaging in this process together pushes back again a more traditional discourse around academic and career planning that emphasizes a linear path from secondary to post-secondary to a career.

> My work with students and families when we're talking about post-secondary plans—especially with a student body that all has a learning difference—and maybe that post-secondary plan isn't necessarily a typical journey for kids, I have explicitly been like, let's imagine something different. Let's look at our values, let's talk about journeys and taking different paths. I use a lot of storytelling and getting speakers to come in to talk about their own winding career journeys. And explicitly using imaginative terms, explicitly saying, we are going to imagine what your future looks like and what you want it to look like. As far as how it's received by the students and by the family that I'm working with, I think that they've liked more of an open-ended, possibilities-are-endless kind of take on the student's future.

Sasha continued to explain that academic trajectories are often assumed; if the student gets good marks, they can attend a 'good' post-secondary institution and then get a 'good' job. Or, as she explained, if you get "into this mediocre school, you get a mediocre job." Sasha intentionally employed imagination to work against this narrative with students. She recognized the learning differences of each student and invited the student to imaginatively explore what they wanted their future to look like. This seemed to be an empowering process that both the students and their families appreciated.

Tanisha also engaged students through imagination in the classroom, recognizing the importance of meeting students where they are at and finding different approaches that may fit the varied needs of students.

> In my classroom, and the way that I support my students—specifically students that learn differently or are on IEPs [individual education plans] or have some behavior needs or social emotional needs—I'm able to use that imagination piece in my classroom, which is wonderful. My students are really open to different ways of learning. So that's been lovely.

Both Sasha and Tanisha recognize the value of imagination and cognitive tools in sense-making with students with different needs and abilities. They discuss using cognitive tools to promote belonging and to meet the needs of each individual student.

Angela discussed how they engage students through various cognitive tools, like humour, role play, and metaphor. She discusses how she has been able to build these approaches over eight years of teaching and that other teachers are becoming interested in what she is doing and why she is doing it.

> I've had eight years to develop my program for grade sixes and sevens - but I come up with a lot of like things that people walk by, and they see well, like you're wearing a bunch of crowns, and you're like acting like little diplomats and things like that. What are you doing? Or just have a lot of questions. And this year, in working with a new team of teachers coming in and getting to know the students and some of the projects that we are able to do, they asked me - where do you get these ideas from? And so that starts the conversation about finding the story and trying to bring that engagement through fun and humor and role play and through metaphor and all of those different types of [cognitive tools].

Tracy, a principal of a school, explains how, as a leader, it is much more than just asking people to be imaginative. She explains that she engages various cognitive tools depending upon the problem or discussion at hand:

> I think that as a leader you've got to choose which facets of imagination might come into play. Are we possibility posing? Are we looking for metaphors to try to help ourselves or students or parents understand something? Are we looking for humor, or are we looking at the limits and extremes to try to enact different ways of thinking or envisioning what an outcome might look like? But also...we might imagine something, and as we go along that path we also have to have that ability to be flexible with our imaginations. That just because we imagined it doesn't mean it's going to be just the way we imagined it. It's a little more fluid and dynamic than that. So, I think that imagination can keep you at the leadership table and help you more successful once you get there.

Tracy goes onto explain the importance of truly collaborative relationships:

> My metaphor for imagination is the prism - where do we need to shine the light and where do we need to dim the light? And who needs to step into the light, and who maybe needs to step out of the light? And sometimes it's you as the leader, and sometimes it's you as the leader who's got to step out of the light and let other people shine.

Participants recognize the practical and generative nature of imagination in working with students, families, educators, and other stakeholders. Imagination creates space for understanding and for pushing beyond traditional narratives that may keep people constrained. Their discussion of using cognitive tools intentionally to build relationships, to collaborate, and to help provide new stories or narratives demonstrates the power of imagination to promote a sense of belonging and care for others. Imagination

appears to allow leaders to determine not only which tools of imagination (cognitive tools) to draw on, but also to be open to re-evaluating or improvising if their initial approach is not productive. This includes stepping back and creating space for others to shine.

Working in Tension and Engaging in Covert Use of Imagination

In general, leaders are ambivalent about imagination: that is, leaders felt positive about the idea of imagination, but are hesitant to employ it themselves (Judson, 2020). They do not talk about imagination often and when they do, it is often associated with risk (ibid). The same theme of tension emerged in this study.

Tanisha offered that although she uses imagination to connect to at-risk learners and create plans to best support their learning, she explained that "no one actually uses that language [imagination] to describe" their work. "It's a different way of thinking, and even using that word 'imagination' in schools, in a leadership position isn't always embraced. Or understood fully, I think, is the big piece".

Imagination is often equated with play and imaginary worlds (Judson, 2020). While perhaps accepted and encouraged in younger children, imagination can be wrongly viewed as something we grow out of. Or mistaken as something that only adults with creative, artistic, or musical talents continue to use (Hopkins, 2019). There may be resistance to the term as it may be seen as too emotional, or whimsical, for important educational contexts (Judson, 2020). For us, and other scholars (e.g., Asma, 2017; Egan, 1997; Hopkins, 2019; Pendleton-Jullian & Brown, 2018; Raptis et al., 2021), imagination is practical, relational, essential, and can be cultivated in each of us.

Only one of the participants noted their explicit and intentional use of the word "imagination" in their practice. Tracy discusses how being explicit about imagination enhanced the culture for imagination on her team:

> We deliberately included the word imagination, and it was quite an interesting discussion, because we're saying - what's our purpose of the team? It is to imagine new possibilities for learning and student life at our school. So, it's created the space for us to be more flexible in our meeting structures, because when we're preparing to come to a meeting, we might be asked to explore something and bring our ideas, or what we imagine. We've also been much more intentional because of that to invite other voices to the table to say - hey, we only represent a specific set of voices, and we need to invite these teachers in, or we need to talk to some parents or some students. And so just expanding the sphere of the collective imagination...I think having that word imagination in our purpose statement for our team has opened up the space for that.

Except for Tracy, most participants seemed to employ imagination *covertly;* most participants indicated they do not use the term imagination explicitly in their practice. Martin explains: "I think sometimes people don't use that language. They might use the tools but are not aware of that. Again, I think the context, like the environment that someone is in, will play a role in how they will be received." Jade admitted that innovation and creativity were words that fit more easily into the language of her leadership—to explicitly speak about imagination would require contextualization and more explanation of her meaning. She stated:

> I don't know if I actually ever say imagination. And I think that's because I have to provide more context behind how that form of imagination is viewed, how we would conceptualize imagination.

Jade notices imagination's tools at work around them, by others and themselves, but they do not name the work as imaginative because of a lack of understanding of what imagination is.

Interestingly, participants acknowledge how imaginative practices are beneficial and ubiquitous but often are not identified as imaginative. Jasper reflects:

> When I think about leaders that I've had, or of people that catch my eye, there's something about people, it's because they're knowingly or unknowingly employing these tools that captivate you in a certain way. So, does using imagination allow you to be more captivating, if that's what you're going for? Absolutely. Does it allow you to build connection more to what you're talking about or to the people that you're trying to speak to? Yes. Is there something about doing a job well, especially, we're working in service. We work with people. It's a people profession. Is there something about using imagination and doing it well and having people see that? I have to wholeheartedly agree.

So, while participants expressed comfort employing imagination and its value in their work in schools, they were less comfortable using the word imagination with others. Imagination, they said, is misunderstood.

In summary, while school culture and misconceptions about imagination may limit expressions of imagination in leadership, the participants find space to engage relationally, using cognitive tools. Participants discussed the possibility created by enacting imagination and using cognitive tools while leading. This is mostly covert work. In most cases, these imaginative practices are not explicitly connected to imagination and may go unnoticed by the wider school community. The next section shares why this covert work may

be necessary; participants share some challenges employing imagination in school contexts as leaders, including being judged for their use of imaginative practices.

Facing Judgement Due to Imagination

Five of our seven participants suggested that talking about imagination can have negative consequences. The participants describe being dismissed, judged by others, or treated with condescension. For two participants, Tanisha and Sasha, the emotionality of imagination was used against them—they were typecast by other educators in their school as naïve and idealistic due to their interest in imagination. Tanisha shared the following:

> I think being a woman is obviously part of it, but I think also being a woman of young children ... with the current people I'm working with, I think there is kind of a level of dismissiveness, because there is a lot of me that is seen as a mother now at school that even a couple of years ago I mean, that wasn't the case. It really feels that has changed people's perception of me at school. And that's some of the ideas, or the [imaginative] things that I am trying are definitely seen as, "that makes sense because she has little kids". And it's super frustrating. And I'm getting like a bit choked up thinking about it, because it's a very real thing that I experience almost every day at my work right now. And I don't think it would be the same if I was a man with young children.

Here you can sense the emotionality and frustration that Tanisha experiences as her imaginative practices and engagement with cognitive tools is dismissed as something for young children. In her experience, her imaginative pedagogy is seen as play a mother would engage in with her children, rather than an intentional and effective teaching or leadership approach. Tanisha is not able to express herself fully as she is typecast as a mother, rather than viewed as an educator and leader. She does not believe a young father would be similarly dismissed and judged.

Sasha has had similar experiences and is treated with condescension by colleagues and administrators for being 'naive' and 'emotional' in her work in an inner-city school:

> I can definitely empathize and feel exactly the same thing [as Tanisha]. I don't have a formal leadership position at my school, but I do take on a lot of responsibilities. And even if it's talking about plans for student success—and specifically because I work at a complex school in the inner city, so there's a lot of need there—just the way that I view student success is like, "you're so naive. You have a big heart. You have a little boy at home. You're

> so emotional, you're so connected." And even the way that I'm spoken to by leadership is very condescending. Like – "it's okay, Hun." And like these little degrading kind of comments.

Sasha emphasizes connection with and "showing up for" her students. Her strengths-based approach and her resistance to 'at-risk' narratives of her students is dismissed by leadership as being naïve and overly caring, emotional, and maternal. She goes on to note that comments are also made questioning her ability to move into a more formal leadership position based on the assumption that she will likely go on maternity leave again.

Jade further explained that while imagination has the potential to build connection and care, it can also be easily misinterpreted as weakness. She explains the risk in enacting imagination:

> The challenge of trying to share that imaginative piece, if they're not open to it, if they're not willing to see it, it's very hard to break down that barrier. A lot of times ... it becomes dismissive, and it becomes a sign of weakness—rather than a sign of nurturing, caring, empathy. I think that's still a very large gap in trying to know when it's psychologically safe [to be imaginative]. Like depending on the people in the room, are you able to actually provide your voice and feel safe in that environment? Knowing that your voice is going to be heard, not judged and heard right, accepted, and acknowledged. I think there's a very large gap there, and I think all these tools that we have with imagination, we know the value behind what it can bring and why we're trying to embrace that. But there's definitely still a barrier to overcome.

Angela noted that she was often judged for her appearance and other educators assumed she was new to teaching. She found when she built a relationship with her colleagues and explained her approach to using cognitive tools, they became more interested and engaged. While initially dismissive, once Angela had established herself as experienced and holding expertise, others became much more interested in how she used imagination. Unfortunately, implicit bias can result in very capable, experienced leaders being questioned, judged, dismissed, or belittled. As Martin explains:

> I see that certain groups, and again, that could be depending on gender, but that could also be depending on their ethnicity, are more likely to be ... belittled maybe at times, or I guess, rather pushed aside.

He goes on to discuss an experience he had as a representative for his school at a district event; Martin was disappointed by the lack of diversity in the group of representatives he met with. He found that some representatives were given more space and others were pushed aside; he noted that gender

and ethnicity both related to who was allowed to take space—that is, voice their ideas and lead—and who was not. Speaking about this district event, Martin lamented:

> I found that experience to be a little bit disheartening because you would think that in more formal leadership roles, all voices are given an equal share, or at least a possibility to share their opinion, and that was not the case. I think that's also what I told myself when thinking about my own career, and eventually, maybe moving into leadership. I think that's why I would push that aside, and I don't really see that for myself because I think there are other voices who need to be pushed more, and it doesn't have to be another white male who already takes so much room in certain leadership roles. I think we need more diversity. A lot more diversity.

Participants responses indicate how enacting imagination can be risky; even more so for leaders who are not in a safe space or whose experience and expertise are questioned. Unfortunately, how leaders present—their age, gender, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, and many other characteristics—can lead to unfounded assumptions about their abilities and thus, a dismissiveness of their imaginative practices. Imaginative practices are misinterpreted as weakness and judgements of the educator/leader can limit their potential for imaginative practices.

Wonderings

Building on the work of Burkeman (2012) and Wheatley (2006), Anderson (2023) shapes his concluding chapter in an anthology on imagination and leadership around the notion of *opensure*. He suggests: "Closure implies finality, *opensure* means receptivity. Opensure is about remaining curious, responsive, and agile, ready to switch gears as opportunities emerge. ...opensure is a necessary condition for imagination to flourish" (Anderson, 2023, p. 172). Anderson urges leaders to make *opensure,* rather than closure, a default in their leadership. This notion inspired this "conclusion."

While limited in size and scope, our focus group data illuminates some interesting themes for future research. These themes relate to leadership education, to misunderstandings about imagination, to the relationship between positionality and imagination, and to imagination as a shared practice. Our work with imaginative leaders leaves us with curiosity. And so, rather than offer a conclusion to this work, we offer our wonderings in support of future research.

First, if we seek to expand and deepen understanding of imagination's role in whole-hearted leadership, then it is necessary to examine the practical ways to bring imagination into leadership education. We echo calls for research on leadership education that focuses on emotionality and imagination (Byrnes-

Jimenez & Yoon, 2019; Judson & Dougherty, 2023; accepted/in press). As described earlier, this particular group of leaders learned about Imaginative Education and, specifically, the tools of imagination, or cognitive tools, that they could use in their work as a focus in their graduate study. The fact that our participants explicitly refer to using cognitive tools such as metaphor, story, role play, and humour in their work nearly two years following graduation, suggests that this particular approach to leadership education did make imagination more tangible and did offer leaders "tools" for imaginative engagement. Further research is required on imaginative pedagogies such as Imaginative Education in the context of leadership education.

Second, our data reveals concerning barriers to expanded use of imagination. For example, despite indicating they value imagination, the use of imagination was *covert*. We wonder, how do we move beyond the covert to imagination being part of the dominant discourse in leadership and leadership education? Moreover, there were negative implications for some in *being* imaginative. As long as misunderstandings exist about imagination and its very real, very *adult* and practical uses in leadership, it is likely that contexts will remain inhospitable to imagination. The vulnerability required to enact imagination in these contexts—and the emotional toll that may result if one feels judged—is significant and, conceivably a deterrent for some leaders.

Third, the themes related to age and gender associated with imagination require further deeper investigation. Though we did not interrogate the influence of race, ethnicity, or sexuality in this focus group (as these experiences were not shared by participants), we can see from this research that positionality makes it more or less difficult to take the risks associated with using imagination. For some leaders—especially those that are already denied equity in a systemically White, heterosexual, and male-dominated field—employing imagination may be too risky. This has significant implications if we return to where we started: the challenges of leading in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times *require* imagination. We wonder, how can imagination be leveraged to do the *un*learning required to address these widespread misconceptions about imagination? How can imagination support the unlearning and deconstruction of historically exclusionary views of leadership?

On a positive note, it is exactly the work of imagination that can lead to the unlearning and recontextualizing of leadership knowledge that will address widespread misunderstanding. Here's the rub for any leadership education: We need to *use* imagination to understand imagination's real impact and value. Whole-hearted leadership scholars Byrnes-Jimenez and Yoon (2019) speak of love as a strategy *and* a framework for leadership (p. 3). Our work suggests that imagination may be considered a *strategy* for leadership but may, more importantly, represent a relational space through and in which to lead in challenging, complex, and contentious times. And this leads to our final wondering regarding *shared* imaginative spaces in leadership.

Fourth, while it was encouraging to see how these leaders cultivate their own imagination—albeit through covert operation—and thus grow this aspect of their whole-hearted leadership, our preliminary data did reveal a very individualized conception of imagination. We wonder, how might shared relational spaces of imagination be cultivated? And what kind of research might interrogate those spaces? Further research should seek to understand how *shared* spaces of imagination in leadership are formed, sustained, and shared. As Byres-Jimenez and Yoon (2019) suggest, authentic and equitable leadership calls for storytelling and story listening in leadership:

> By cultivating a shared habit of imagining, leaders can help people find where they belong. Perhaps most important is the role of leaders in crafting and listening to the histories and stories of individual students, teachers, staff, parents, and their communities. These stories are sources of wisdom and identity, of shoring up courage with reminders of past success or resilience. (p. 7)

We feel that story—arguably the most powerful tool of imagination for individuals and communities (Asma, 2017; Egan, 1997; Judson, 2023)—is worth investigating as a powerful means to address misconceptions about leadership. In terms of concrete practices that support or fulfill relational processes, the story emerged as a kind of vehicle of imagination in action in our larger case study. Our participants noted how communication can be made meaningful and memorable through story-shaping. We think is worth investigating further how story creates relational spaces in which people can develop shared meaning, multiple voices can be heard, and new possibilities can develop.

Relational leadership requires leaders to bring themselves—their whole heart—into their encounters. Whole hearted leadership practices that embrace emotionality and honour our connections create space for the possible. These practices also strengthen our relationships, encouraging shared experiences and collective imagination. However, as seen through our participants' experiences, it is risky to engage in imaginative, whole hearted leadership practices. These approaches can be misconceived by others, leading to judgement and condescension, especially where implicit bias colours interpretations. More investigation is needed on how leader positionality impacts how their imaginative enactments are received. Most imaginative work is done covertly, in found spaces that allow for vulnerability and connection. Through story and centering dialogue on imagination, we hope to develop cultures that support imagination for all leaders.

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