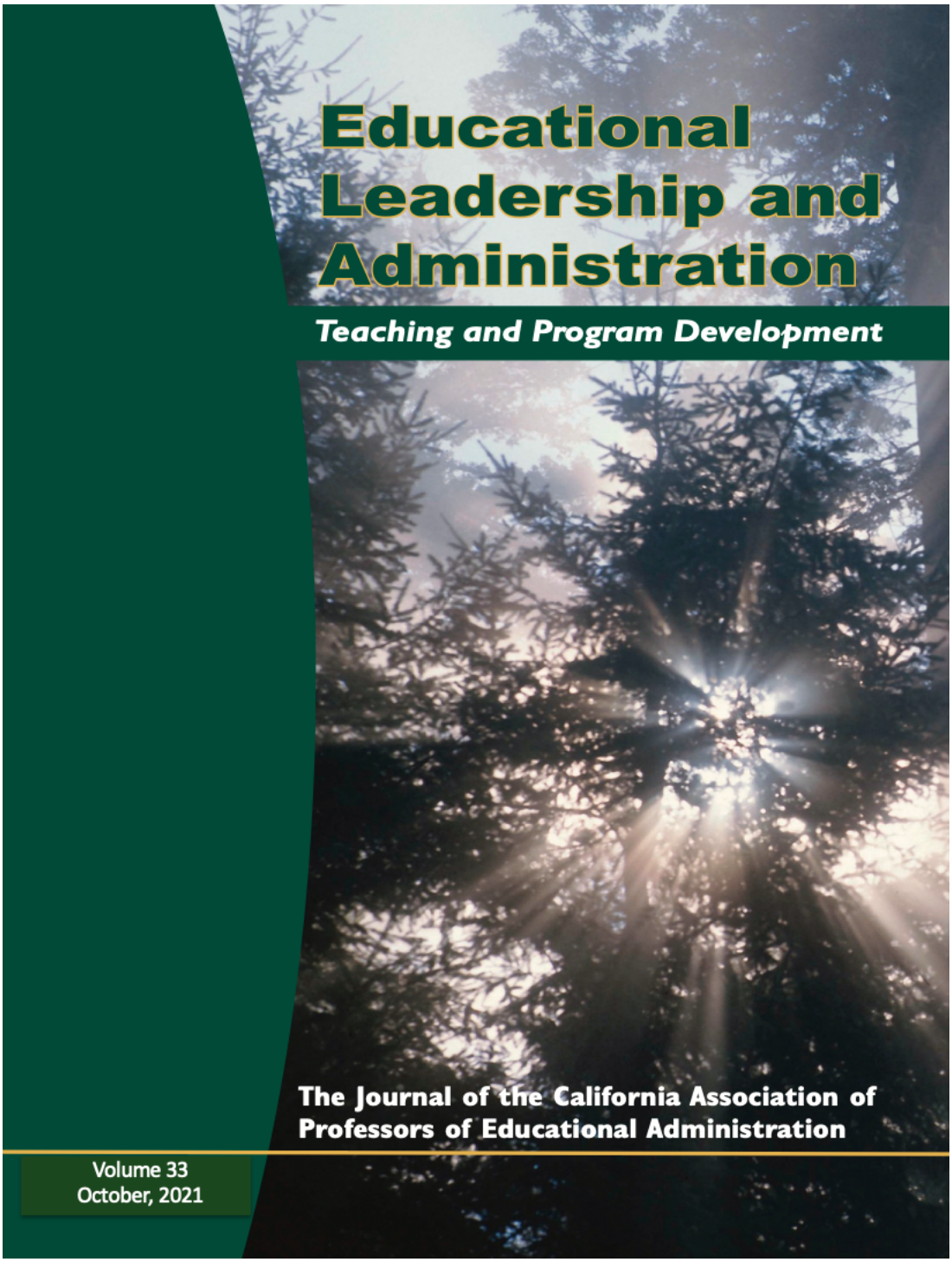

Educational Leadership and Administration

Teaching and Program Development

The Journal of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration

Volume 33
October, 2021

Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development

The Journal of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration

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Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development is a refereed journal published yearly since 1989 for the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration (CAPEA) /U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences Contract No. ED-04-CO-0005). The journal is listed in the Current Index to Journals in Education (CIJE) and catalogued in the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) database, which provides a comprehensive, easy-to-use, searchable Internet-based bibliographic and full-text database for education research and information for educators, researchers, and the public. The editors welcome contributions that focus on promising practices and improvement of educational leadership preparation programs. Beginning with Volume 23, 2011 and continuing with this issue, Volume 33, the journal has been published by ICPEL Publications and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership (https://www.icpel.org).

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Printed in United States of America
Indexed by Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ISSN 1532-0723

How to order print copies of this Journal:

ICPEL Publications and the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership offer *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development* as a print-on-demand hard copy and electronic copy (download at https://www.icpel.org/state-affiliate-journals.html) Printed copies are prepared in perfect bound binding and delivery time is 3-5 business days. Ordering is available at: http://www.lulu.com

Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development has been peer-reviewed by CAPEA and endorsed by the International Council of Professors of Educational Leadership as a significant contribution to the preparation and practice of education leaders.

Foreword

By the Issue Editors

Welcome to Volume 33 of *Educational Leadership and Administration: Teaching and Program Development: The Journal of the California Association of Professors of Educational Administration (CAPEA)*. Although the members of CAPEA come from many different sectors and educational professions throughout the state of California, they share a common goal of preparing educational leaders who are committed to ensuring an equitable education for California's diverse students. After a blind and rigorous submissions review process, the editors accepted papers that gear towards this goal. This volume addresses the challenges raised by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, and examines varied approaches of leadership and school culture, focused on all students through transformative leadership development and empowerment.

The featured article, *How California School Principals and Teachers Engage Academic Optimism to Maximize Equity in Student Learning Within Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) Schools*, studied the perceptions of 144 TK-8 urban school leaders and their staff on the effects that Academic Optimism has on supporting equitable growth in student learning within ten low SES schools. Focusing on the constructs of Academic Optimism, the authors described how the leaders created an inclusive environment where "new teachers, staff members, and other administrators gain feelings of belonging to the school as an important part of the school team" (p. 12). Through a collective efficacy of "no blame attitude" (p. 12) and beliefs, the authors explained how school culture was rebuilt as students and teachers return to a more traditional campus teaching from the online virtual learning environment forced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The second article in this volume, *Using Narrative Inquiry to Explore Critical Reflection and Self-Awareness in Equity Leadership Development*, offers a new way to think about educational leadership. Narrative inquiry is based on the idea that "critical reflection and self-awareness are two of the most crucial components in developing equity-centered leaders" (p. 19). The authors concluded that "engaging in narrative inquiry illuminates where reflection and awareness come together and where they remain disconnected" (p. 28). As a result, this level of connection of self-awareness and critical reflection can, the authors posit, narrow the disparity gap between leaders' and educators' expectations and, indirectly, students' learning outcome.

Opportunity or Mandate: Superintendent Beliefs About School Climate Assessment is the third article in this volume. Through the perspective of superintendents, the authors reemphasized the importance of looking at "school climate and the use of data to inform decision making" (p. 40) at a systematic and educational policy level for sustainability and equity. The authors further stated that school climate assessment does not only promote the "efforts in leveraging resources to support the needs of vulnerable student populations" (p. 51), but it also provides an "avenue for leaders to gain deeper understanding of the pupil experience" (p. 51). Although this concept isn't new to the field of education, the study "confirmed a consistent belief that school climate plays an important role in school experiences and that school climate assessment can be useful in guiding continuous improvement efforts" (p. 51), even during the pandemic.

On a smaller scale, the fourth article, *Leadership and Innovation in a Special Education School,* sheds light on how "special education pedagogy has the potential to inform and influence general education inclusive practices" (p. 57) during the pandemic. Utilizing the Diffusion of Innovation theory, the author examined "how leadership supports innovation implementation" (p. 57) in a PK-12 special education environment to sustain inclusive practices. Specifically, this qualitative case study explored how "teachers and administration worked to ensure that the students continued to receive equitable instruction as mandated by their individual education plan (IEP) throughout the school closure" (p. 66).

Continuing with the concept of innovation practices, the fifth article, *Funds of Knowledge and Educational Leadership: Recognizing and Leveraging Untapped Leadership Talent,* discussed how social capital contributes to inequities in education. The authors argued that "leadership styles are not enough to correct inequities" (p. 70), but by using the funds of knowledge embedded in social capital as a prism, education leaders can shed some light on where inequities occur. The authors further concluded that by

understanding how social capital works, one can tap "into the funds of knowledge of the staff and faculty and welcome diverse perspectives" to promote equitable education (p. 77).

The volume concluded with two additional pieces—a commentary article, and a book review. In *What School Leaders Need to Consider About Virtual Engagement at Home During the Pandemic: Learning Loss or Learning Gain? A Commentary,* the authors critically reflected on the idea that "leaders who reimagined learning gain instead of loss" (p. 80) during virtual instruction at home can have an impactful effect on students' learning. Regardless of where learning occurs, equitable education is at the forefront. The book review of *Equity Partnership: A Culturally Proficient Guide to Family, School and Community Engagement* provides readers with both conceptual framework and specific strategies that families, educators and communities can engage in to increase and embrace equitable partnerships between schools and families.

This volume would not have been possible without the efforts of numerous people. We thank all of the authors who contributed manuscripts. A very special thank you is offered to the editors, reviewers and copy editor who worked tirelessly in the review and editing of all submissions. Finally, this journal would not exist without the support of ICPEL and ICPEL Publications, especially Brad Bizell, who has been an invaluable member of the team.

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How California School Principals and Teachers Engage Academic Optimism to Maximize Equity in Student Learning Within Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) Schools

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This mixed-method phenomenological study reports findings of 144 urban California educational leaders' and teachers' views about the identified effects Academic Optimism has on supporting equitable growth in student learning within ten low SES schools. Hoy, Tartar and Woolfolk-Hoy (2006) examined how Academic Optimism was a general demonstrable second order construct of successful urban schools. This study seeks to compare the findings of Hoy et al. to that of 144 California TK-8 school leaders' and teachers' perceptions regarding both the presence of Academic Optimism at ten low SES school sites, and its effects on equitable growth in student learning across student groups.

Keywords: Academic Optimism; urban school leadership; equitable growth in student learning; positive school culture; successful urban schools

While the literature focuses on narrowing the achievement gap as vitally important to educational equity, especially with regard to high-poverty schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010), educational leaders in California were not prepared for the additional challenges and barriers to closing the gap evidenced during COVID-19. The global pandemic that closed California schools in March 2020 created mounting challenges for teaching and learning particularly as empirical evidence notes those factors that affect student performance in schools with low SES populations (Hough et al. 2020). Fischer et al. (2018), in a study of urban low-SES schools, found significant relationships between per-student funding, days of instruction, teachers' knowledge and experience, some aspects of teachers' professional development, and student performance on a high-stakes examination. These were found insignificant as California schools moved to remote learning during COVID-19 (Hough et al. 2020).

Another broad area of study focuses on the school's culture. Trust (Adams & Forsyth, 2009; Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Forsyth, 2008; Goddard, Salloum & Berebitsky, 2009; Goddard, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007), collective efficacy (Hoy, Sweetland, & Smith, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004), academic emphasis (Goddard, Sweetland & Hoy, 2000), and organizational health (Hoy & Hannum, 1997) have all been investigated. Academic Optimism, a construct that encompasses the aforementioned cultural topics, has been specifically examined by researchers with encouraging findings (Akhavan, 2011; Bevel & Mitchell, 2012; Hong, 2017; Hoy, Tarter & Woolfolk, 2004, 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Smith & Hoy, 2007; Woolfolk, Hoy & Kurz, 2008). It is to this area of research that this study is directed.

Does the research of Hoy et al. (2006) have any significance for examining the collective efficacy and cultural property 144 California school leaders and teachers envision for their sites? In a state such as California, given the vast diversity of students and families, how do educators remain hopeful and optimistic that they can maximize student learning toward future work and schooling? Participants were invited to describe their lived experiences through a phenomenological lens as they both interviewed with the researchers, and engaged in follow-up surveys, responding to the four following research questions:

1. How do California school leaders and staff at high performing low SES schools support a collaborative attitude for the benefit of all students?
2. What specific practice(s) has/have contributed most to growth in student learning within California's high performing low SES schools?
3. How do California's high performing low SES schools ensure equity in learning for all students?
4. What recommendations do California school leaders and staff make for other low SES schools as they consider engaging Academic Optimism and collective efficacy at their sites?

Background of the Study

While educational reforms mandate a full spectrum of local accountability in California, to include planning for and resourcing supports toward the growth of student learning, large populations of students continue to repeatedly perform below their peers (CDE, 2016).

Fischer et al. (2018) addresses the preparation of teachers, noting, "In the advent of the innovation age, teacher education requires reinvention around the emerging knowledge base about learning and the key role teachers play in addressing issues of equity and student success in this

rapidly changing and complex world" (p. 267). Fischer and his team of renowned international researchers at the Global Learning Equity Network (GLEN) focus their equity mission to, "Provide learning environments and quality teachers that enable the potential of all children while challenging the preparation of a new kind of teacher for a new kind of school, one built on a learning center rather than a testing center model" (p. 267).

While equity of learning for all students is in the hands of teachers it is, as well, the concern of state education officers. The *Council of Chief State School Officers* (2017) identified the following 10 commitments, described as actions, that they and their state education agencies (SEAs) can take to improve educational equity:

(1) Prioritize Equity: Set and Communicate an Equity Vision and Measurable Targets;
(2) Start from Within: Focus on the State Education Agency;
(3) Measure What Matters: Create Accountability for Equity;
(4) Go Local: Engage Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and Provide Tailored and Differentiated Support;
(5) Follow the Money: Allocate Resources to Achieve Fiscal Equity;
(6) Start Early: Invest in the Youngest Learners;
(7) Engage More Deeply: Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments;
(8) Value People: Focus on Teachers and Leaders;
(9) Improve Conditions for Learning: Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-emotional Development; and
(10) Empower Student Options: Ensure Families Have Access to High-quality Educational Options That Align to Community Needs.

An academically optimistic school culture, in which the collective efficacy and organizational citizenship of staff and school leaders is pivotal to student learning, critically impacts academic growth (Akin-Kösterelioglu, 2017; Kulophas et al. 2018; Hong, 2017; Wu & Lin, 2018).

Academic growth and active learning teaching practices are recurring foci of much of the current literature. Two studies investigating school climate and culture continue to surface current findings on their impact in the area of growth in student learning. While Tang et al. (2017) explored ways in which active learning teaching practices can focus on inquiry while supporting equity in the classroom, Jain et al. (2015) investigated inequalities in school climate, or the physical and social conditions of the learning environment, and implications for academic achievement in California. The researchers examined how school climate varies by school-level characteristics in California using administrative data and the California School Climate Survey. They found, "Teachers at secondary schools, schools in large cities, schools that serve low-income populations, Hispanic- and black-majority schools, and/or low-performing schools reported less positive school climates, including staff/student relationships, norms and standards, student facilitative behaviors, and perceived safety, than their counterparts, paralleling other education inequity trends" (p. 237).

Academic Optimism and School Culture in the US and World

A school's cultural property may particularly affect growth in student learning. A 2018 study of award-winning high school principals was designed to distill lessons from highly effective school leaders. Luby (2018) explored how personal motivation and professional core values

influence the practice, priorities and decisions of exemplary principals. Participants included school leaders across a 10-state region who won their "State Principal of the Year" award from 2007 to 2017. The first phase of data collection utilized a survey, while the second phase was comprised of semi-structured interviews. Luby notes, “Principals indicated they were motivated to become educators because of their desire to have a positive impact on children, the influence of others, and their passion for a subject area or co-curricular activity. Key reasons they became principals were to help others, to positively influence student achievement, and to impact school culture. Additional motivators included encouragement they received and modeling they observed from school leaders. Dispositional traits they shared—specifically optimism, a belief that all students can achieve, a growth mindset, and a passion for helping others—impacted their career choice” (p. 4).

From the seminal conversation of Academic Optimism by Hoy et al. (2006, 2007, 2012) other researchers have also developed an interest in the topic and the effect and affect Academic Optimism has on schools. This research interest is not limited to just the United States, and in fact, has become part of the research agenda of many international scholars who are researching Academic Optimism. (Beard et al. 2010; Cheraghikhah et al. 2015; Wu & Lin, 2018)

One of the most recent international research projects regarding Academic Optimism is reported in the March 2018 Asia Pacific Education Review. In a study by Wu and Lin, a multilevel analysis of teacher and school Academic Optimism was conducted in Taiwan Elementary schools. These researchers sought to build on the original research regarding Academic Optimism and its positive effects on student achievement. In their view, this previous research had looked at individual and collective levels of Academic Optimism, but no study as of their research had considered how the two perceptions (individual and collective) of Academic Optimism interact across these two different levels. In Wu and Lin’s view, because both perceptions have similar theoretical roots and conceptual structure, individual teacher and school Academic Optimism were potentially interrelated. Their belief was that there was an overlooked research question about the nested relationship between the teacher and the school’s Academic Optimism. In summation, these researchers were looking to find what relationship there might be between the individual teacher and the school in their views regarding Academic Optimism.

Wu and Lin used hierarchical linear modeling to empirically test the relationship between individual teacher Academic Optimism and collective school Academic Optimism. By using the data from 1073 teachers in 102 schools in Taiwan, the results showed that approximately 10% of variance in teacher Academic Optimism came from the school level. School Academic Optimism explained nearly all of the between-school variance as it overpowered a number of school contextual variables, such as percentage of minority students and student achievement, in predicting variation in teacher Academic Optimism.

Another international research project regarding Academic Optimism was recently conducted in Persia (Iran) (Cheraghikhah et al. 2015). The objective of this study was to explain the role of Academic Optimism, academic emotions, and school well-being on the mathematical performance of students. The research method was descriptive, and correlation focused on gender (boy and girl students). A sample of 440 (109 boys and 331 girls) students were selected by cluster random sampling. The research instruments utilized were the Student Academic Optimism Scale (Tschannen-Moran, Bankole, Mitchell & Moore, 2013), Academic Emotions Questionnaire (Pekrun, Goetz, Frenzel & Perry, 2011), and School Well-Being Questionnaire (Konu, Alanen, Lintonen, & Rimpela, 2011). A teacher-made questionnaire was also used to evaluate math scores. The data collected were then analyzed by using descriptive statistics that included, Pearson

correlation, stepwise multiple regression analysis, and independent t- test. These researchers' findings demonstrated that Academic Optimism, academic emotions and school well-being had a significant positive correlation with math performance (0.20, 0.23, 0.16). Further, the results showed academic well-being had a significant positive relationship with mathematic performance of girls and boys and is a predictor of mathematic academic performance. The data results also showed academic emotions had a significant positive relationship regarding the students' mathematic performance. In the girls, the academic emotions in combination with academic well-being accounted for 16% of the mathematic academic performance. In the data for the boys, the researchers found these two concepts could account for 17% of their academic mathematic performance.

What then is the relationship between school culture and Academic Optimism? Culture is a set of deep patterns of thinking and ways of acting that give meaning to human experience—it is a collection of unwritten rules and traditions people learn as they fit into a group (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2011; Peterson, 1999; Schein, 2017). School cultures are influential, they shape and re-shape what people do, think, and feel and provide a framework that a group can use to solve problems (Deal & Peterson, 1999, 2009; Frumin et al. 2016; Rosenholtz, 1991; Schein, 2017).

Research tells us that some kinds of school cultures support students' learning much more strongly than others (Fleming & Kleinhenz, 2007). A school culture that embodies Academic Optimism supports student learning and encompasses three constructs: the academic emphasis of the school, the collective efficacy of the faculty, and the faculty trust in the parents and students (Hoy et al. 2006; Wu, 2013). This collective property of schools has been linked to school achievement in a number of studies (Cheraghikhah et al. 2015; Hoy & Smith, 2007; Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk, 2004; and 2006; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Wu & Lin, 2018).

Extending the discussion of the impact of a school culture of Academic Optimism to the students' perspective, Tschannen-Moran et al. also found that Student Academic Optimism, consisting of student trust in teachers, students' perceptions of academic press and student identification with school, had a direct positive effect on student achievement (Tschannen-Moran et al. 2013).

Influences that create a positive school culture have been the focus of much research. While teachers' workplace factors of collaboration, shared decision-making and structured time to work together were brought to the discussion of teaching quality in the eighties and 1990s by Hord (1986), Rosenholtz (1991), McLaughlin and Talbert (1993), and Darling-Hammond (1994), it was via the work of Richard DuFour that the term 'professional learning community' became a focus of attention among educators (DuFour & Ecker, 1998). Professional learning communities (PLCs) were viewed as a way to build shared ownership of support among educators to ensure the success of each learner within structures that support a collaborative culture (DuFour, 2004). While over time this structure and implementation of PLCs became somewhat ambiguous, studies have shown that higher functioning PLCs predict higher levels of teacher efficacy, which can contribute to improved student achievement (Olivier & Hipp, 2006, Strahan, 2003; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

Legislated Educational Reform and Positive School Climate

Federal mandates have also recognized the importance of an optimistic school culture that focuses on educators' ability to work collaboratively to create a positive school climate that

supports the academic and behavioral needs of all students. A 1997 amendment to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) included the language 'Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports'(PBIS) and remains in the version of the law amended in 2004 (OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, 2017). PBIS requires a school wide commitment to implement positive behavioral supports in order to create a positive school climate. Studies of schools that have implemented PBIS with fidelity have documented improvement in teachers' overall perception of organizational health and indicated stronger perceptions of trust among teachers, and some indicators of higher student achievement (Houchens et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2018).

The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA also called for the need for early intervention and support for students with learning and behavioral needs. Response to Intervention (RtI), became a new way to think about both early intervention and disability identification (Fuchs & Deschler, 2007). A three-tiered system of differentiated student support RtI is being widely implemented in schools across the country in order to increase effective teaching and remove barriers to student learning (Mundschenk & Fuchs, 2016). Currently, more comprehensive than RtI, Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is being used as an umbrella term that includes academic, behavioral, social, and emotional supports for students.

While none of these mandates alone develop a culture of Academic Optimism, they provide tools for teachers and administrators to use to support a culture of high academic expectations and ownership of the learning for all students. Supported by high functioning Professional Learning Communities, research provides evidence that capacity building and collective efficacy can be enhanced through success as a professional learning community (Olivier & Hipp, 2006). These factors contribute to the development of school culture of Academic Optimism, where an effective leader builds a culture that positively influences teachers, who in turn positively influences students (Marzano, Waters & McNulty, 2005).

The Power of Collective Efficacy

A March 2018 article, The Power of Collective Efficacy (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells) points to the relationship between a school leader's role and the collective efficacy attributes enabled in a school staff. This is especially important in that a meta-analysis conducted by Eells (2017) revealed that collective efficacy and achievement in education demonstrates that the beliefs teachers hold about the ability of the school as a whole are "strongly and positively associated with student achievement across subject areas and in multiple locations" (p. 110).

As a result of Eells' research, Hattie (2016) positioned collective efficacy at the top of the list of factors that influence student achievement. Other previous researchers also documented the very strong and positive outcomes achieved within an educational environment that strengthens collective efficacy. For example, the seminal research of Bandura (1977) is the keystone foundation for collective efficacy as he defined and described collective efficacy as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capability to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment" (p. 197).

In terms of school leaders' relationship to growing collective efficacy, a consistent theme noted by administrators, teachers, staff, parents and students is the trusting relationships each group and individual have for other members of the school groups (Bryk, 2003; Kochanek, 2005). Trust has been described by many, in various ways, as the firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability or strength of someone or something. This feeling tone of interpersonal relationships across

all concerned takes some time to develop in a strong manner and yet it is built each day by each individual (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Tschannen-Moran (2014) describes the importance of school leadership to set the tone for a high trust level at the school, modeling the behaviors of regard, caring and respect for everyone in the organization and being exceedingly competent in dispatching their responsibilities.

The actions a school leader can undertake to help foster and develop collective efficacy is seen in the many themes of the research conducted in the school districts and schools of this current study. These steps, as implemented in these schools, have indeed captured the spirit, heart, and power achieved through a collectively efficacious culture and environment.

Research Methods

This study reveals findings of the constructs of Academic Optimism demonstrated by 144 urban school leaders and teachers within 10 California socioeconomically disadvantaged schools as they both framed learning expectations and assisted their students to meet them over 2017-18. Participants consisted of 144 purposively selected urban California school administrators and their staff at low SES schools. The sample was delimited to K-8 public, non-charter, non-academy schools identified from the California School Dashboard which demonstrated high performance/growth, while designated high poverty. "Purposive sampling is most often used in qualitative research to select individuals or behaviors that inform the researcher regarding the current focus of the investigation" (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 172).

Schools were initially identified through the Educational Results Partnership at edresults.org, a reporting portal, which engages a national alliance of business and academia dedicated to improving educational productivity from kindergarten through employment. It uses the nation's largest database on student achievement (National Center for Education Statistics) while identifying successful schools particularly within economically disadvantaged districts with the goal to promote their best practices. Identification of schools was subsequently corroborated through two additional websites, The California School Data Dashboard, and EdSource.org. Purposive sample selection of participants met the following criteria:

- Fifty percent or greater student population receiving Free/Reduced Lunch (Title l)
- *Blue or green progress for English Language Learners (EL)
- *Blue or green progress for Mathematics
- *Blue or green progress for English Language Arts

**Blue or green progress on the California School Data Dashboard denotes 1st or 2nd quintile.*

As schools were identified, school leaders were contacted to determine their interest to participate in the study along with their teachers. Participants were invited to describe their lived experiences through a phenomenological lens as they both interviewed with the researchers, and engaged follow-up surveys, responding to four research questions of:

1. How do California school leaders and staff at high performing low SES schools support a collaborative attitude for the benefit of all students?
2. What specific practice(s) has/have contributed most to growth in student learning within

California's high performing low SES schools?
3. How do California's high performing low SES schools ensure equity in learning for all students?
4. What recommendations do California school leaders and staff make for other low SES schools as they consider engaging Academic Optimism and collective efficacy at their sites?

The primary data analyzed for this study were: 1) responses to open-ended focus group interviews comprised of superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals and teaching staff of ten urban California school districts; and 2) survey responses from 144 superintendents, assistant superintendents, principals, assistant principals and teachers on an eight question Likert scale survey.

Qualitative: The results of the survey were utilized to develop follow up questions that were used in focus groups and interviews at each school. Inductive analyses were utilized to examine participants' responses to the interviews. Audiotapes were transcribed verbatim and reviewed several times to ensure completeness of data. As categories emerged they were coded through the constant comparative method of data analysis which captured recurring patterns that cut across "the preponderance" of data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 139). The coding and labeling of text according to content provided a means for theory building (Richards & Richards, 1994). This was repeated using the grounded theory approach until saturation was reached (Strauss & Corbin 1990). This method of analysis involved the identification of interpretive themes and categories that emerged from the data (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990). The inductive analysis process began with the research team's thorough reading of each interview transcript to gain a sense of the range of the responses and identify any reoccurring themes. Tentative themes were then refined after the research team collaboratively reread, reflected on, and discussed participants' responses. Validity and reliability were achieved through participation of others in the coding process (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Quantitative: Survey questions were drawn from the review of literature on Academic Optimism and then reduced to just those questions deemed most closely focused on the factors related to the study. The survey was piloted to a small group and final adjustments were made resulting in eight questions. Surveys were sent electronically to principals to share with their staff members. The responses were disaggregated by school site including analysis of means and variance by question.

Findings

The following data reveal findings for six of the eight questions surveyed. Questions 7 and 8 of the survey sought demographic information regarding level of school (elementary, middle) and length of service of the respondent. Responses were disaggregated by the demographic categories, but no significant differences were found between categories. In essence, there was close to universal agreement on the responses from all respondents.

Quantitative data from the survey illustrated that responding schools scoring high on the characteristics chosen on the California School Dashboard also scored high on the survey questions. There was variation between schools, but it was not significant. There was also little variation between administrator and teacher ratings. While no correlational analyses were

performed due to limited sample size of the number of schools (10), there was evidence of a relationship to schools scoring in a higher quintile having higher overall survey ratings.

Research Question 1: How do California school leaders and staff at high performing low SES schools support a collaborative attitude for the benefit of all students? was most related to survey Question 1: School administrators and staff support collective efficacy at my school in the following ways. The results are found in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Collaborative Attitude

Question	Percent of responses Always or Sometimes
Engagement of shared planning time for grade level curricula	98.3
Provide current and relevant resources toward optimal student learning	97.5
Belief in promoting the development of understanding	97.9
Exploration of perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs	93.2
Engage current research findings	96.6
Ongoing professional development	99.2
Teachers own learning and application of best practices	97.5
Serving the larger community	98.3

Overall percentages were approximately 98%. Of note is that the lowest rating was over 90% indicating a very high degree of agreement by staff.

Research Question 2: What specific practice(s) has/have contributed most to growth in student learning within California's high performing low SES schools? was taken from responses to several questions on the survey. The results are found in Table 2 and 3:

Table 2

Schoolwide Initiatives Contributing to Optimal Student Learning

Contributing Schoolwide Initiative	Percent of responses
Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)	97.4
Collaborative Professional Learning Groups	95.7
Response to Intervention (RtI)	92.3
Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS)	75.2
Instructional Rounds	47.9
AVID Program	7.7
Other Initiatives	25.6

Note. Some respondents indicated that they did not have some of the initiatives in place in their school (e.g., AVID).

Table 2 indicates that the schools responding to the survey had a number of initiatives in place that supported student growth. Almost all of the schools reported PBIS, RtI, and some form of collaborative learning. A multi-tier system of supports (a more complex approach than RtI) was found in many of the schools. Instructional rounds were also reported in approximately half of the schools.

Research Question 3: How do California's high performing low SES schools ensure equity in learning for all students? was taken from responses to several questions on the survey. The results are found in Table 3 below:

Table 3

Ensure Equity

Question	Percent of responses Always or Sometimes
School promotes a culture of equity in learning for all students	96.63
Explore and examine all views	96.64
Willingness to have crucial conversations	96.64
Willingness of school admin and teachers to challenge assumptions	94.96
Establish practices that ensure equity in learning for all students	95.80

There was nearly unanimous agreement in the survey data related to questions ensuring equity in learning for all students with the lowest percent being almost 95% of responses that were Always or Sometimes.

Qualitative data from survey questions and focus groups provided specific data in response to research question 4.

Research Question 4: What recommendations do California school leaders and staff make for other low SES schools as they consider engaging academic optimism and collective efficacy at their sites?

The following quotes represent the most common recommendations by participants:

- "Have your systems in place!"
- "Organization and implementation of those systems will perpetuate growth and academic progress."
- "Establish a schoolwide culture of high expectations and high support for all students."
- "Allow teachers to "fail"… Allow them to be innovative. Let the students drive their needs, their goals."

- "One teacher cannot account for the individual growth of more than 60 students in a day, but one student can track his progress on an everyday level."
- "Academic success and academic optimism come from a culture of family and safety."
- "The kids see us try... sometimes fail... but try again. When they see this, they learn that it is okay for them also."
- "The constant finding of ways to become innovative to challenge students to grow beyond expectations and showcase knowledge."

Qualitative data from survey questions and focus groups were coded and emerged into four thematic phenomena that supported the quantitative findings and providing details of the way with which California school leaders and teachers together engaged collective efficacy and willingness to support community and organizational citizenship. The organizational lens of academic optimism both assisted school leaders and teachers to frame learning expectations for low socioeconomic status students while mitigating the traditional challenges inherent in their schooling.

THEME 1 (High Trust to Mitigate Problems)
A cultural shift from micro-management with 5-7 students performing below grade level in every class to a culture of innovation, choice, students setting their own goals with nearly all either at, or nearly at, grade level. There is great reciprocal trust in and great respect for each other. The principal is seen as a coach by all the staff. There is comfort with mistakes that ultimately improve practice.

THEME 2 (Anticipating Barriers with Outreach and Development)
Clear learning targets are in place. Instruction is differentiated with strong Tier 2 and 3 intervention supports. Teachers participate in the hiring of teachers. Site principals and teachers adopt processes of ongoing continuous improvement; don't do the same thing every year. A culture of agile-ness is encouraged. Labels have been eliminated (i.e. EL, SpEd) and teachers are encouraged to discover what students need and ensure they receive it.

THEME 3 (Collaboration is Teacher Owned)
While data are the primary source for collaboration the design of universal or designated time is a weekly priority. Planning days over the year are calendared. Common assessments are teacher created at each grade level. Teachers are released to visit other teachers' classrooms, through instructional rounds, or #watchmeteach.

THEME 4 (Equity in Learning is a Partnership)
Every adult believes every child can learn. The socioemotional needs of students come from the home. Systems are in place to ensure learning. Teachers reflect on their own practices to ensure student growth in learning for all students so that students get what they need at their level. All teachers meet the needs of all children, make school exciting. While participants noted, "other low SES schools have 2nd and 3rd graders who can't read," this was not the case with this sample.

Respondents most attributed equitable growth in student learning to universally high-

expectations and positive school leadership, small group instruction and engagement during direct instruction, and opportunities for creative teaching and support from administration to meet every student's needs. Respondents identified shared planning time for developing grade-level curricula, and promoting the development of understanding while exploring perceptions, assumptions, and beliefs, as critical to serving the larger community.

How the Findings Relate to the COVID-19 Pandemic

While educational leaders and their staff in California have the challenging task before them to rebuild school culture as students and teachers return to campus from the online virtual learning environment, this study's findings are significant. The academically optimistic staff and administration who have forged together best through the difficult trials of COVID-19 will continue to deeply value and share a "no matter what our challenges are, we can overcome them," position. They will continue to champion the high expectations and high support for all students that they did prior to the arrival of the global pandemic and during it.

Follow-up interviews with these principals during October 2020, provided insights as to how these administrators extend and invite inclusion to help new teachers, staff members, and other administrators gain feelings of belonging to the school as an important part of the school team. They described how they clarify the nature of the work to be done with a no blame attitude, how they address uncertainty through intentional agility and adaptation, particularly with the uncertainty that came with COVID. These leaders create and project consistent messaging with an intensity around instruction. Everyone, from teachers to students to parents, receives consistent messages about the purpose and strength of the school. Failure is destigmatized with staff and leadership in that these are part of the learning process.

The collective efficacy these staff have long cultivated over time was not absent during the extremely challenging season of COVID-19, but perhaps made even more clear as their academically optimistic way of being, knowing, and doing supported every child through the retooled virtual teaching and learning required of every educator and learner during California's stay-at-home orders. One principal noted, "How we influence teachers' behavior is important versus the compliance piece."

Discussion

As California schools closed due to COVID-19 in March 2020, educational leaders and their staff moved to remote learning. "While the academic impact would be felt most acutely by low-income, Black, and Latinx students" (Hough et al. 2020, p. 1), staff in which Academic Optimism prevailed as the dominant disposition within the school's culture prior to COVID marched onward in the belief that all children can learn despite the challenges of the moment. The findings of this study focus our learning in two areas, each related. First, staff who had engendered the constructs of academic optimism and collective efficacy over time had additionally cultivated a way of being, a deep sense of believing, that they could overcome any challenge. This shared belief was paramount to providing equity in student learning prior to, and during COVID-19. And, secondly, they operationalized it.

As an overarching recommendation noted within the findings above, these schools had their systems in place while learning to scale at a level to serve all students, "No matter the challenges." This mantra, deeply held as a conviction of all within these schools, became their new

normal, their new truth during COVID-19 as it knocked and gained entry into the closing of their very school doors. How would, "No matter the challenges," operationalize itself during this season of global pandemic?

Although there is a preponderance of literature that supports the essential elements of teacher efficacy, academic emphasis, organizational health, and principal trust within schooling, there is a critical need for researchers, school administrators, and teachers, "to go beyond socioeconomic status in the search for school-level characteristics that make a difference in student achievement" (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2006, p. 428).

The research of Hoy, et al. proves significant for examining the collective efficacy and cultural property that 144 California school leaders and teachers envisioned for their sites. The findings of this study corroborate that the collective efficacy of California's urban school leaders and their teaching staff, while operationalizing high expectations for equitable growth in student learning for all student groups, champion the tenets of Academic Optimism.

Donohoo, Hattie and Eells (2018) in writing to the power of collective efficacy offered a number of recommendations that would help schools to build and sustain a culture of Academic Optimism. A synthesis of those recommendations follows:

- Control the school narrative: Don't think of small changes, but instead focus on building a culture of collective efficacy among all members of the school community and its overall impact on student learning;
- Nurture an environment of evidence-based improvements: Constantly engage in conversations around the impact that specific practices can bring about and not worrying about failing forward as teachers adapt new techniques and strategies;
- Listen to students: Create opportunities for educators to hear from their students about their learning, their progress, and their struggles;
- Examine student artifacts: Regularly examine assignments, tests, portfolios, and other indicators of student progress and link these actions to teachers' actions;
- Foster teacher collaboration: Identify student needs and develop formal, frequent and productive teacher collaboration to problem solve and come up with strategies, try them, and refine them;
- Build trust, empathy and effective interaction: These key terms identify teams that work effectively together to support each other, learn together, make mistakes and adjust, and build common understandings.

In a state such as California, given the vast diversity of students and families, the participants in this study remain hopeful and optimistic that they can continue to maximize student learning in an environment of Academic Optimism. The key findings from this study of these successful schools provide lessons for all educators to emulate. In many ways, COVID-19 has been viewed by the schools' personnel as another impediment that has been successfully addressed through their optimistic team approach to serving students.

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Using Narrative Inquiry to Explore Critical Reflection and Self-Awareness in Equity Leadership Development

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Critical reflection and self-awareness are two of the most crucial components in developing equity-centered leaders (Dugan and Humbles, 2018; Madsen, 2020; Patti, Madrazo, Senge, and Stern, 2015). Leading for equity requires the leader to face both personal bias and professional challenges (Boske, 2014). Many leaders are willing to engage in the work of leading for equity but lack clarity about where to start and how to proceed, often seeking out external tools. Using narrative inquiry, this study collected leaders' stories to understand the participants' perspective of self, the understanding of their own journey, and the connections to their leadership work.

Keywords: critical reflection, self-awareness, equity, leadership, leadership development

As researchers and educators in the field of leadership and equity, we are struck by the challenge of helping emerging leaders find their voice in a way that supports the complex work of leading when issues of equity arise. Equity work requires the leader to face both personal bias and professional challenges (Boske, 2014). What we have seen is a willingness to engage in the work of leading for equity and a lack of clarity about where to start and how to proceed. To better understand this, we formulated this research question: How do school or organizational leaders use critical reflection and self-awareness to lead for equity?

To answer the question, we collected leaders' stories to understand the participants' perspective of self, the understanding of their own journey, and the connections to their leadership work. We believe, and the literature supports (Dugan and Humbles, 2018; Madsen, 2020; Patti, Madrazo, Senge, and Stern, 2015), that critical reflection and self-awareness are two of the most crucial components in developing equity-centered leaders.

The most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reveal that 78% of public school principals were white, while 48% of public school students were white. This disparity can be traced back to the U.S. Supreme Court Brown v. Board of Education decision, which cost 90% of black school principals in the South their jobs while almost 40,000 black teachers lost their jobs (Hansen & Quintero, 2018). Women are also underrepresented in school leadership across races, despite women representing nearly 80% of public school teachers (Ramaswamy, 2020).

School leaders who fail to recognize these disparities and the need for both organizational and personal cultural competence will continue to fail their staff, their students, their families, and their community. In her article for the School Superintendents Association, Hollins (2013) says, "Uprooting systems of advantage requires we work toward cultural competence. This means we have to recognize the bias and stereotypes we each have unconsciously internalized." School leaders must engage in self-awareness and critical reflection to be able to uproot these systems. Using narrative inquiry, we illustrated current leaders' use of critical reflection and self-awareness and gained insight into their leadership context and development.

Critical Reflection

When encountering difficult dilemmas, particularly those related to equity issues, critical reflection is useful when trying to make sense of those dilemmas that Faller, Lundgren, and Marsick (2020) describe as disorienting. Critical reflection allows leaders not only to identify and acknowledge experiences that impact response to equity; those who engage in critical reflection understand that being an effective leader means engaging in "continuous and deep learning" (Madsen, 2020). Boske (2014) states, "Critical reflection centers on *doing* and *being* deliberate—intentional practices centered on being aware of how and why presuppositions constrain the way in which people understand, respond and feel about the world" (p. 291).

Dugan and Humbles (2018) have identified critical reflection as one of the fundamental abilities to engage with critical leadership development. As Patti, Madrazo, Senge, and Stern (2015) have indicated, critical self-reflection is crucial to action and decision-making. They go on to state that it requires work in three areas: "1) reflection on what matters, 2) reflection on how we make sense of the world around us, and 3) reflection on our emotions" (p. 442). Without this kind of reflection and insight, it is difficult to motivate others. Developing critical self-reflection habits effectively allows our experiences to provide meaningful opportunities for those we lead and creates transformational experiences for everyone (Madsen, 2020).

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness helps leaders be able to evaluate the impact of their identity and experiences on their actions and decisions. Despite acknowledging self-awareness as one of the most important skills for leaders to develop, studies have found it be lacking among leaders (Esimai, 2018). However, Tekleab, Sims, Yun, Tesluk, and Cox (2007) have found that leader self-awareness has a positive impact on the satisfaction of the stakeholders.

Esimai (2018) says that self-awareness is empowering, arming one with knowledge that allows leaders to make better choices. Practicing self-awareness also demonstrates leaders' authenticity, which, in turn, inspires others (Suri & Prasad, 2011). As Pence (2020) points out, practicing self-awareness connects us back to ourselves, allowing our authenticity to help us feel at ease and comfortable in our own skin. Leaders understand that leadership is about constant growth and learning; practicing self-awareness guides that growth (Gunsalus, Luckman, Burbules, and Easter, 2019).

Narrative Inquiry

In this study, we chose narrative inquiry in order to understand the participants' equity leadership journey and the impact that critical reflection and self-awareness has on that journey. Narrative inquiry is a relational research methodology that seeks to listen to participants' stories and understand the context of those stories (Hickson, 2016). Engaging in narrative inquiry allows the researchers to make sense of the participants' story because of and within its context. Narrative inquiry also allows the researchers to think about the impact of the participants' stories on their own understanding and experience with equity leadership. Seiki, Caine, and Huber (2018) state, "Thinking narratively with each other's stories shaped openings for relational shifts in understanding ourselves and one another" (p. 12). Narrative inquiry allows researchers to not just think about participants' stories, but to also think *with* them.

Methodology

Through narrative inquiry, we wanted to understand the participants' stories of critical reflection and self-awareness, and furthermore sought to examine the context in which their stories took place and shaped their experiences and development as leaders. We surveyed nine leaders and then conducted interviews to gather participant stories. We invited participants to a second interview, which five participants chose to do.

Participants

Participants were invited from a pool of masters and doctoral-level university students who took a course on equity as part of their leadership studies. Students were currently serving as or preparing to be leaders in K-12, higher education, or non-profit organizations. Of 49 invitees, nine people agreed to participate in the study. Participants represented a variety of gender identifications, ages, ethnicities, and leadership experiences:

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Years in Leadership Role	Second interview
Jeanne	Female	Black	1	No
Jamie	Female	White	More than 2	Yes
Robert	Male	White	More than 2	Yes
Maria	Female	White	More than 2	Yes
Gabriela	Female	Latina	More than 2	Yes
Susan	Female	Latina	More than 2	No
Alex	Male	Black	1	No
Joshua	Male	White	2	No
Amy	Female	White	More than 2	Yes

Data Collection

Data collected began with a survey that used Likert-scale questions. The survey asked questions related to participant comfort level when encountering differences, their awareness of how cultural perspectives influence judgement, and awareness of the impact of power, privilege and social oppression. (Appendix A). Their responses provided the framework for our interview questions (Appendix B).

In the first interview, we asked them to describe their identity and how they viewed leading for equity, their commitment to equity, actions they did or did not take in situations of inequity, as well as how they attended to self-care. This interview provided initial insights into how participants understood themselves. Realizing we wanted to capture more of the stories and experiences that formed their leadership identity prompted the need for second interviews. In keeping with a narrative inquiry stance, for this interview, we simply asked them to tell their stories about the connections between their identities, experience, and leadership.

The initial interviews lasted between 30-45 minutes depending on the participants' depth of description. The second interviews ranged from 60-90 minutes depending on the length of the participants' stories. All interviews were recorded via teleconference software and transcribed for data analysis. All participants were offered copies of both the recording and the transcription for their review, as well as for their own records.

Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred at two points in the study: the survey helped us frame the interview questions and the interview responses helped us determine where we wanted to unpack the participants' experiences and context. The responses were organized in the following categories: identity labels, length of leadership experience, self-awareness, and critical reflection. The second interviews were designed to evoke deeper storytelling around critical reflection and self-

awareness.

Narrative inquiries usually use a narrative analysis approach; however, there are no set procedures for a narrative analysis (Butina, 2015). Because we were specifically looking at critical reflection and self-awareness in the participants' stories, we engaged in an inductive approach, reading and reviewing the transcriptions for participant stories that indicated their own critical reflection and self-awareness related to their development as equity leaders.

We used professional transcription services for all interviews, and then reviewed the transcripts against the recording to ensure accuracy and completeness before beginning the data analysis process. We reviewed the initial interview set and coded against the categories of critical reflection and self-awareness. A comparison of the number of indicators a participant used to describe themselves, the participants' awareness of equity, and their own perspective, revealed a connection between self-understanding and identification of equity issues and possible actions to take. Participants who were less able to self-describe had a more superficial equity lens through which they perceived the world. The second-round interviews yielded stories that were layered and textured from participants with detailed self-descriptors. For participants who held a limited set of self-descriptors, the stories were fairly superficial, with no indication of how the story related, personally, to the participant. Further coding for attributes of privilege and leadership yielded a deeper connection between how participants saw themselves and their capacity to relay depth in the stories they experienced or witnessed.

Unpacking Participant Stories

Participants shared personal and rich stories of their lived experiences of their own identity journey and their perspectives on leadership. Given the complexity and difficulty in understanding the impact of identity on equity leadership, not all interviews (first or second) yielded stories related to critical reflection and self-awareness. Therefore, our participant stories were limited to only three participants rather than the full set of nine. Our findings, as a result, focuses on key participants whose stories helped us more clearly understand the connection between self-awareness, critical reflection, and leading for equity.

Findings: Their Stories

Our focus is on critical reflection and self-awareness within leaders' stories. To unpack these dimensions of their stories, we proceed with examples of critical reflection and self-awareness that appeared in the stories that leaders told about themselves.

Critical Reflection As Concept

As we read our participants' stories, we first focused on the concept of critical reflection. We were mindful of evidence that demonstrated "continuous and deep learning" (Madsen, 2020), as well as the parts of their stories that reflected understanding of how the experiences and context challenge their thinking and beliefs (Faller, Lundgren, and Marsick, 2020).

Jamie's story resonated with us, as we realized that her critical reflective practices reach back into her childhood. She recognized how feelings of being excluded or seeing others excluded have informed her understanding of herself as a leader:

> I remember trying to kind of figure out, well, what is it they don't like about her [childhood friend]? Is it the way she talks? Is it because she is so good at soccer and makes them look like they are not very good? And then it eventually came around to me, oh, she has a different color skin. She comes from a different place. Her parents speak Spanish. It was just kind of an awareness that I hadn't had before.

However, as an adult, Jamie's awareness of being a white woman helped her recognize that she occupies a place of privilege:

> But I'm aware that I don't have to have a conversation. I don't have to prove things that other people might have to prove. It's easier for me to build a relationship. I think that what it has done for me is help cultivate relationship-building skills because I've always started from a place or I've typically started from a place of comfort and I haven't had to necessarily prove anything right off the starting block. So, it has been easier to build those relationships and those relationships has become pretty powerful part of what I do now and being able to move forward in this profession. So, from the start, that privilege has allowed me to dig deeper into things that have got me further along in my journey.

Her awareness made being accepted as leader easier for her than for others in many circumstances, particularly being in education.

In contrast, Maria's engagement in critical reflection is less nuanced, particularly as she recognizes that she has never felt at a disadvantage, never feeling invisible:

> I have to be honest and say that I don't think I really paid a whole lot of attention to issues of equity early in my life … Almost every situation I'm in, and I honestly can't think of a distinctive scenario where I felt like I was invisible. Like I was not able to be a part of some kind of dialogue or conversation or that I was not... as it pertains to what I try to do in the world.

Her awareness seems to come from her self-labeling her identity as white, even though she acknowledges her Hispanic background.

Finally, Robert, as a white cisgender, male, does not engage in critical reflection as part of his leadership stance. His story reflects a transactional approach and framing his leadership in a desire to be liked and not recognizing the privilege that comes from being the white man in a position of authority:

> It's important to me, right or wrong, it's important to me to be liked … So I have used that … I use that to this day to persuade people. I rarely use my positional power, my official power to say, well, I'm the boss and therefore you have to do as I say… I appeal to the fact that they respect me.

Robert goes on to imply that he likes being the person in charge and having the authority. His desire to share his knowledge impedes on his ability to see how his privilege compels others to listen to him.

> I love to share every ounce of knowledge I have, and to expound upon my thoughts and

ideas to anyone who will listen (or even if they won't).

Robert then shared a story about a Black colleague who was the target of what he called "raucous jokes" and said it is the culture among engineers to tease and make fun of one another:

> I felt uncomfortable for him as well as myself. I don't believe (even to this day) that our fellow engineers meant to be disrespectful or hurtful, it was 'just a joke' and they didn't think anything more about it.

Robert didn't make the connection between his discomfort and a need to challenge his thinking or question the motives of his colleagues, let alone defend his Black colleague. To this day, he's able to dismiss those actions as "just a joke."

Self-Awareness As Concept

We reviewed our participants' stories again, examining them through the lens of self-awareness. We wanted to explore how they were able to connect these critical reflection practices and experiences to their awareness of themselves as leaders. We wanted to see if there were moments in these stories that illustrated how our participants' self-awareness allowed them to be authentic leaders (Pence, 2020).

Again we began with Jamie and immediately saw self-awareness connected to her childhood experiences:

> I was always kind of the odd person out. I was the largest person in the class. I didn't get to sit with people at lunchtime. People didn't invite me over to their house or to their birthday parties. So I experienced some discrimination in the sense of my size. This student had always been kind to me… I noticed how people treated her the same way… I remember thinking that it was just really hurtful and unfair. If someone was unkind to her, I was very, very defensive for her. I stood up for her because I knew what it felt like to be excluded by that group of people.

Jamie also recognizes how these childhood experiences impact have held her back at times:

> I am very anxious about confrontation and confrontation to me, because of how I grew up being excluded by all of my social peers in elementary school… I do struggle with speaking out, especially when it comes to… Not in the terms of my profession. I feel very empowered to speak out on behalf of children and I will stand up and be in confrontation for children, but for others in my life, I find it more challenging.

However, she is aware of when she does feel empowered to speak up, when it is on behalf of the children she serves. Jamie is able to connect those childhood experiences and the pain she had endured, not only with her inability to speak up sometimes, but also the need to speak up for children.

When we examined Maria's story, we again found an identity conflict. She is aware of her Hispanic heritage yet identifies white so we frequently saw her white identity show up in her practice:

> My mother is white and my father is Hispanic. I have strong ties to both of those experiences within the family context. I don't speak another language. I only speak English. I've traveled to a lot of places in the world and been exposed to different groups of people, but I by and large, while I do absolutely identify myself as Hispanic, I pretty much identify as white. If there is a situation that arises where I might be, where someone might be talking over me or not hearing my point of view, I have no issue with asserting my thoughts, my ideas, again, not in a confrontational or aggressive way, but I have never felt unable to be heard.

Maria's white identity also showed up in situations of privilege that she described:

> It's not always necessarily just my point of view and sometimes it might not be my point of view. I might represent a point of view that I don't necessarily share, but that I know is important to the other people who I might be representing.

There seemed to be a lack of awareness that what she felt was being helpful could be seen as silencing or dismissive.

When we looked at Robert's stories through this self-awareness lens, we saw that he does see his own privilege, and is comfortable accessing it for his own purposes:

> Being British is still synonymous, in my mind, to be being English even though I know there is a difference. I recognize it's one of the privileges of being a member of the dominant 'group' within the British family–not something I flaunt or seek to leverage, but rather simply to accept without thinking.

Robert went on to describe how he understands that getting people to like him is deliberate and is a power-play:

> I do leverage my, I guess being undiplomatic, my likeability. I go out of my way to make sure that people like me and then I do use that to my advantage. I sometimes as it were, cringe the fact that I do that, but it's, to be quite honest, it's a very deliberate ploy. It sounds very callous. I guess I've learned early on in life, not just my working career, but I learned early on that being liked was powerful.

Robert feels it is appropriate to use his likeability as part of his management style.

Leading for Equity

Finally, we examined how we saw leading for equity show up in Jamie, Maria, and Robert's stories and the impact that critical reflection and self-awareness had on their understanding of themselves as leaders. To echo Gunsalus, Luckman, Burbules, and Easter (2019), we wanted to know how critical reflection self-awareness impact the purpose and mission of their work.

Jamie clearly expressed a need to continue to focus on her own development and to be honest about who she is and how that shows up in her leadership:

> For me, knowing myself and learning more about myself and continuing to grow that, because if I don't know my own bias, I can't pay attention to the actions and behaviors that might be coming from that bias and also to look for the opportunities where you can elevate others.

Jamie saw conversations about equity as an opportunity for her own growth and a chance to learn more:

> I think to lead for equity means number one, being self-aware. I was thinking about this conversation today and I was thinking I'm excited about it because it's an opportunity to learn more about myself and to think about things in a way I haven't thought about them before.

For her, leading for equity is not a solitary endeavor that's reduced to a class or a training but rather an opportunity to embrace the challenge of leading for equity.

Maria's viewpoint was more unassuming; she was aware of her privilege but it does not seem to be something she leveraged in order to advance equity or to specifically lead for equity. The challenge to her thinking seemed something she was surprised by, rather than something she welcomed as an opportunity to learn more:

> You know, I've always sort of felt like I was more in a power and privileged point of view in most situations, but kind of unassumingly. I didn't really think about it, to be honest with you. So having been kind of pushed and challenged to think about these things has had a strong impact on me.

Even though Maria acknowledges that she has been pushed and challenged, it does not reflect a deeper desire to change or challenge her own thinking:

> I'm often drawn to topics that either directly or indirectly relate to, not specifically equity and leadership, but again, indirectly and understanding how people from different and diverse backgrounds operate in the world and are viewed and having an appreciation for, we are all one human race and that we all have talents and should have equal opportunity and equal access and an equity, whatever that means in different contexts.

To Maria, it seems to be more about simply understanding difference rather than challenge her thinking.

In examining Robert, we consider how his stories illustrated issues of fairness rather than equity. His desire is to have his employees and colleagues do what he wants them to do "because it's just the right thing". This stance gives him permission to avoid examining his own thinking or create systemic change:

> First of all, my own actions, which is to treat people fairly regardless of all of the factors that you told us about, you know, their ethnicity, their color, their age, sex. To treat everybody fairly is a standard I try to hold myself to. I'm not perfect and I make mistakes, but I try to be fair to everyone. And then secondly to support and defend those around me when I think that they are not being seen fairly by other people, including themselves

sometimes.

Robert continues by explaining how he has been supportive and recognizing that all voices are not heard:

> One of the things I've observed is, I believe I've observed over the years and I try to address are things like women in particular. Women are more timid than men, generally. I'm generalizing, of course… In a meeting, as we all know, the males in the room will have no trouble speaking up, speaking over the top of each other, et cetera. The women will tend to be more passive and if a man starts to talk, they will tend to shut up and listen or say nothing at all. This also goes to different cultures. Asian cultures tend to be more timid and passive and quiet versus the Western cultures… so saying, "Hey, you are talking way too much and you are not... You just talked over the top of this young lady next to you" or whatever… There is part of it that I might do that. But I might also then talk to the young girl after, the young lady afterwards and say, "Hey, you know, speak up. You had a right, you had a good point. You should speak up and make yourself known." I try as best I can to be consciously aware of those things.

Robert does not recognize how his position as a white man marginalizes others.

Examining our participants' stories through these three lenses—critical reflection, self-awareness, and leading for equity—showed us not only how divergent our experiences are, but also how important they are for leadership development. Engaging in more deliberate critical reflection and self-awareness impacts leaders' desire to effectively lead for equity. Being aware of equity experiences in their early years also seemed to impact how they saw themselves as leaders—from Jamie's experience being excluded and seeing her friend excluded to Robert dismissing the treatment of a Black colleague as "uncomfortable" teasing. These stories have given us insight into how we might engage current and emerging leaders in conversation about leading for equity and be able to support these leaders as they continue on their equity leadership journey.

Conclusion

The capacity for critical reflection is crucial in any leadership position but particularly when addressing issues of equity. Understanding one's identity and the experiences that impact that identity shape leadership identity. Through our participants' stories, we have seen how their past experiences influence their decision-making and how those decisions impact others. We noticed that engaging in critical reflection did not necessarily help our participants become better equity leaders. In fact, we believe it was something they were all able to engage in with relative ease. They could articulate experiences or circumstances that influenced their identity development: Jamie's understanding as a child of being excluded and seeing others excluded; Maria's recognition of being half-Hispanic but identifying as white; Robert's need to be liked and using his influence in that way. It was their ability to move from critical reflection to engaging in self-awareness that we saw the shift from traditional leadership to equity-centered leadership.

In our interviews, leaders' self-awareness shows up in how they describe themselves and the system in which they work. A leader like Jamie powerfully described her life experience through an observer's lens. This stance supports her in making her voice heard in issues of equity, even if just to ask questions that allow others to pause in the moment. Robert, by comparison,

demonstrated his lack of self-awareness through his words, e.g. he refers to a female colleague as a “young girl” then corrected to the equally demeaning “young lady.” Additionally, his non-action, e.g. not speaking up for the black colleague even though he, himself, recognized discomfort, reinforced the status quo by dismissing the event as normed behavior inferring that race had little connection. Since self-awareness helps leaders accurately self-evaluate, the reflexive loop is an important component to develop for leadership growth which produces greater satisfaction and sustainability.

The disparity in statistics, from achievement to job growth, is in critical focus. Developing leaders who can and will advocate for everyone and initiate systemic change is key to leadership development programs. The connection of self-awareness and critical reflection on leading for equity is tremendous. To be truly self-reflective, to maintain objective self-awareness, and to incorporate this awareness and reflection into one’s work can produce impactful leaders rather than leaders who continue to carry out the status quo and fret about what to do.

Beyond leadership development programs, leaders need continuous development and growth opportunities. Engaging in narrative inquiry illuminates where reflection and awareness come together and where they remain disconnected. Empowering the next cohort of leaders to understand their own story, reflect critically, and increase their self-awareness, sets the stage for powerful, equity-centered workplaces. In these settings, rising and current leaders can understand and embrace the call to an integrated leadership experience anchored in their story and intersecting with the stories of those they serve.

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Appendix A

Survey Questions

Background Information

1. Indicate your level of leadership experience *
   - ❑ Informal leadership position 1st year as a leader
   - ❑ 2nd year as a leader
   - ❑ More than 2 years as a leader
   - ❑ Other:

2. Your Gender *

3. Your Age Range *
   - ❑ 25-30
   - ❑ 31-35
   - ❑ 36-40
   - ❑ 41-45
   - ❑ 46-50
   - ❑ 51-55
   - ❑ 56-60
   - ❑ 61-65
   - ❑ 66-70
   - ❑ Other:

Awareness and Action

4. Please rate your frequency of awareness of the following. *

	Rarely	Seldom	Often	Usually
I am aware of my own ethnic, cultural and racial identity.				
I am aware if I experience discomfort when I encounter differences in race, color, religion, sexual orientation, language, and ethnicity.				
I am aware of the assumptions that I hold about people of cultures different from my own.				

I am aware of how my cultural perspective influences my judgment about what are ‘‘appropriate’’, ‘‘normal’’, or ‘‘superior’’ behaviors, values, and communication styles.				
I’m aware of the impact of the social context on the lives of culturally diverse populations, and how power, privilege and social oppression influence their lives.				
I’m aware of within-group differences and I would not generalize a specific behavior presented by an individual to the entire cultural community.				

5. Please rate your frequency in taking the following actions. *

	Rarely	Seldom	Often	Usually
I recognize that stereotypical attitudes and discriminatory actions can dehumanize, even encourage violence against individuals because of their membership in groups which are different from myself.				
I recognize that people have intersecting multiple identities drawn from race, sex, religion, ethnicity, etc and the importance of each of these identities vary from person to person.				
I try to intervene when I observe others behaving in racist and/or discriminatory manner.				
I try to intervene when I observe others behaving in racist and/or discriminatory manner.				

6. How do you affiliate? *

- ❑ white (Skip to question 7)
- ❑ non-white (Skip to question 9)

Agreement questions (respondents who select "white" affiliation)

7. Please rate your agreement with the following. *

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am comfortable sharing my own culture in order to learn more about others.					
As a White person I understand that I will likely be perceived as a person with power and racial privilege, and that I may not be seen as 'unbiased' or as an ally.					
I continue to develop my capacity for assessing areas where there are gaps in my knowledge.					
I am working to develop ways to interact respectfully and effectively with individuals and groups.					

8. Based on the questions in this survey, is there anything you would like to share with us at this time? *

Agreement Questions (respondents who select "non-white" affiliation)

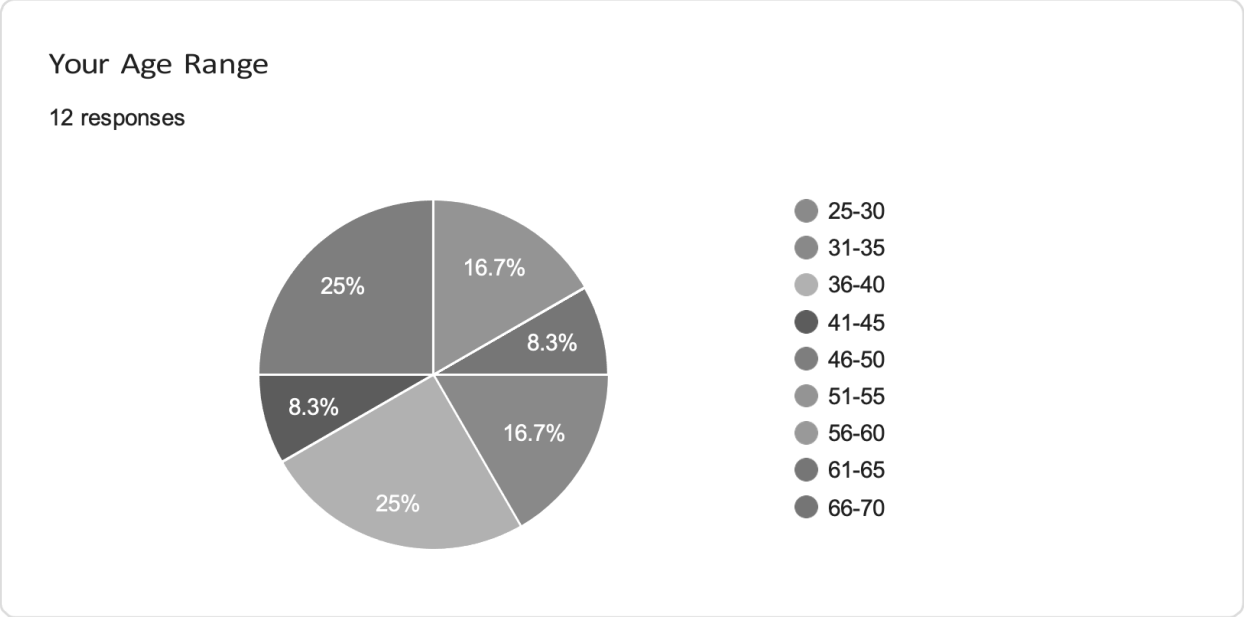
9. Please rate your agreement with the following. *

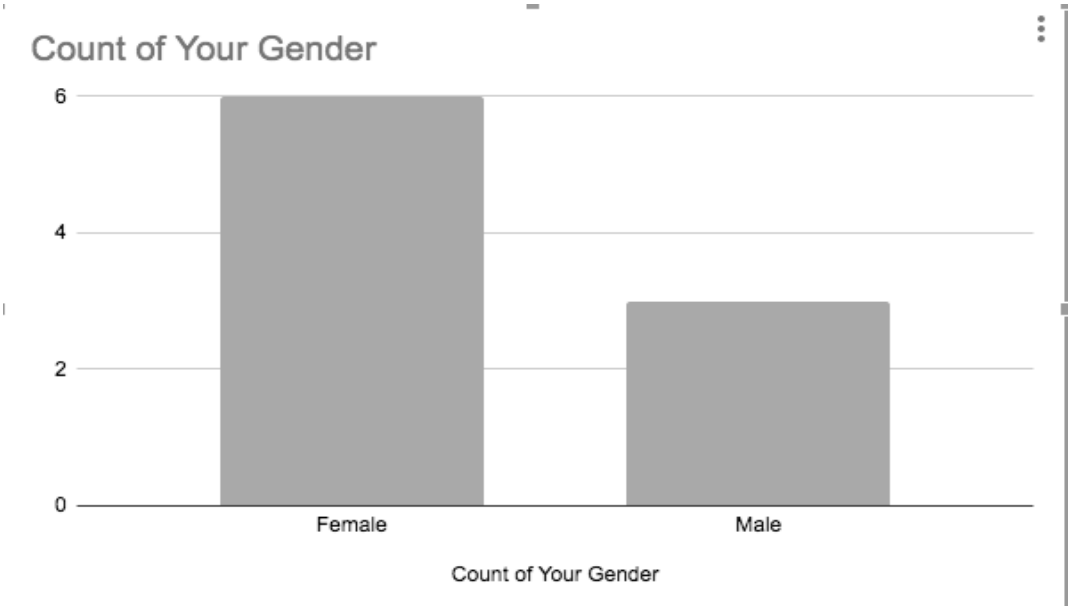
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
I am comfortable sharing my own culture in order to learn more about others.					
I continue to develop my capacity for assessing areas where there are gaps in my knowledge.					
I am working to develop ways to interact respectfully and effectively with individuals and groups.					

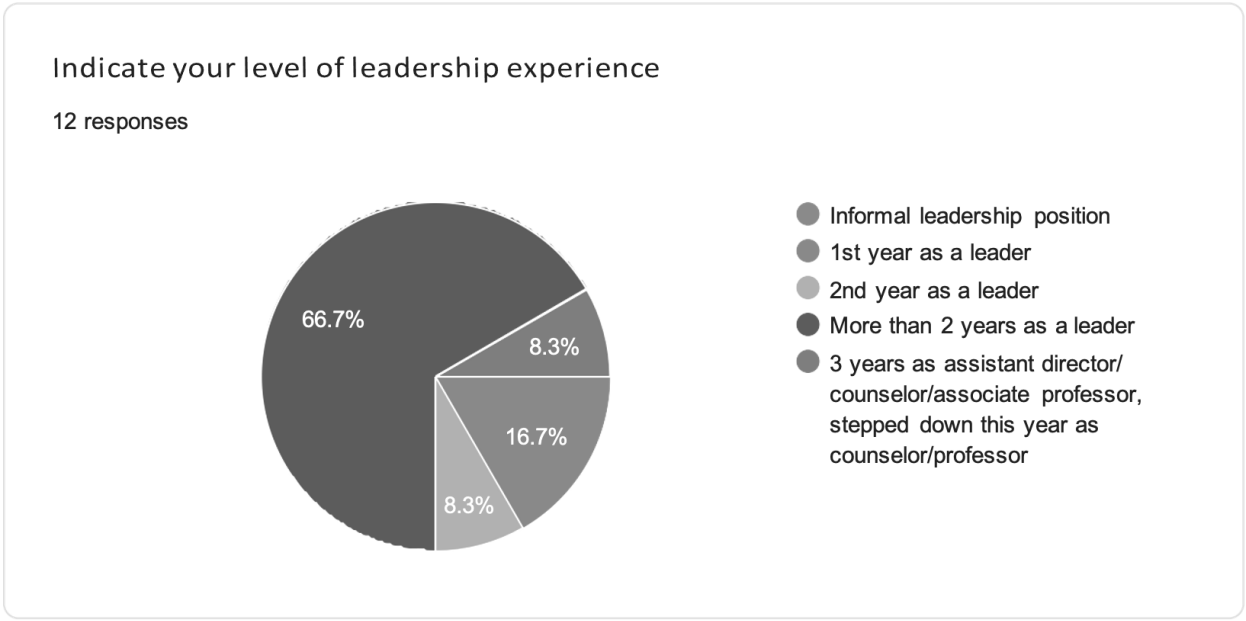
10. Based on the questions in this survey, is there anything you would like to share with us at this time? *

Appendix B

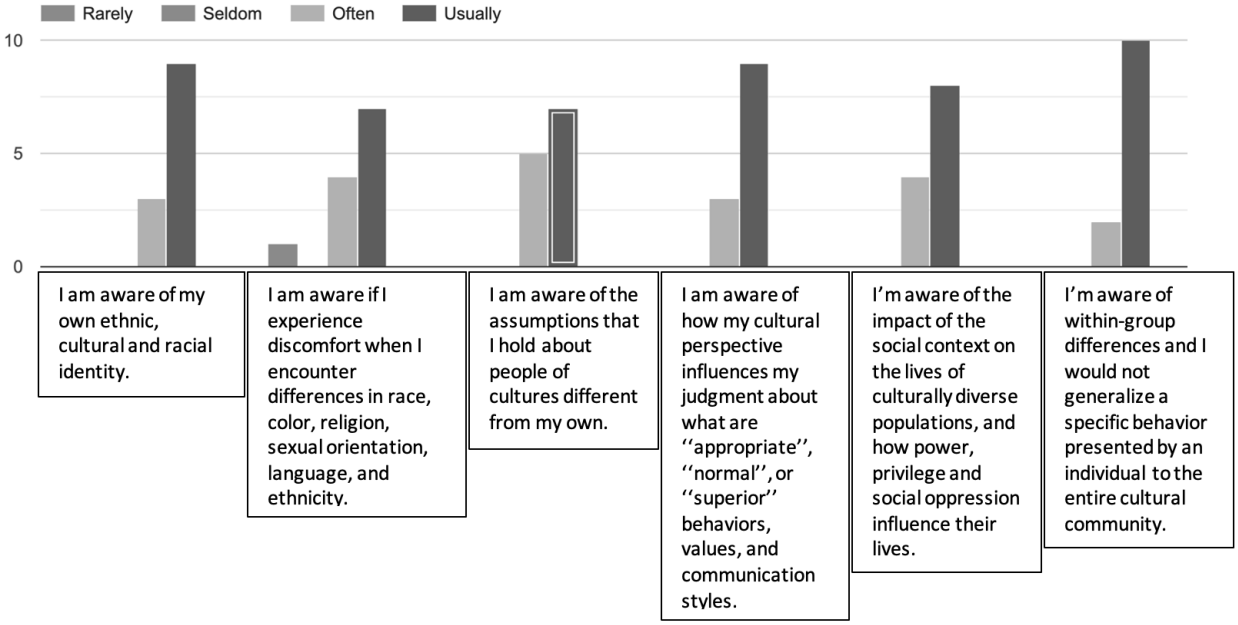
Survey Responses



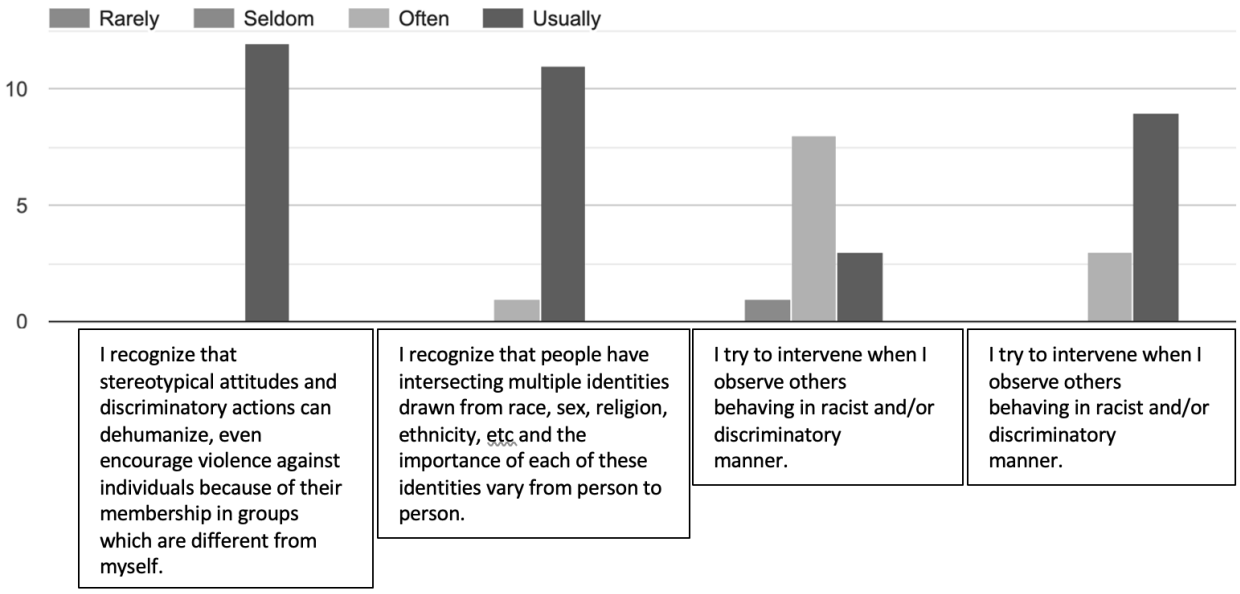




Please rate your frequency of awareness of the following.

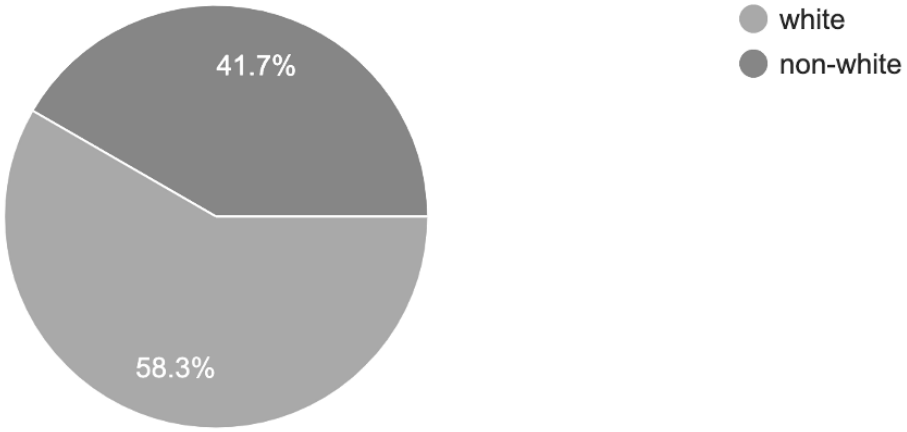


Please rate your frequency in taking the following actions.



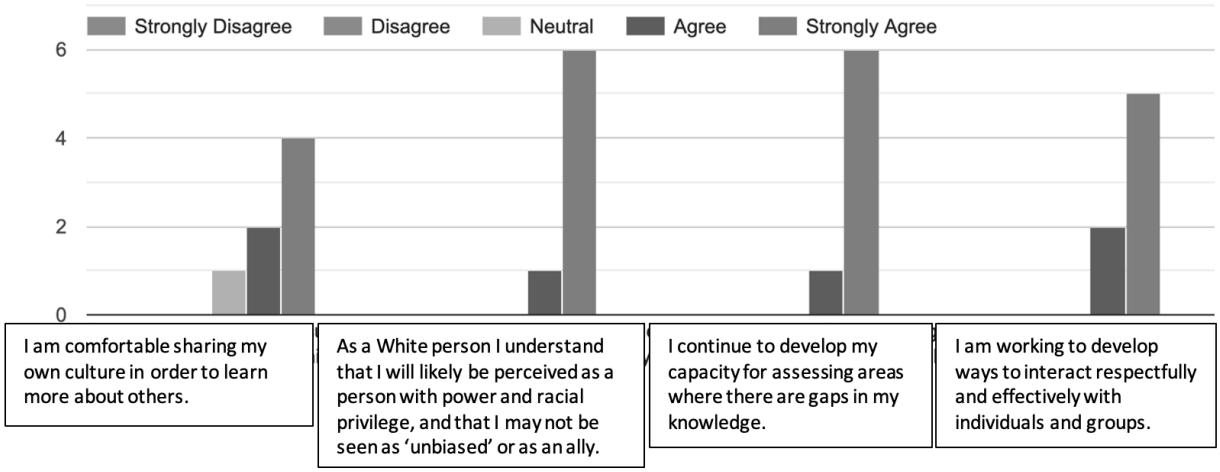
How do you affiliate?

12 responses



Affiliation Agreement - respondents who selected "white"

Please rate your agreement with the following.



Based on the questions in this survey, is there anything you would like to share with us at this time?

7 responses

I would have chosen both answers to the question of affiliation (white, non-white) if that were an option.

None

Our school does a lot of work to unpack our biases and to address many of the areas of growth mentioned above. This work is forever!

No, thank you.

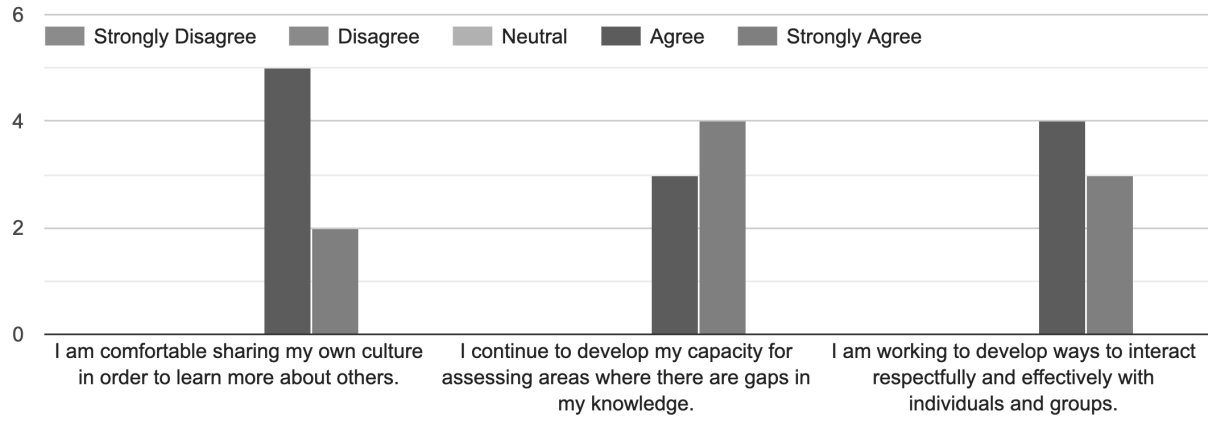
My background is industry rather than academia. I have lived in the US for 33 years.

I have trouble sharing my own culture with others because I'm so aware of my whiteness and how it can be perceived as oppressive or dismissive to others.

No

Affiliation Agreement - respondents who selected "non-white"

Please rate your agreement with the following.



Based on the questions in this survey, is there anything you would like to share with us at this time?

7 responses

No

I believe race always matters.

none at this time

No, thank you.

I identify as multi ethnic.

None

Opportunity or Mandate: Superintendent Beliefs about School Climate Assessment

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School climate is important for continuous improvement. California's LCFF requires districts to report on school climate and use data to inform decision making. Qualitative data, derived from an explanatory sequential mixed-methods study, explored three belief constructs and sub-groups by response patterns. Education leaders have a range of beliefs that influence policy implementation, and they need quality data to guide meaningful change in efforts to meet increasingly diverse needs of students. To capitalize on the opportunity inherent in the LCFF, leaders must believe it is important, have the capacity to use data, and trust the data.

Keywords: School climate assessment, education policy, school accountability, superintendent beliefs, LCFF

School climate has emerged as an important measure of a healthy school environment among advocates, educators, researchers, and policy makers. This trend is evident in California's 2013 education financing and accountability policy, Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which mandated school climate assessment. School districts, under the leadership of the superintendent, are now expected to use school climate indicators to guide continuous improvement efforts through a Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP). While these policy changes demonstrate the state's interest in school climate, there is a need to better understand education leaders' perspectives towards collecting and using school climate data to facilitate changes to improve the health of school environments. This manuscript presents the qualitative findings from a mixed methods study that explored superintendent beliefs towards school climate assessment in California.

Background

Education and public health researchers have documented a relationship between health and education outcomes. Mortality rates decrease with years of educational attainment, and educational success is more prevalent among students who are healthy and who are educated in healthy environments (Basch, 2011; Berliner, 2009, 2013, 2014; Krueger et al., 2015; Olshansky et al., 2012; Pomeranz & Chang, 2017; Telfair & Shelton, 2012; Venkataramani et al., 2016). One lens used to broadly explore healthy school environments is school climate.

Many studies have examined how school climate influences health and academic outcomes. Positive health and education behaviors were more common in school environments where academics were engaged and students felt safe and connected. These healthy environments led to positive mental health, lower rates of violence, and higher achievement in math and English (Benbenishty et al., 2016; Burton et al., 2014; Espelage, et al., 2014; Gase, et al., 2016; Hopson & Lee, 2011; Kraft et al., 2016; Low & Van Ryzin, 2014; McMahon et al., 2009; Wang & Degol, 2016). Conversely, school environments negatively perceived by students have lower achievement in academics, higher rates of absenteeism, poor mental health, and increased risky health behaviors such as substance use and limited physical activity (Doumas, et al., 2017; Richmond, et al., 2015; Van Eck, et al., 2017).

School climate data are increasingly desired for research, practice, advocacy, and accountability. Evaluating schools based on data has increased since the 2001 federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. The follow up, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), expanded data collection by inviting schools to assess outcomes using multiple measures. In California, the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) overhauled the public school accountability system by decentralizing leadership and shifting accountability expectations from a single measure of success (standardized achievement test) to multiple measures, including school climate. Local districts are expected to collect primary data on school climate, submit a summary of findings to the publicly available state dashboard, and use data to codify continuous improvement efforts in their Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) (CDE, 2017).

Central to California's policy is the conviction that mid-level leaders can effectively collect and use data strategically to leverage state resources and facilitate school improvement efforts (Fullan, 2005; Fullan 2011; Fullan, 2014). The role of district leadership is fundamental to this process. Guided by the superintendent, education leaders are responsible for creating and sustaining systems to collect, analyze, and use school climate data to guide change (Datnow & Park, 2014; SCCWG, 2017). Many factors influence how data will inform decision making, including beliefs towards data processes and data use (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Henig, 2012).

Previous studies suggest that leaders use data differently based on their resistance, skepticism, acceptance, or enthusiasm towards the data (Buske & Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, 2018). If the LCFF and subsequent LCAP are going to lead to significant changes in educational environments, education leaders need to believe in the process and the data.

Conceptual Framework

Superintendent beliefs are important, varied, and they have practical implications. This study embraced a conceptual framework that beliefs influence the potential for data to guide continuous improvement and decision making. One comprehensive framework for understanding data driven decision making (DDDM) captures the relationships between using data and why data are being collected, organizational contexts that influence how data are collected, and what guides data processing (Coburn & Turner, 2011). This study explored beliefs as a key influence on the organizational contexts that guide assessment practices and processes. Under California's LCFF, local education agencies are expected to provide the leadership and direction for school climate assessment. To maximize the opportunity, leaders need to believe that school climate assessment is important for continuous improvement, they have the capacity to use data to guide change, and they can trust the data obtained (AERA et al., 2014; Bertino, 2014; Bosworth, 2018; Buske & Zlatkin-Troitschanskaia, 2018; Coburn & Turner, 2011; Datnow & Park, 2014; Gannon-Slater et al., 2017; Mandinach & Schildkamp, 2020; SCCWG, 2017).

The three belief constructs explored in this study were conceptualized in a theoretical construct map, which is a visual representation of the range of perceptions associated with each construct (Wilson, 2004). The construct map, displayed in Figure 1, shows each of the three beliefs in a continuum of low endorsement to high endorsement.

Figure 1

Construct Map

Constructs

Endorseability: High ▲ Low

Importance	Capacity	Trustworthiness
Strongly believe in the importance of capturing multiple perspectives, using data to support change, and evaluating schools based on standardized assessments. School climate is absolutely essential to education reform.	Strongly believe they can make decisions using data, lead others in using data, use data to meet parent and community needs, use data to inform change in schools.	Strongly believe data are meaningful and adequate; that they are selecting instruments that are valid and reliable; believe data will help make decisions that will guide change.
Believe in the importance of capturing multiple perspectives, using data to support change, and evaluating schools based on standardized assessments. School climate is essential to education reform.	Believe they can make decisions using data, lead others in using data, use data to meet parent and community needs, use data to inform change in schools.	Believe data are meaningful and adequate; that they are selecting instruments that are valid and reliable; believe data will help make decisions that will guide change.
Do not believe in the importance of capturing multiple perspectives, using data to support change, and evaluating schools based on standardized assessments. School climate is not essential to education reform.	Do not believe they can make decisions using data, lead others in using data, use data to meet parent and community needs, use data to inform change in schools.	Do not believe data are meaningful and adequate; that they are selecting instruments that are valid and reliable; believe data will not help make decisions that will guide change.
Strongly do not believe in the importance of capturing multiple perspectives, using data to support change, and evaluating schools based on standardized assessments. School climate is absolutely not essential to education reform.	Strongly believe they cannot make decisions using data, lead others in using data, use data to meet parent and community needs, use data to inform change in schools.	Strongly do not believe data are meaningful and adequate; that they are selecting instruments that are valid and reliable; believe data will not help make decisions that will guide change.

Note. Buckner-Capone, 2019.

Methods

An explanatory sequential mixed methods design was used in this research. In this approach, the quantitative data collection and analysis preceded the qualitative, which were collected for the purpose of deepening the understanding of the quantitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). An online survey was used to collect quantitative data, followed by semi-structured interviews.

The study population, district and county superintendents, was selected as they are the highest level local leader responsible for meeting the school climate assessment accountability expectations. In the first, quantitative phase of the study, survey invitations were emailed to all superintendents included in a publicly available database (1,055) and 298 responded (28.2% response rate). The survey, developed using the NRC Assessment Triangle and the Four Building Blocks of instrument design (NRC, 2001; Wilson, 2004), included 37 items with Likert style response choices across the three constructs. The purpose of the survey was to capture the range of superintendent beliefs and current school climate assessment practices.

Following quantitative data collection and preliminary analysis, a purposive sample of 25 potential qualitative participants was generated through recommendations made by experts and key informants known by the researcher. The list was finalized based on publicly available regional and district demographic data to include leaders from different regions and communities, and districts with diverse student enrollment. Ultimately, eight superintendents participated in the qualitative component of the study. District characteristics and the number of years in superintendency for qualitative participants are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Qualitative participant overview by community, pupil demographics, and experience

			Enrollment Demographics			
	Urbanicity	Enrollment	English Learners	Free & Reduced Price Meals	Race/ Ethnicity	Years in Position
True Believers						
A	Suburban	~7,000	9%	38%	42% White, 38% Hispanic, 6% Asian	3
B	Urban	~2,000	50%	97%	98% Hispanic, 2% White	4
C	Urban	>20,000	unavailable	unavailable	38% Hispanic, 30% Asian, 20% White	1
Still Questioning						
D	Urban	>10,000	45%	73%	60% Hispanic, 30% Asian	4
E	Rural	<500	21%	99%	58% Am Ind, 27% Hispanic, 12% White	6
F	Rural	~2,000	64%	98%	52% Hispanic, 39% White	3

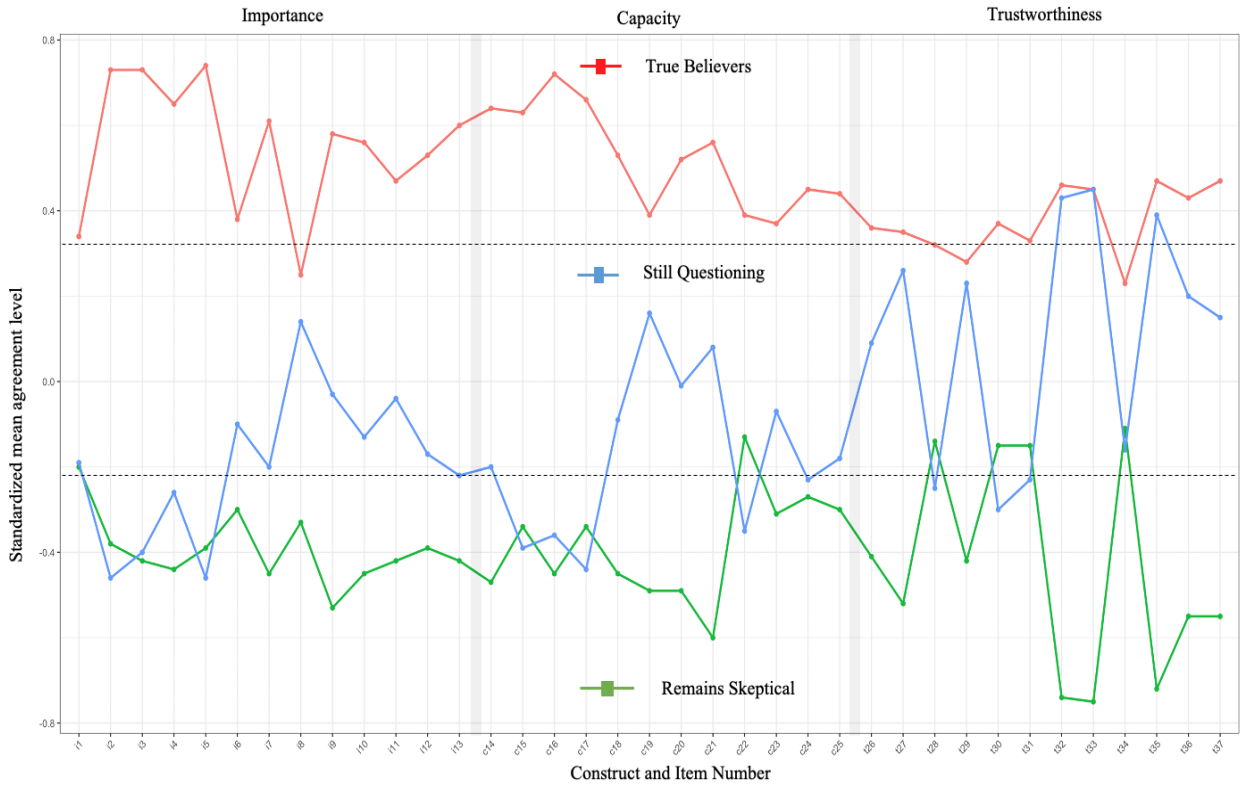
Remains Skeptical						
G	Rural	>20,000	14%	67%	70% Hispanic, 20% white, 4% Asian	8
H	Urban	>20,000	21%	72%	70% Hispanic, 13% Asian, 6% White	4

The interview protocol was developed in alignment with the construct map (see Figure 1) to capture variation in beliefs, narrative explanations, and contextual examples drawn from respondent experiences. The questioning format was consistent for each construct and included an overarching general question, followed by probing questions to invite in-depth sharing of perspectives and experiences. The final protocol was adapted to include probing questions designed to deepen the interpretation of the quantitative data obtained during the first phase of the study. Semi-structured interviews lasted between 35 and 50 minutes in length and were conducted over the phone. All interviews were digitally recorded and saved on a password-protected laptop accessible only to the researcher.

Data were analyzed sequentially and concurrently. Quantitative data analysis included latent class analysis (LCA), which was used to explore response patterns across the constructs. Figure 2 shows the LCA results, with three subgroups identified by response patterns. Qualitative data were analyzed first by construct and then case-by-case to further understand the response patterns that were revealed in the LCA.

Figure 2

Latent Class Model



Note. Latent Class Modelling was derived using Mclust package in R. Latent Class Analysis was used to identify homogenous groups that share response patterns within a heterogenous group. A series of models were fitted to determine the appropriate number of classes. The three classes are depicted in the figure. Latent class modelling included 180 out of 298 complete survey responses collected from superintendents in the first phase of the study. Construct identifiers, i=importance, c=capacity, t=trustworthiness precede the item number that corresponds to the instrument.

Qualitative data were analyzed using MAXQDA 2018 qualitative data analysis software (QDAS). The coding process was deductive, beginning with a provisional start list of codes identified from the extant literature and included in the construct maps (Miles, Huberman, Saldaña, 2014). Codes were first categorized by construct (importance, capacity, and trustworthiness), followed by the sub-group categories identified in the LCA (true believers, still questioning, and remains skeptical). Once data were organized according to the provisional start list, descriptive and in vivo coding further informed sub-codes within the provisional categories.

Findings

Findings from qualitative analysis revealed that varied beliefs exist and patterns appear to align with the LCA. The three distinct subgroups of superintendents based on belief patterns were labeled true believers, still questioning, and remains skeptical. As Table 1 shows, each group included superintendents with a range of experience, serving in urban and rural areas, and serving schools that varied in enrollment and pupil demographics. Due to the sample size, some demographics were omitted in reporting to ensure respondent confidentiality. The similarities and differences in the three subgroups are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

Summary of subgroup characteristics

True Believers	Still Questioning	Remains Skeptical
– Favorable response patterns across all three constructs	– Inconsistent response patterns across all three constructs	– Less favorable response patterns across all three constructs
– School climate assessment is essential for continuous improvement	– School climate assessment may or may not be essential for continuous improvement	– School climate assessment may positively contribute to continuous improvement, if policy and practices are authentic
– Data can absolutely guide change	– Important to meet state accountability expectations	– Data can guide change if interest is genuine
– Evaluation and standardization important, but labels or ranking not helpful	– A standardized tool may not capture local experiences and evaluation may lead to	– Standardization is not necessary, formal evaluation may heighten

	unfair labels and comparisons	competition and potential for gaming
– Have capacity to use data – Trust data	– Have capacity to use data – Trust data	– Have capacity to use data – Trustworthiness of data questioned

True believers

This group was characterized by their favorable endorsement of school climate assessment for continuous improvement. Each of the three cases in this group were consistently coded with positive beliefs in their responses across all three constructs.

Superintendent A: Data-Rich

Superintendent A was data driven. They saw data as an effective and important approach to demonstrate need, rationalize investments, and to create energy and commitment to change. When explaining this perspective, they said,

> Why are we doing this, really becoming a data-rich school district? Because if you don't have a needs assessment with data, you don't know where you have a baseline and you don't know where you need to get. You can't have real goals and you can't monitor improvement... If it's about what we think, it's not really what we know, and we can't really improve if we're not using multiple data sources to inform us moving forward.

Superintendent A believed it was important to involve others in the process, that leaders can and should use data to facilitate change, and it was essential to use tools (surveys) with evidence of validity and reliability. They said it was important to use a tool "That measures what it is supposed to." They went on to explain, saying, "I want to make sure that it does it all the time… The instrument needs to have consistent results for us to move forward and implement things, but also so there is trust from the community."

Despite the favorable perspectives, Superintendent A also explained a challenge with data-informed decision making. "Definitely resources. We see an area and sometimes we have–we know what the best solution is, but we can't afford the best solution and so we put on a band-aid and kind of do the best we can knowing that if we had additional resources, we could do a better job."

Superintendent B: It's All Good

Superintendent B believed that school climate and school climate assessment were very important and that people in schools could make a significant difference in the school environment. They strongly endorsed the concept of continuous improvement and believed standardization was important. They said, "So, these days everything we do is standardized. We are looking at things through the same lens; whether it is instruction or the results of assessments it is the same lens."

Superintendent B believed that they could learn from all data and that all data were good and useful. They said, "We have a growth mindset… Even when the data is negative, it is still good because it is telling us something. And when it is good, then it is validating that we are doing

the right things."

Superintendent C: Important for the Whole

Consistent with the previous two leaders in this subgroup, Superintendent C also believed school climate assessment was important. They explained that through school climate, assessment leaders can gain insights about problems in the community, which could invite collaboration between schools and communities leading to substantial change. They said, "I think that assessing school climate and understanding school climate is a really important thing for administrators and teachers and parents because it is so interconnected to all of the other indicators of health, whole child, and whole community."

Superintendent C believed that standardization was necessary because people will make comparisons and if the tool is standard, the comparison may make more sense. They believed that if assessments were only locally relevant, the comparison may be confusing and inaccurate. They said, "I think standardizing solely at the local level may cause more confusion and harm because of individual natural tendency to want to compare or maybe to learn from each other."

Superintendent C also believed there were challenges with data interpretation and identified this as an important area for capacity development. They said, "I think one of the biggest challenges is when there is a reliance on numbers or trying to oversimplify a very complex set of data and information and I think that when it happens, it is harmful."

Still Questioning

The still questioning group was characterized by their inconsistent response patterns across the three constructs. In contrast to the true believers, the three cases categorized in the still questioning group were coded with a range of favorable and less favorable endorsement of school climate assessment for continuous improvement.

Superintendent D: Changes Every Year

Superintendent D explained that school climate was important, but they also felt it was complex. They believed it was important to assess so schools knew what was going on in experiences at school and could make changes for improvement. They said,

> We have to establish a climate and culture that is supportive and that meets the social and emotional needs of students if we are going to be able to make any gains academically. So, we are constantly having to assess and take the pulse of the school to see where improvements need to be made in order to make sure that the students are safe–both physically, but also mentally.

Something that contributed to the complexity conveyed by Superintendent D was a belief that using data to evaluate schools was not helpful or necessary because each school is dynamic, thus influencing experiences and perceptions. They said, "Every school is going to be unique in regards to the circumstances surrounding the school. And, it will fluctuate from year to year depending on the unique needs of the students."

Superintendent E: Watch, Listen, Learn

Superintendent E believed that both school climate and school climate assessment were important, but explained that school climate surveys were not the only useful information. They said, "As administrators, you've got to build relationships and you've got to understand the landscape and, you know, see what the heck is going on within your school walls and make some decisions there. It's just a lot of observation and listening. Those tools are good to use, but just for me, you can learn a lot by talking to the staff and get a lot of community input too."

Superintendent E explained that all data could provide learning and they trusted the survey data because they believed the responses were honest and therefore an accurate reflection. They said, "They are pretty honest statements and I trust that the kids are taking it and they're being pretty honest about it." Superintendent E also explained some of the challenges school leaders have with parents and communities, saying: "It's hard to get a hold of them, it's hard to talk to them. There is such a substance abuse problem … the parents are a big part of that. They just feel that it is the school's responsibility to deal with everything, you know. And they don't want to deal with anything."

Superintendent F: Rural and Size Matters

Similar to the other two leaders categorized in the still questioning subgroup, Superintendent F believed that school climate assessment was important, but they felt it was different in rural areas and small districts. They believed that policy makers and state education leaders needed to understand the challenges with policy implementation at local levels. For example, anonymity may not be possible with some survey data and specifically with disaggregation for analysis. They said,

> Mandates–like what you're discussing–they shake out differently in small counties… They are not as easy to administer sometimes. You know, for example, with things like the California Healthy Kids Survey, it is difficult, particularly in [a] smaller district, where there are only 400 kids, you have to be really careful when you get down to those grade level assessments because you lose the anonymity factor… When the state says, thou shalt, it makes it a little difficult when all they put forward is a one size fits all measure.

Similar to Superintendent E, they trusted the survey data because students were familiar with the surveys, and they believed that the answers were honest. In addition, Superintendent F believed the state had vetted the survey that was being used in the district. They said, "It is fairly consistent. I think that the students are pretty comfortable with this, once they have done it the first time, so, I think they are fairly honest when they take this survey. I know it is vetted. So, I believe the results that we get."

Remains Skeptical

Two cases were categorized in the remains skeptical sub-group. This group was characterized by their generally low (or skeptical) endorsement of school climate assessment as a key driver for continuous improvement. The respondents in this group described their leadership

as an authentic approach to using data to continuously improve, but they were openly critical of the intent and authenticity of the policy and practice.

Superintendent G: Communities Influence Schools

Superintendent G believed that both school climate and school climate assessment were important, but they were skeptical of the purpose, the intentions, and the use by others. They suggested that data could be used by schools or the community to misrepresent school experiences:

> Well, school climate can go badly if you have people that are trying to go after your school system. They say it's unsafe and… sometimes yeah, okay–you've got problems with fights, suspensions, whatever. But, often times unsafe is coded language–that there are too many minorities in your school so I want to transfer out because your school is unsafe. So, the data–you always have to be mindful of who is using it and for what purposes. Whether it is to improve the school or really just make public schools look bad.

In another instance, they shared a concern for data manipulation. The example provided was based on the reporting of suspension rates. The participant disclosed that some school districts were showing a decrease in rates, when in actuality, they were just changing the label. "So, school districts, they're showing a reduction in school suspension rates, but they're still doing in-school suspension, but they're calling it, like a study hall." They go on to say, "So, on paper, their numbers have come down. You see how the system can be gamed."

In relationship to obtaining data that were trustworthy, Superintendent G explained "In the neighborhood–and there's a lot of trauma there–you could have a lot of violence at that specific school site that you know, might be perceived as reliable data and valid, but it's in the context of the greater neighborhood." They expressed concerns about school climate assessment because they believed schools were routinely blamed for larger societal challenges. They said, "I think schools are blamed for a lot of social problems. We're not capable of handling a lot of these problems. So, sometimes the data, if you're just looking at school climate–yeah, there are issues there… if you look at schools alone. You need to look at neighborhoods and communities."

Superintendent H: Teaching and Learning

Superintendent H believed that school climate and school climate assessment were important, but expressed some areas of concern in data use and authenticity particularly when data do not align with community perceptions. They suggested that not all leaders were prepared to handle the community response, which may affect the authenticity of data reporting. They said,

> Well, let's just say that you're in a community that really thinks it has its act together and thinks it's all good and positive and the school climate survey results come back to say that it is not. Well, what that means then is that you are going to have to weather some controversy from the results as you seek to make your school or school district better as a result of the findings.

Superintendent H also questioned the extent to which the school climate assessment expectations

were genuinely implemented to support schools in their primary charter of teaching and learning. They said, "If you want them to do a good job, in a particular job in a particular area, don't tell us to do a 4.0 job there and then add in another 15 things just because they're nice to have." Ultimately, Superintendent H opined that the potential and actual use of data had to be intrinsically motivated:

> You can tell me, as a superintendent that I need to assess school climate and I will do that. If my motivation is to make my school district better for the kids that I serve, then it's going to happen regardless because of the information at hand. But, if you tell me that I have to do that and then you're going to pinch me until I stop, pinch me until I change my behavior, that's a different thing all together, because my instincts were not going to take this seriously.

They went on to say "Schools are better for accountability measures for academics, but there has been a lot of by-product in bad things, or less than productive things, that have occurred because we have chased numbers instead of learning." Superintendent H explained that comprehensive systemic change would require resources and collaboration, otherwise, the mandate to assess school climate begs the question of the true purpose and intent of the policy. They posed the question, "Did a legislator legislate something because he or she feels like this month it should be something like health or safety?"

Discussion

This study confirmed the importance of school climate assessment, although responses varied from unequivocal to critical. Findings revealed a confidence in self-capacity to use data to guide change, despite needed resources and less confidence in the capacity of others. Results also showed a range of perspectives relating to trusting the data, with respondents reporting absolute trust, to questioning the quality of data collection and interpretation processes. It is evident that beliefs influence how school climate data are collected and used to support continuous improvement efforts. If superintendents believe school climate assessment is important, regardless of a policy mandate, they will use data to guide school improvement.

Ultimately, this research revealed underlying complexities of data informed decision making and education policy. First, policies are not created in a vacuum, nor are they free from historical context and experience. Results suggest distrust in accountability systems. For decades, standardized data were used to rank and penalize schools, and even among the most ardent believers of data informed decision making, there were undertones of questionable trust in using data to authentically support continuous improvement. The extent to which education leaders and policy makers genuinely intend to foster the use of school climate assessment data and other measures of accountability to guide changes in public schools remains unknown, but this study suggests that education leaders may not fully trust the political intentions.

Second, there was variation in the degree to which actual data were trustworthy. Many believed that data were trustworthy because of familiarity or history using the instrument, results were consistent with their own perceptions, or because they felt like the responses were honest. Furthermore, some participants believed that the state will or has vetted instruments. Recommendations for statewide vetting of instruments had been proposed to state leaders (SCCWG, 2017), but no formal state vetting process has yet to be implemented.

Third, study results suggest a need for additional support and resources for school personnel and local leaders in assessment literacy and data use. Leaders need to know how to analyze and present data in ways that will invite collaborative approaches to solving problems and supporting continuous improvement. Additionally, they need to have the knowledge and capacity to critically evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, and overall stability of data collection tools. Some of the assumptions guiding local leaders' trust in the data may be misguided because many instruments lack current evidence of effectiveness, including validity and reliability. School climate researchers have developed many tools to assess school climate for correlational studies and to inform policy and practice recommendations. However, critical considerations for practical application include a need for cohesiveness in terminology, consistency in the variables being measured, and a standard expectation for the psychometric rigor of instruments (Berkowitz et al., 2017; Konold et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017; Thapa et al., 2013; Wang & Degol, 2016; Zullig et al., 2015). Clearly defining what will be measured, followed by the development and use of psychometrically developed tools that are consistent with the standards for educational testing and assessment (NRC, 2001) are important considerations for research, but fundamental to the use of these tools in accountability frameworks and practical decision making. Robust assessment literacy among education leaders is necessary to identify and use high-quality assessment instruments and to further develop capacities to use data to inform decision making and facilitate continuous improvement efforts.

Importantly, this study contributes a district and superintendent perspective to the literature on data driven decision making in education and draws attention to the role of beliefs in policy implementation. This study is limited in scope and generalizability due to the small sample size of qualitative responses and the focus on a specific component of California policy. Future research is needed to determine the extent to which the belief patterns identified in this study relate to other school climate assessment policies and other education leaders (e.g. school principals). In addition, future research will need to consider the unique nuances of 2020. Given the complexities associated with the past year, including the challenges that schools have faced in providing quality education while responsibly navigating the pandemic, the realities of school climate assessment as a measure of accountability and school success may be radically different than in previous years.

The COVID-19 global pandemic forced education systems to adapt in ways that were previously unimaginable and the successes (and failures) of these efforts will be seen for the next decade. Underscoring this experience is the reality that education outcomes were unequally distributed before the pandemic and the disparities are only expanding (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). In addition, researchers are already measuring an increase in mental health diagnoses and crises among our nation's youth, with many of the most vulnerable at highest risk (e.g. homeless, foster youth, low income, LGBTQ, EL learners) (Fish et al., 2020; Marques de Miranda et al., 2020). The success of public schools is closely tied to the physical, mental, and emotional health of students and the current realities have accelerated the need for education leaders to gain access to quality data that can support their efforts in leveraging resources to support the needs of vulnerable student populations. School climate assessment provides one such avenue for leaders to gain deeper understanding of the pupil experience.

This study confirmed a consistent belief that school climate plays an important role in school experiences and that school climate assessment can be useful in guiding continuous improvement efforts. However, the findings caution: in order to capitalize on the opportunity inherent in the policy, leaders must believe in the policy and process, have the capacity to collect and use data, and they must trust the data.

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Leadership and Innovation in a Special Education School

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This qualitative case study explored ways innovation is practiced in a PK-12 special education school, including the antecedents and outcomes to innovation, and how innovation was supported. Findings concluded that specific elements within the school's staff, leadership, and environment fostered high levels of innovative practice. Individual's intrinsic motivation, openness to change, and way they approached challenges led to more innovative practices. Leaders who demonstrated transformational and servant leadership promoted innovative practices within the special education school. Implications for practice across special education is discussed, as well as how findings can be applied to the general education environment.

Keywords: special education, innovation, leadership, equity, inclusion

In education, the word innovation has grown to be synonymous with teaching and learning. School systems are being transformed as we speak. If schools wish to continue to grow and persevere, they cannot continue with the status quo. Teachers and leadership must take on a collaborative and innovative mindset (Paxton & Stralen, 2015). If school leaders can understand what inspires a person to be innovative or drives a person to create a novel solution to a problem, they can foster its existence. Within innovative learning environments, key to continued growth and success is leadership that navigates uncertainty, fosters willingness to learn and change (Paxton & Stralen, 2015), promotes transformation in school culture, and generates a shared vision for the future (Earl & Timperley, 2015). Now, more than ever, it is imperative to research how school's stakeholders transform ideas into initiatives. It is then that they can begin to solve related problems and generate educational value.

Schools Must Innovate to Survive

The past year has forced many schools to jump headfirst into implementing new, innovative approaches to teaching students, before many of them were ready to do so. Over the course of the abrupt closures in March of 2020, schools came face to face with the grim reality of providing students equitable access to a free, appropriate, and public education, and often falling short. Many schools struggled to provide special education services, accommodations, and modifications to students virtually (Nadworny, 2020). Equity issues become very apparent as lack of access to technology prevented student participation in an all-virtual education, in addition to the reality that the virtual environment is not the least restrictive environment for many special education students. The specialized instruction that many students require often cannot be delivered as effectively over a computer. The situations that we have experienced this past year warrants school leaders and teachers to take on and adopt an innovative mindset—one that is open to new ideas, flexible, willing to take risks, and not afraid to fail (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987; Warford, 2010; Bourrie, Cegielski, Jones-Farmer, & Sankar, 2014; Earl & Timperley, 2015).

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore ways innovation is practiced in a PK-12 special education school in a Northeast state, and specifically identify the innovative practices found in the special education school, the antecedents of innovation, the outcomes of innovation, and how leadership supported innovation throughout the school.

Why special education? Special education pedagogy has the potential to inform and influence general education inclusive practices. The core of special education service is that practitioners work within their current system to assess the needs of all stakeholders, identify problems, evaluate possible barriers, and create innovative solutions. These practices are the hallmarks of effective creativity (Runco & Jaeger, 2012).

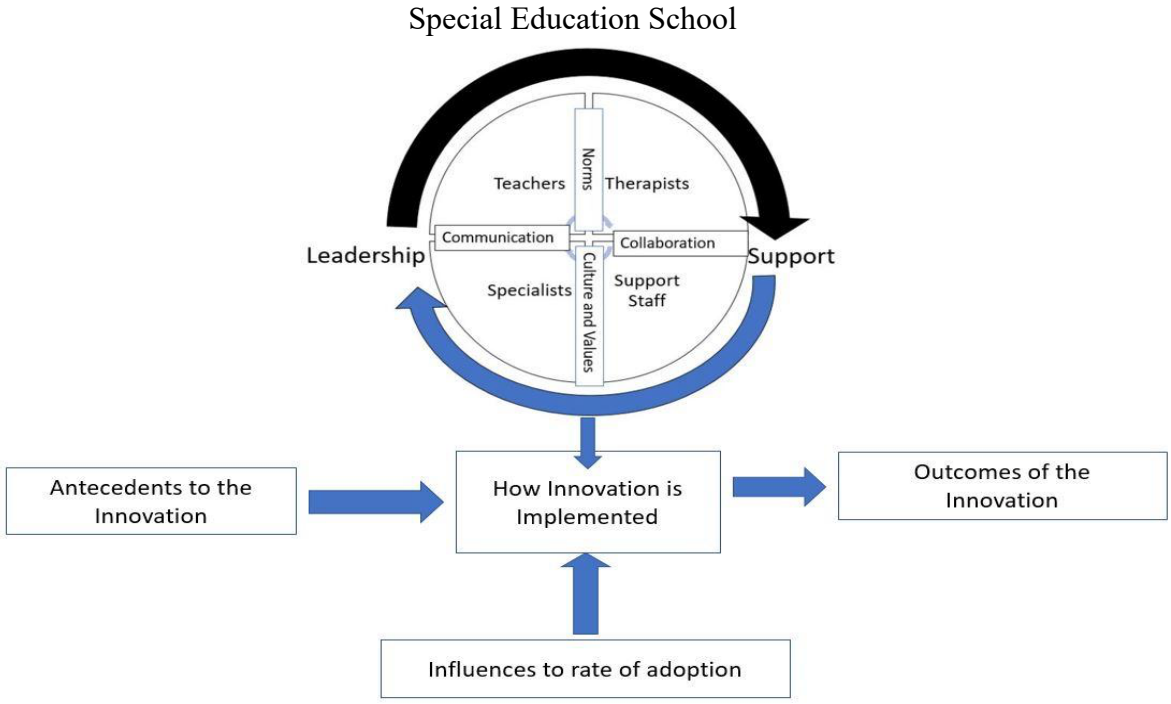
The conceptual framework below captures how I utilized the Diffusion of Innovation theory to study how leadership supports innovation implementation (Rogers, 2003). Rogers' Diffusion of Innovation Theory (2003) includes the socio-organizational contexts of a system, which is a contributing factor in educational innovation. In special education, multi-disciplinary collaboration, partnership, and teaming are core components to successful service delivery. For example, multiple specialists (occupational therapists, social workers, behavior therapists) work both independently and jointly to problem-solve and deliver services to students. These cross-discipline teams bring together their varied expertise to solve complex problems that require novel solutions. Leaders need to support this collaborative culture for effective delivery of special education services by developing a climate of trust and support of personnel who take risks to

achieve student and school goals (Waldron and McKleskey, 2010).

Creating this type of environment is necessary for innovation to be implemented and sustained. Cementing innovative practices are the elements of communication, collaboration, and effective teaming (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Rogers, 2003). These components comprise my conceptual framework below. This theory reflects people's attitudes, identities, and practices within an organization, especially a school, and is an appropriate lens through which to view innovation in a special education school (Rogers, 2003).

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework



Literature Review

Research into the study of environmental and personal characteristics influencing innovation has produced common findings. Early work by Amabile and Gryskiewicz (1987) concluded innovative environments were ones that encouraged innovation, produced challenges to solve, and were autonomous in nature. Individuals' knowledge of the innovation and their openness to change affected the adoption of an innovation (Warford, 2010). Specifically, intrinsic motivation, along with an individual's skill expertise, and preference for risk taking, relate to qualities of individuals that promote creativity (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987). Lastly, motivation was found to be an important characteristic in the successful dissemination of innovations (Bourrie, et al., 2014).

Environmental and individual characteristics are contributing factors to innovation dissemination. Environments are highest in creativity when its members have high skills in

creative thinking, high domain expertise, high levels of support for creativity, and members with high intrinsic motivation (Amabile, 1983). Traits and attributes of individuals and environments go hand in hand, and both promote and inhibit creativity (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987, p. 14). Individuals who are high in skill expertise, intrinsic motivation, and risk-taking, thrive in environments that facilitate autonomy, contain adequate resources, and promote a culture of collaboration. Individuals also thrive in environments that did not punish risk-taking attempts that resulted in failure. Regarding innovation, the person influences the environment, and the environment influences the person (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987).

If leaders want to sustain innovation, they need to be open to ideas for improvement, be pragmatic, and develop teams, specifically interdisciplinary ones (Blackwell, 2009; Mateo et al., 2016). Connecting people to others outside their own disciplines is critical to the continuation and sustainability of the innovation process (as cited in (Mateo et al., 2016).

Knowledge-Building "refers to the creation and improvement of ideas that have a life out in the world, where they are subject to social processes of evaluation, revision, and application" (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003, p. 2). In Knowledge Building Environments (KBE), members are concerned with not only supporting individual member's learning, but also advancing its state of knowledge. Groups convene organically to solve problems and produce new understandings and solutions (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003). More than sharing knowledge, Knowledge Building Environments seek to situate new ideas beyond the minds of the creators and the limits of the organization. An effective KBE supports the continuous advancement and improvement of ideas (Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2003).

Knowledge-building practices must be adaptive, and members should be encouraged to demonstrate epistemic agency in their pursuits of knowledge creation **(**Gloor, 2006). Ma et al., (2016) suggest that a school environment can be innovative if it utilizes the concepts of collective cognitive responsibility, agency, respect for diverse ideas, and shared leadership. All these elements are required for effective knowledge advancement.

Leadership is influential in promoting innovation in organizations. Agbim's (2013) research concluded that a leader's relationship style, specifically the ability to foster idea-sharing, collaboration, trust, and respect between employees, was critical to support knowledge building practices and innovation. Despite a school's typical hierarchal structure, if school leaders want to foster innovation, they should encourage cross-functional teams or informal professional learning communities in their school. Through this network of relationships and interactions among school staff, leaders can use distributive leadership to empower school personnel to share responsibility for decision making (Waldron and McKleskey, 2010).

School leaders must focus on building a culture that values collaboration and idea sharing among the teachers before they delve into the process of implementation (Agbim, 2013). Shared leadership and collaboration are crucial for the development of inclusive schools and a collaborative culture (Waldron and McKleskey, 2010).

Sagnak, Kuruoz, Polat, and Soylu (2015) found that transformational leadership is the most effective environmental condition required for innovation and creativity. As principals increase transformational leadership behaviors, employee empowerment rises, which leads to an increased innovative climate. Transformational leaders create an environment that is open, free from punishment, and is a place where individuals feel autonomy and control to make decisions on their own. Through this empowerment, transformational leaders can create a climate for innovation (Sagnak, et al, 2015).

Methodology

In this qualitative case study, I explored ways innovation is practiced in a PK-12 special education school in a Northeast state. I chose a case study design (Yin, 2014), because it allowed for a focus on the process and context of how innovation is demonstrated (Creswell, 2018). Case study research produced rich descriptions of faculty's actions and beliefs, how the physical environment was utilized to enhance practices, and how faculty, staff, and administrators leverage school and community stakeholders to achieve goals in innovation (Merriam, 1988).

The research setting was a private special education school in a Northeast state. The school serves 235 students in grades preschool to grade 12. Students are age three to 21, and all receive special education services driven by their Individual Education Plan (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). The school offers educational programs in autistic support, life skills/multiple disabilities, mental health, therapy and support services in occupational therapy, speech therapy, vision therapy, physical therapy, and behavioral health services.

The participants of this study were all school employees in the selected school. The initial three participants were chosen using purposive sampling. Snowball sampling was used to identify additional participants. Nine participants chose to participate in the study. Three participants identified as male and six as female. These participants comprise a representative sample of the professionals working directly with students at the school. The unit of analysis in a case study is not dependent on participant number. Rather, it is important that participants exemplify a holistic analysis of the phenomenon investigated with the case (Creswell, 2018). For this case study, pseudonyms were used for each participant.

Table 1

Participant information

Name	Job title	Gender
Carol	Education Program Coordinator	Female
Natalie	Preschool Supervisor	Female
Zane	IT coordinator	Male
Jennifer	Occupational Therapist	Female
Sarah	Speech and Language Pathologist	Female
Seth	Special Education Teacher	Male
Luke	Special Education Teacher	Male
Laura	Special Education Teacher	Female
Nora	Special Education Teacher	Female

I conducted nine semi-structured interviews that lasted 45 minutes to one hour for each participant. I took photographs of the physical classroom and school environment—I wanted to capture physical evidence of the tools that are used throughout the school that were indicative of innovative practices. I also collected multiple documents and artifacts. Artifacts analyzed for this research study were obtained directly. I acquired documents from mining the school's website and online presence. The other documents were obtained from attending community advisory board meetings held at the school beginning in the fall of 2016. The meetings' main purpose was information sharing. Meeting minutes were disseminated afterwards and were used to validate my

observations and anecdotal notes from the actual meeting. In summary, I collected 129 pages of interview transcripts, 364 minutes of observation, 30 documents from meetings, 8 pages of notes, and 20 pictures.

Data Analysis

For my data analysis, I used an inductive approach described by Yin (2014). All collected data was organized topically and repeatedly read and reviewed. Interview data was coded using in vivo and axial coding and analyzed. Codes from the interviews were then combined into categories. Analyzing the patterns and convergence categories from interviews, artifacts, and photos together, I collapsed overlapping components of categories into the final thirteen categories. From there four themes emerged (Table 2).

Table 2

Themes from data analysis

Themes	Categories
Innovate Attributes	Embracing challenges
	Open to risk taking
	Taking initiative
	Reflective
Environment Fosters Innovation	Cross-discipline Collaboration
	Partnerships
	Diverse Environment
	Work Outside Comfort Zone
Leadership	Supportive
	Shared Vision
	Provide Trust and Autonomy
School Culture and Systemic Practices	Continuous Improvement
	Research Minded

I ensured reliability and validity during my data collection and analysis process by using member checking, multiple sources of evidence, and triangulation of the data (Yin, 2014). I also explained my position as the investigator in this study in relation to the group being studied (Merriam, 1988).

Findings

Innovation was first demonstrated through individuals' identities and personal character attributes. Interviewed participants shared common attributes, such as the ability to embrace new challenges, being open, willing to fail, demonstrating initiative, being collaborative, and engaging in the act of reflection. Initiative was highlighted in Carol's response when she described the teachers' actions. She noted, "They are ready to try and do anything. They are always ahead of the game. So, they are real go-getters." These behaviors contributed to the participants' continued learning process and are attributes often associated with innovative behavior (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987; Warford, 2010; Bourrie, Cegielski, Jones-Farmer, & Sankar, 2014; Earl & Timperley, 2015).

Exemplifying an innovative attribute alone is not enough to translate into demonstrating innovative practices within a school. Innovation lives in the intersection of individuals and their environment (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987). Not only did participants demonstrate innovative characteristics, but the school environment was also conducive to innovation and fostered the existence of innovative practices.

A special education school is diverse, both in student population and in the backgrounds of teachers and staff. This diversity is a catalyst for innovative practices. Diverse student needs require multiple specialists to take a team approach in developing each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). In interviews with participants, many discussed examples of how, through interdisciplinary collaboration, they and their team members invented and manufactured new products and assistive technology, devised new instructional strategies, and researched classroom solutions for their students (Ma et al, 2016).

The diversity of student need is not only a part of the innovative environment, it is a catalyst for innovative practices. When students' academic and functional skills are not at the normal standard, typical practices will not work. Staff must attempt novel ideas. The experience of working at the school and living within the environment of diverse student needs and professional expertise is a driver for innovation.

The school's environment was innovative because personnel demonstrated knowledge-building practices of collective cognitive responsibility, agency, respect for diverse ideas, and shared leadership (Ma et al., 2016). All of these practices are components of a knowledge-building community, and all are necessary to meet student needs. The special education school supported individual learning and advancing the state of knowledge within that community (Scardamalia, 2003).

Several examples from the data illustrated knowledge-building practices. Teachers, therapists, and specialists demonstrated collaborative problem solving towards a shared goal through weekly cross-discipline team meetings (Chen & Hong, 2016). Monthly "Tech Talks" were held to keep staff up to date on the latest advances and resources for the classroom. Many universities and corporations asked the school to help develop new technologies and products beneficial for their student population, and the school was a hotspot for research and innovation. Also, multiple research studies have been conducted at the school. Innovation was seen as the collective responsibility of the school (Cheng & Jhang, 2016). Through member assessment, evaluation, collaboration, and problem solving, they took ownership and responsibility for creating and sharing knowledge at the school (Waldron and McKleskey, 2010; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

Several antecedents to innovation emerged in the study. Starting from the top, the school is driven by a shared vision statement that promotes innovation:

> It is our vision that professionals will see our organization as the place where their profession is practiced at the highest level of expertise… and that people will see the organization as a valued resource for knowledge, education, training, consultation, and support.

To further that mission, several interviewed participants noted that the vice-president of the organization sought out partnerships with universities and corporations to implement new programs at the school. She remained current on the latest technology and research and used that to drive the technology initiatives through the technology strategic planning team. Carol, the

education program coordinator, noted that the organization's vice president is key in bringing research opportunities to the school.

The school's administration exemplifies balance between being visionary and staying true to the core values of the school. Using the vision of the school as the driving force for change, innovation catapults the organization and its members forward. This drive for progress was a shared piece of the school's culture. A core value of the school is to provide the best possible education for the students and is embedded in the actions of every school personnel. Connected to this value is a drive for change, improvement, and innovation. Collins and Porras (1997) categorize this behavior as "preserving the core, stimulating progress" (p. 82). This behavior allows an organization to explore, experiment, and change. They can remain true to their values but still be visionary.

In the interviews and analysis of data, a common theme was the shared purpose and passion that drove individual actions and programming. This purpose was rooted in a commitment to the students. This passion for students was the core driver for innovation at the school. The teachers or administrators who were interviewed did not set out to be "innovative." They set out to make their students' lives better. Through these actions, innovative ideas and practices emerged.

The commitment to innovation is time intensive. The individuals in this organization understood that innovation was not created in a single defining action or program. It was a process with unrelenting small, yet transformative successes that gained momentum. A key predictor of innovation at this school was a commitment by individuals to achieving the goals they set out to attain, both personal and student centered in nature.

Two outcomes of innovation for teachers entailed developing a growth mindset and a changed perspective towards innovation. Many teachers described new initiatives and strategies they attempted with their students. No initiative worked perfectly in its first attempt. In interviews, contrary to Warford's (2010) research, teachers did not convey that this initial failure resulted in an abandonment of the idea, rather, it fostered a mindset of growth and change. Teachers viewed failure as part of the learning process and a step closer to achieving the end goal (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). Data analysis from interviews and artifacts captured teacher and staff's experience of living in an innovative environment. Individuals shared stories that captured two to twenty years of teaching experience. After experiencing their own innovative experiences, in addition to being more open to change, participants conveyed a newfound confidence. This trait was developed by experiencing risk and trying new things within the school environment. Due to their experiences, these teachers are now a conduit for innovative practices.

Seth, Laura, Jennifer, Nora, and Luke all noted that since working at this school, they have changed how they approach new tasks. Because of their experiences, taking risks are now something they enjoy and have learned will produce positive results, even if those results are initial failures. Jennifer described how she approaches challenges and relates them to puzzles:

> I jump on them, and they're not really stressful to me, they're, more of a… okay, I'm going to figure [it] out. It's more like you're, you're giving me a dare, and I'm going to do this. So that, in one hand, it makes me happy, and it makes me feel fulfilled that I'm actually helping that one person. It may not make a difference everywhere, but it's making a difference here and now. That's what I like to do.

Laura discussed how she previously viewed mistakes or challenges as something she was once apprehensive about, but now approaches differently. She believes her transformation was due

in part to the change in her current position at school, as well as a change in her personal mindset.

> Okay, you don't know what's going to happen. Make the best of every day, do the best you can because that's all you can do and just know that it's a learning experience all the way through. No matter what happens, it's going to turn out okay. I think being in this room kind of changed me a little. It really allowed me to rethink some things and to say it's okay when things don't go quite right. This isn't going to work, that's not a problem. We'll find something else that does. I have a lot of support from the administration being in this room this year and that, too, is huge. They're willing to let me try whatever I need to try to get things going and we're in a good spot now.

Leadership supported innovation through forming relationships, being accessible, and supporting individuals in their innovation efforts. Seth, a special education teacher, was asked to describe the administration at the school. He said:

> Supportive. Cautiously optimistic. They also inspire change and growth. And they allow me to have some autonomy and do what I need to do. And sometimes if something is not ready for the classroom, we look a little bit closer at it, and see if we put on the back burner. They are so supportive, and I couldn't be more blessed. But they make it a point to, to know you personally too. And to help you in the areas that you need help in as well. I do not think I've had administration take you under their wing as much.

Carol, the education program coordinator, was asked to describe the culture and climate of the school, she described how important training and development was for staff.

> So, I think in our culture, if you don't know something, we will retrain you, and we will retrain you. At the many lectures I go to I hear 'you have to hear something seven times before it might kick in.' So, it's just that constant retraining and that re-speaking about the issue and going, reviewing things with them that way. But I think the biggest thing here is to walk into a room, oh just stay, stay positive, stay flexible. We will work through that.

Administration supports teachers' and staff development by focusing on a culture of training, education, and growth, and support of risk taking (Kouzes & Posner, 2012). New, innovative practices are driven bottom up, based on the needs of students, as opposed to typical innovations in a public school system, which are artificially disseminated top down, and can easily fail and fizzle out, due to their lack of connection to the school and staff. Administration works closely with teachers, through distributed leadership, and are so attuned to the needs of the staff and students, several participants noted that new programs and initiatives were much more likely to be successfully implemented.

Two theoretical frameworks best represent the leadership at the school: transformational leadership and servant leadership. Transformational leadership practices create an environment that is open and free from punishment, where individuals feel autonomy and control to make their own decisions (Sagnak et al, 2015). The administrators in this study demonstrated positive relationships with the school staff, and empowered them to achieve their goals, supporting innovation (Northouse, 2016). As Nora noted,

> I think, I think the type of school we have, I think that administrators have to have some kind of trust in their teachers. Because there are no two classrooms that are the same. We all have to find what works in our classroom for our group. They support your individuality as a teacher, and they do take your ideas and they share them.

Servant leadership is focused on realizing the goals of others, as opposed to organizational goals. Servant leaders are motivated primarily by a deep desire to help others and seek to "transform their followers to grow healthier, wiser, freer, and more autonomous" (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 13-14.). The school administrators' servant leader attitude was shown to be at the heart of their actions. This aligns with the vision of the school and the core values of the staff. As data demonstrates, the leaders and staff of this school were driven by a desire to serve the needs of the students. Service remains the core driver of innovation (Greenleaf, 1977).

Both servant and transformational leadership exemplify people-oriented approaches, with a focus on their followers seeking to enhance the personal development and professional contributions of all organizational members (Russell, 2001). The administration in this school see the best in their staff. These leaders understand that when people succeed, the organization succeeds. Thus, they devote resources to investing in people first (Kouzes & Posner, 2012; Wiseman, 2010). This philosophy and leadership style best support innovations.

Implication for Practice

This case study explored how innovation was practiced in a PK-12 special education school. The results demonstrated that innovation is prevalent in the mindsets, practices, environment, and leadership support at the school. This special education school demonstrated practices that are valuable, and the results have implications for general and special education.

Investigating student participation in general education, statistics show from fall 2000 to fall 2017, 63% of students ages 6-21 served under the IDEA spent 80% or more of their day in the general education classroom. Students are coming to school with more and more significant health, mental, and behavioral challenges that impact their ability to learn (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, 2005). Administration in public schools would more fully be able to address the increasing student needs in their school if they implemented practices such as interdisciplinary teams, cross-discipline collaboration, continuous training, curriculum, and instruction driven by student needs, and making all specialists valued members of the classroom environment. Administrators should also collaborate within and across departments of other education administration and special education programs to further develop their skills and understanding in serving their students with disabilities (Pazey, Garcia, & Cole, 2012). This would improve their skill set as instructional school leaders.

When the teachers and administration are already innovating within their regular practice, working every day to adapt for each student, it is much easier for them to strategically pivot when faced with new challenges. This was the case for this school during the pandemic. When the school moved to remote only learning, their challenge was even greater than the public school, as every child's program was delivered virtually, and no two programs were alike. The school provided access to online educational resources for parents via their website as supplemental materials to the direct instructional lessons the students received. Many of the students in the school have physical disabilities, are non-verbal, and/or have significant cognitive challenges, which can produce barriers to learning in the physical classroom, and even more in the virtual

classroom. The teachers and administration worked to ensure that the students continued to receive equitable instruction as mandated by their individual education plan (IEP) throughout the school closure, continuing to innovate. Schools that struggled the most to innovate and implement new practices during the pandemic were ones that did not have a very strong innovative environment to begin with. This cements even more the importance of placing innovation in the forefront of priorities for school leadership.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was a beginning exploration of innovation in a special education school. One area of future research is to take the conceptual framework created for this study and use it to evaluate how innovation is practiced in other special education schools. This study's school in a northeast state may not be representative of all the special education schools in this association. Even though the case included significant data, it still only focused on a single school with a smaller sample size of interview participants, making it challenging to generalize the study's findings. I recommend this exploratory study be continued in a multiple case study of schools across the U.S. This would increase the sample size and allow generalizations to be made regarding the study's implications. This study's methodology could also be repeated in a general education school in the same northeast state to see how innovation differs in public schools.

Conclusion

Innovation is a mindset and culture that must be developed across all facets of a school environment. Education's direction has been narrowly focused far too long on standardization and aiming for average, lessening educator's creativity. If future school leaders want to solve student's unique needs and complex problems, they must facilitate teachers working with people from disciplines outside their own, push themselves out of their comfort zones, and continuously seek out training and research for themselves and their staff. This is what our students need from us so that they can maximize their growth and achievement. This is what all students need.

Innovation implementation is the first step towards educational equity amongst all students, especially students with disabilities. School leaders need to keep the needs of the individual student at the forefront of their efforts. Special education is a responsibility for every school stakeholder, and a core skill for every educator and administrator to demonstrate (Pazey, Garcia, & Cole, 2012). According to Theoharis's (2007) definition of social justice, principals should make central to their advocacy, leadership practice, and vision, working to eliminate marginalization in schools. This includes inclusive schooling practices for students with disabilities. He builds upon the work on Sapon-Shevin (2003) who asserted that, "Inclusion is not about disability… Inclusion is about social justice… By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us" (pp. 26, 28).

I believe, right now in the unknown state that education is in, schools must look to change or be left behind. Innovation does not just happen. Innovation lives within a school and its people. This study can open the door to new ways researchers and practitioners think about educational innovations, specifically from the perspective of special education. Leaders need to leverage the power of innovation in their schools to improve special education practices, to ensure that all students are receiving an equitable education. Innovation is not just about the latest technology, tool, or program. Innovation *is* special education.

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Funds of Knowledge and Educational Leadership: Recognizing and Leveraging Untapped Leadership Talent

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This article discusses the issue of inequities in educational leadership, of which we attribute largely to social capital and how educators interpret this capital. This concept is presented along with a range of leadership styles commonly accepted in education. An argument is made for using Funds of Knowledge as a lens for understanding leadership as well as in practice for addressing the social capital dilemma. We argue that leadership styles are not enough to correct inequities, but can be applied along with this Funds of Knowledge lens to identify and utilize untapped leadership in a range of educational settings.

Keywords: Leadership, Social Capital, Funds of Knowledge, influence, oppression.

Recent global uncertainties have shed light on several issues in the field of education. In addition to the constant reminder of political impacts on the future of our profession, the global health crisis resurfaced by Covid-19, and punctuated massive inequalities, continue to be glaringly present. Closures of low-income school sites put teachers in a new position to transform their instruction using ineffective and insufficient tools, and have forced school leaders to be the bearer of a constant stream of bad news to thousands of students and families in their communities. This environment of distance learning has presented another problem, perhaps one hidden to the public as a whole, and has been even more detrimental to the field of education. School leaders have been faced with the challenge of guiding and overseeing employees who are working from home. Some leaders have become stricter with rules and focus on accountability, while others have been trying their best to recreate the same procedures they had on site; still, a few others have challenged themselves to see this as an opportunity for reimagining leadership. In times of strife, it can be helpful to break from the cycles of tradition and reproduction by seeking a new approach. This paper offers such an approach to school leadership.

In this article, we will review perceptions of good leaders in school settings, challenge some of these perceptions using an understanding of social capital, and explore possibilities for addressing inequities through a Funds of Knowledge approach that may create opportunities for untapped leadership talent.

Perceptions of Leadership

While there are many definitions of leadership, Northouse (2016) offers one of the most elemental and, arguably, one of the most helpful. He writes, "Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal" (p.6). There are many attributes one can exhibit in a professional setting that may influence others towards a common goal, and interpreting effective influence is a complex process. Throughout educational research communities, there are many perspectives on how leadership can be conceptualized and defined by a set of standards (Young, Anderson & Nash, 2017) or competencies (Karadag, 2017).

The broader traditional study of leadership often examines roles in management, largely due to the conceptualization of leadership as a quality which is located in the leader—trait leadership is one example of this (Bryman, 1992). The Harvard Business School argues that there are six characteristics of effective leaders: influencing others, transparency, innovation, integrity, decisiveness, and optimism (Landry, 2018). The Blake-Mouton managerial grid is another popular model that polarizes four categories of leadership style on an X and Y axis of concern for people and concern for results, arguing that a balance of both are necessary for good leadership and a positive work environment that produces team efforts (Mind Tools).

Transformative Educational Leadership

Some researchers would argue that leadership in an educational setting must be analyzed with a different set of tools and measures, specific for educational outcomes. Lynch (2016) argues that there are five leadership styles that can have transformative effects in education settings: constructivist leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, invitational leadership, and strategic leadership. Others argue that leadership style is not enough, but purpose should hold precedence. Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) argue for leadership centered on equity practices that promote activism. This perspective is taking hold in many circles that advocate social

justice changes in the field of education.

Distributed or shared leadership envisions leadership as a quality or process found in a group rather than as a quality or responsibility residing in a position or person (Bolden, Petrov, & Gosling, 2008; Jones, Hadgraft, Harvey, Lefoe, & Ryland, 2014; Bolden, Jones, Davis, & Gentle, 2015; Woods, Bennett, Harvey, & Wise, 2004). Shared leadership repositions leadership as an emergent quality of a group rather than as a single formal role given to someone. This reconceptualization makes leadership involvement accessible to those without formal leadership roles, and is an environment in which the skills all individuals bring are much more likely to be valued and allowed to be leveraged toward the good of the organization.

The Missing Element in Educational Leadership Conversations

We presented this broad range of categories concerning leadership styles to emphasize the wide range of definitions and understandings related to leadership. Each may be valuable in its own way. Instead of advocating for one perspective on leadership over another, we seek to add an element to the broader conversation about leadership. Rather than focusing merely on leader output and capacity, it is important to first analyze the presence of social capital in the workforce and how it impacts perceptions of leadership.

It is no secret that even in the field of education, there seems to be a certain set of personal traits that remain prevalent in those who hold leadership positions. Fast tracking, nepotism, and rejection of equitable hiring practices are real issues in many educational settings and provide fodder for water cooler conversations throughout the education sector. The intersectionality of various forces of oppression in the workplace result in fewer opportunities for marginalized groups, even in an era where women dominate the field of education and minorities are the fastest growing groups of both students and teachers (Macias & Stephens, 2017). Educational institutions that seek to avoid these overtly negative practices may fall prey to a less visible set of oppressive outcomes. Educators, particularly those who may become educational leaders, must learn to become what Freire (2014) called dialogical; in other words, we must embrace open dialogue about oppressive actions and circumstances. In order to do so, we must understand social capital and how it impacts the professional experiences of educators.

Educators who pursue leadership positions must be prepared to model all aspects of equitable praxis. Freire's (2014) work reminds educators that work is more than just action, but a combination of action and reflection. Part of this reflection involves naming the world around us including oppressive systems, a practice which has been muted and glossed over for too long in the field of education. "Dialogue is thus an existential necessity" (Freire, 2014, p. 88). Yet, "dialogue cannot exist without humility" (Freire, 2014, p. 90). Educators must embrace open dialogue about oppressive actions and circumstances. In order to do so, we must understand social capital and how it impacts the professional experiences of educators.

Social Capital

Social capital is "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that an individual or group accrues by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p. 119). This definition imagines social capital within a network of relationships, and social capital is the sum total of nodes on that network—the number of, and quality of, social connections. It is important to note

that social capital functions like legal tender in a particular country: we do not say that money is good or bad; it just is. It holds value within that system of exchange, but it also holds less value (and sometimes none) in another system, just like Japanese Yen hold value in Japan, but if a person was to travel to Turkey, they would need Lira, not Yen, as the medium of exchange. Different social contexts, therefore, hold different value systems, and a person's social capital in one context does not necessarily translate equally to other contexts. A congressional aid may have significant social capital in her own sociopolitical sphere, but less social capital in urban Los Angeles. This lack of Angelean social capital would make her social mobility in Los Angeles much more difficult than a person who has an extensive Angelean social network, and therefore more Angelean social capital.

Social capital manifests in a variety of ways in the workplace. Some individuals may have stronger personal connections with management due to sociocultural commonalities. Some individuals may have language patterns that reflect that of the dominant syntax within that social context. Some individuals may have access to resources outside of the workplace that further their status in the field. These forms of social capital may lead to upward mobility or allow for perceptions of leadership qualities in those who possess such capital regardless of their direct impact on abilities to produce particular outcomes as a leader. We can learn much about how society uses language, sex, origin, and other characteristics to reproduce social class systems from Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) groundbreaking work on *reproduction*. This work is often utilized as a lens to criticize how the education system subjugates students. However, we rarely consider how this process of reproduction that educators promote, knowingly or unknowingly, may also therein subjugate themselves from upward mobility at the same time. In other words, by establishing a hierarchy of appearance, communication, demeanor, or any other such qualities, educators may be supporting the act of using larger societal expectations on them where evaluations for leadership potential are concerned.

Social Capital in Education

Some theorize that when a profession is more associated with femininity, as education is, there are social ramifications of losing prestige (Cacouault-Bitaud, 2001). Drudy (2008) argues that this reflects several social issues revolving around sexism and perceptions of masculinity, resulting in negative working conditions for all genders. This issue creates a situation in which educators are starting from a disadvantage when it comes to upward mobility in their career, since they have already chosen a profession that has less prestige than other fields, therefore leading us to unconsciously respond to other forms of social capital as indicators of leadership qualities.

Even in a profession steeped in discussions of diversity, equity, and social justice, we may still struggle with our own perception of leadership potential by deferring to what Bourdieu (2013) calls symbolic capital, which can be a misrecognition of nobility, goodwill, repute, notoriety, prestige, honor, renown, talent, intelligence, culture, distinction, and taste (p.299). In other words, when certain members of the population hold power, we may be more likely to associate their characteristics with power. The dynamic leader's personality qualities, good or bad, become desired qualities, and these qualities become a sort of litmus test thereafter for good leadership among their followers. Therefore, the educator who may have traits that reflect those of others in power may be, in turn, perceived as powerful and perhaps as having leadership potential beyond their peers. Those who hold power often ascribe their power to (and believe it to be the result of) their own effort, and are more likely to perceive others as having leadership qualities if they are

similar to themselves. This principle of human power dynamics has significant implications for the development of educational leaders; indeed, if current leaders are more likely to perceive people with similar social capital to themselves as potential leaders, then those with dissimilar social capital to current leaders may go overlooked. An educator's social capital is likely affirmed or diminished throughout their evaluations: while they may appear to have improved in many school settings, their scores are often nothing more than a subjective examination scored on arbitrary skill sets. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) criticize the use of examinations in school systems calling them the "unexplained legacy of national tradition or the inexplicable action of the congenital conservatism of academics" (p.141). Likewise, teachers often have the same criticisms of standardized tests for students in our current school systems. Yet, the teacher evaluation and tools used for promotion often also lack authenticity. Rather than being driven by the one being evaluated, these evaluations are imposed by systems of power; thus reproducing or diminishing social capital that matches that system of power.

This phenomena impacts not only women, people of color, and women of color disproportionately, but may even impact white men who do not have as much social capital as their peers. The ethics of this equity issue are paralleled by practical ramifications: if this phenomenon occurs in educational leadership development and selection, then it is likely that large pools of leadership talent remain unrecognized and underutilized, resulting in a commensurate lack of organizational optimization.

Funds of Knowledge as a Response to Reproduction

If the social theory of reproduction may explain the ongoing inequalities we see in leadership opportunities and styles among educators, it may be possible to resolve some of this reproduction with a theory for sociocultural learning. Funds of Knowledge (FoK) is defined as "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household and individual functioning and well-being" (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005, p.133). In other words, FoK are skill sets developed according to one's unique life experience, set of values, and personal perspectives. This perspective also implies the assumption that all experiences are valuable in some way, which aligns with a progressive philosophy that most educators claim to embrace. The use of a FoK approach to learning in any setting assumes an honest assessment of social capital in order to challenge inequities. In fact, many researchers believe that using FoK combats the longstanding problem of deficit thinking (Hogg, 2011; Macias & Lalas, 2014).

Benefits of Using Funds of Knowledge

Many researchers advocate for the use of a FoK approach for instruction with K-12 students, preparation of K-12 teachers, and instruction of adults in higher education settings because the method almost always results in authentic learner engagement. In the K-12 setting, using FoK has provided a method for promoting culturally relevant instructional methods that reach minority student populations and increase academic engagement (Macias & Lalas, 2014). FoK has also proven to be useful in working with adults. Larotta and Serrano (2012) found that investigating parents' funds of knowledge improved the experiences of students during reading instruction and helped ESL parents get more involved. Use of FoK has also been found to enrich the pedagogy and practice of preservice teachers and limit deficit thinking as they explored expertise in their school communities (Licona, 2013; McLaughlin & Barton, 2013). Teaching in

this manner encourages the learner to utilize their own personal skills and experiences that may not otherwise apply in a traditional learning environment. Given that most leadership approaches in education seek to encourage engagement, equity, and teamwork, it would seem beneficial to approach leadership with a FoK lens.

Funds of Knowledge in Leadership

Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's (2005) study on FoK involved training a group of teachers to analyze their students with an anthropologically informed lens that takes into account experiences, skills, and sets of knowledge that pertain to personal lives. Teachers then utilized the funds of knowledge that their students possessed and intentionally implemented them into their lessons. The result of this original study and hundreds of reproduced variations resulted in higher levels of engagement with learning content.

How Can Leaders Do This in an Educational Setting?

By breaking Gonzalez, Moll, and Amanti's process into simpler general steps, we find a process that can be easily applied to educational leadership.

Step 1: Visit, observe, and learn from the population in question. Just as these teachers visited, observed, and joined the communities of their students, so must educational leaders visit, observe, and learn from the everyday work that educators do. The key to this step is following the anthropological approach that respects the population as opposed to observing with authority. This means that leaders must leave their offices and administrative wings and engage their employees in the spaces in which they do their work, not with the intent to evaluate or direct, but rather to learn; the leader becomes an ethnographer, studying and learning from organization members in their workplace.

Step 2: Analyze results and do more research. Just as the teachers in this original FoK study did, the leader must reflect on field notes, identify themes, and conduct further research on findings. This means that leaders would have to draw upon their training as researchers or, in some instances, be retrained if necessary. This may include learning ethnographic tools or approaches and thoughtfully negotiating the tension between embedded ethnographic research (Lewis & Russel, 2011) and more traditional distancing from research subjects. Regardless of what leaders learn throughout Step 1, the results can be valuable for furthering goals, objectives, and outcomes in this educational setting. The purpose of Step 2 is to allow for reflection on the skills and strengths the employees in question possess that are underutilized. Imagine all the unsung accomplishments and special skill sets that go unnoticed each day in a school setting that can be discovered and then leveraged through fully detailed observational inquiry!

Step 3: Brainstorm and apply uses for FoK of employees. In the same manner that the teachers in the original FoK study went on to find ways to implement their students' FoK into their lessons, so must educational leaders next find ways to apply their employees' FoK in the workplace. Inevitably, this implies a willingness to explore at least some shared leadership and teamwork. Delegation of responsibilities, highlighting of accomplishments, recognition of efforts, and collaboration for change would follow as leaders find ways to use these FoK. We believe that these outcomes all lend themselves to what research identifies as good leadership qualities and would actively shift any deficit thinking by creating new social capital for teachers, staff, counselors, and other employees.

Challenges to the Approach

Implementation of our proposed approach raises some potential challenges within the current structures of today's educational institutions. One such challenge is that the power differential between administrators and subordinates will affect the interactions between administrators and teachers or staff. Obviously, a formal ethnographic study of one's own subordinates is fraught with ethical challenges, but most administrators need not engage in formal or comprehensive ethnography; rather, an informal and relational approach is suggested. While power differentials remain and must be considered with such an approach, we recommend that administrators seek to understand an employee's FoK and approach employee interactions as a learner. While formal evaluations must include performance reviews, if an administrator seeks to learn about subordinate FoK outside of the evaluation process, this could contribute to a positive shift in organizational culture. Another challenge to such an approach are the limitations and strictures imposed by a collective bargaining environment. Although unions are not found in all educational institutions, they are found in many. Faculty and staff unions negotiate contracts and working conditions, and evaluation processes are negotiated by unions. Linking a FoK approach to the contractually identified processes may be problematic as these would first need to be negotiated; however, if administrators used an ethnographic lens of their own and simply engaged with subordinates as a learner, these problems could be considerably mitigated. Even a servant leadership approach (Greenleaf, 2002) employs an informal learning approach that need not be linked to formal evaluative processes; consequently, there are several different approaches to this kind of learning that are available to administrators.

Untapped Leadership Talent

The constructs of both social capital and funds of knowledge are complementary. Indeed, the conceptualization of funds of knowledge would not have been possible without the social capital construct. Each construct uses the metaphors of currency to explain social power; in this way these two constructs are easily blended. Social capital is a much broader construct, however, and is applicable in a wide variety of contexts, providing a useful lens for the analysis of social, political, cultural, and relational dynamics. Funds of knowledge has roots in environments of power inequality as a means to shift the locus of value toward those with less power, thus utilizing knowledge and skill that was previously undervalued. This is a tool to strategically diversify the knowledge available to the larger community and to be a vehicle for equitable inclusion. We argue that the use of these two constructs together can allow a more equitable framework for selecting new educational leaders, making more knowledge and skill accessible to the institutional leadership as a whole, and improving leadership quality.

Using FoK as a lens to analyze how to approach leadership in practice may promote several positive outcomes. First, untapped leadership talents will likely be discovered that can benefit the school community and ultimately change how we all view social capital and, in turn, leadership potential. Second, this approach may encourage those in leadership to explore more equitable practices that promote shared responsibilities and constructive collaboration. Third, these leadership talents, having found new purpose, can be honed, and over time result in a more diverse population of leadership. In this instance diverse has multiple meanings: demographically diverse as well as a diversity of skills and personalities.

In order for this approach to be maintained, a consistent commitment to mentoring must be

present among leadership. New education professionals, both faculty and staff, need careful mentoring from both colleagues and administrators as they grow in their career (Lambeth, 2012). Wang and Odell (2002) argue that this mentoring should be humanistic and personal, use an apprentice model, and promote a critical constructivist perspective. Likewise, those who fulfill management positions also require mentoring that is personal and promotes the growth of their unique capital as well as support for navigating barriers they may face (Mendez-Morse, Murakami, Byrne-Jimenez, Hernandez, 2015).

Overall, we believe that in order to address the diverse challenges that educators will undoubtedly continue to face, those in leadership must consider tapping into the Funds of Knowledge of the staff and faculty and welcome diverse perspectives. New problems require new ideas and new leadership styles. This untapped currency can bring value to the workplace and provide a better return as we invest in the social capital of our colleagues who may have not been considered for leadership before.

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Reports from the Field

What School Leaders Need to Consider About Virtual Engagement at Home During the Pandemic: Learning Loss or Learning Gain? A Commentary

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There is a common assumption in education that lack of face-to-face instruction during COVID-19 will result in a learning loss when students return to physical classrooms. While some studies reported interesting results on learning loss, more research must be done to inform schooling practices. At a recorded webinar, learning loss was examined by analyzing the ideas of school leaders who manifested deficit-based and/or asset-based views in doing virtual instruction at home. The authors wrote this commentary as a critical reflection of the ideas presented by leaders who reimagined learning gain instead of loss as they recognize, value, and honor the many culturally- and socially-situated knowledge and skills students have acquired and learned during these unprecedented times.

Keywords: learning loss, learning gain, deficit-based mindset, asset-based learning, equity

In general, many school leaders and educators are not well-equipped to meet the pedagogical challenges of distance learning and collective emotional trauma caused by social and physical isolation during these unprecedented times brought upon us by the global COVID-19 pandemic. Educational leaders and teachers are constantly pivoting and learning how to deal with the new reality of managing their personal lives and daily routines of working from home, while pursuing their careers and meeting the individual needs of their students. Caring and exceptional teachers attempt to make adaptations and engage students all the time (Lalas & Strikwerda, 2020) in their virtual classrooms to provide them with meaningful instruction, access to academic content, and daily live interactions. School leaders support their teachers by encouraging them to provide creative learning experiences and assume generous responsibility for their students regardless of the many out-of-school factors and daily stressors that are out of their inherent control (Berliner, 2013).

For these educational leaders and teachers who are operating in virtual spaces, there are no excuses for not discovering explicit ways of facilitating access to learning and engagement for all students including the dual language learners and students with special needs. However, during the first quarter of the 2020-2021 school year, data show that attendance in many California schools are below 80% and around 50% of students are receiving D's and F's who are participating in the hybrid model (Blume & Barajas, 2020). Among dual language learners and students with special needs, the numbers are even more dismal reaching up to 100% failure rate on the Facilitated Online Learning programs that are mostly self-instructed in some schools (Blume & Barajas, 2020). There is a growing consensus that the achievement gap between students from high-income families and traditionally marginalized students from low-income families continues to exacerbate during the pandemic (Hollingsworth, 2020).

During this time of COVID-19, homes are transformed into centers of learning and teaching. With or without parental involvement, training across socioeconomic backgrounds and implicit or explicit guidance from educators, parents are taking on the role of guiding, helping, and monitoring their own children's education in implementing distance learning (Erdogan et al., 2019). Consequently, a tension exists between the potential within the concept of learning gain among those students with parents who are able to guide their students' work, and the notion of learning loss because of school closure. The key issue, then, becomes this: how can the concept of equity be truly tapped into as a solution during distance learning? Equity is important because it is a frame of mind that guides what appropriate and relevant remedies can be done to meet the needs of students while doing distance learning at home or in-person instruction.

This commentary addresses the challenges of school leaders and educators during the pandemic and how to employ equity as a solution for learning loss. What are the different ways of describing learning loss, and the equitable practices to address them? How do the different views about learning loss from educators manifest in handling the curriculum and delivery of instruction in distance learning? Are educators and school leaders creating virtual spaces that value the diverse experiences and knowledge of students as assets? Are students provided with equitable and ample opportunities to experience meaningful engagement and demonstrate their learning in virtual or physical spaces? We conducted a webinar conversation with experienced school site administrators and teacher-leaders to address these questions and seek answers or practical solutions to these concerns. We are sharing the results in this commentary.

Learning Loss as a Deficit View

Learning loss is a concern "that students aren't learning content and mastery skills at the same rate they typically would be" (Pier et al., 2021). As a measure of achievement, it is the "difference between what they would have learned in a normal year and what they learn during the pandemic" (Pier et al., 2021). Quantitatively using Measures of Academic Progress (MAP), research evidence on learning loss produced by CORE-PACE Research Partnership showed significant learning loss in both English Language Arts and Mathematics with students in earlier grades (Pier et al., 2021). Interestingly, according to a recent report from Collaborative for Student Growth titled *Learning through COVID-19* (2020) that includes comparative data from about 4.4 million students in grades 3-8, on average students are learning more than expected during the pandemic. The data compared the results from the (MAP) assessments that were given in the fall 2019 (pre-pandemic) and then again in fall 2020 (during the pandemic) which demonstrated a learning gain in both math and reading across those grade levels (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Beth Tarasawa, head of the research extorted in a news report that, "most students made some learning gains in both reading and math since COVID started" (Turner, 2020, p.3). This report provides much needed encouragement as it combats the fearful predictions of a massive learning loss during the pandemic, demonstrating that a learning gain in students is plausible even during difficult times.

As educators and school leaders continue to explore the phenomena of learning loss, an equitable lens may be needed to foster transformative solutions in addressing the educational disparity our students are experiencing during distance learning. In this commentary, equity is defined as, "the relevant and responsive educational attempts that are culturally and socially situated to meet the program or instructional needs of students, when they need them, relative to their academic backgrounds and social and cultural identities" (Lalas & Strikwerda, 2020, p. 294). To develop an understanding of learning loss through the lens of equity in distance learning we, the authors of this commentary, posed a series of questions to a panel of educators as an exploratory conversation with the aim to: 1) develop an objectified understanding of the notion of learning loss, 2) examine viewpoints that reflect certain educational theory and practice, and 3) identify some practical solutions to enhance learning acceleration. These experienced educators engaged in our courageous webinar conversation and freely expressed their understanding and manifestations of race, racism, social class, and equity across content areas in distance learning, while employed in their regular jobs as district educators. During the conversation, it was discussed that teachers, classified staff, and administrators must be considered "essential workers" on the ground pulling the education of students together during this difficult time of the pandemic. They viewed the administrators, teachers, and staff as essential workers because they are continually doing what's best for students out in the real world making a difference in the lives of our youth that attend our K-12 public schools. They all demonstrated their criticality as scholar-practitioners as they candidly and bravely spoke upon their lived experiences as educators dedicated to the academic success of all their students, especially during the pandemic.

Understandably, parents, teachers, and school leaders are concerned that when the pandemic subsides, many students will return to physical schools with significant learning loss, similar to what has been shown to occur during the summer when there is a long period away from school (Soland et al., 2020). They are making assumptions that the absence of face-to-face instruction will ultimately lead to a loss of knowledge that was acquired by students as measured by standardized test scores from the previous year (Soland et al., 2020). It will be very interesting

to note the appropriateness of applying the concept of learning loss to students who are receiving virtual instruction or distance learning during the pandemic considering the strict requirements of California Senate Bill 98 (SB 98) for all schools to provide daily live interaction, content area teaching equivalent to in-person instruction, access to connectivity and devices, and other academic supports (Cummins, 2020). Moreover, the educators in the webinar panel (see Appendix A) expressed a unified view that "learning loss," although well-described quantitatively in literature, may be a classic form of deficit view in education (Valencia, 1997); collectively, as a group, they rejected the notion of learning loss as a manifestation of a deficit-based mindset. They discussed and expressed the belief that learning loss is based on deficit thinking that highlights the academic performance outcomes of students while deflecting the role of the schools in providing effective equitable ways to support student learning. In theory, deficit thinking is the perspective that emphasizes internal or external cultural deficiencies, which limits one's cognitive, linguistic, and motivational abilities for learning (Strikwerda, 2019). According to Valencia (1997) the deficit theory in education is pervasive because:

> Of the several theories that have been advanced to explicate school failure among the economically disadvantaged minority students, the deficit model has held the strongest currency—spanning well over a century, with roots going back further to the beginning of American colonies of the 1600s. (p. 2)

It was revealing to hear how the panelists discussed the different ways districts approached the SB-98 Trailer Bill and this was a good reminder how, much like our society, districts are also uncertain how to effectively embrace learning during this time. The panelists considered how in meeting the requirements of the Trailer Bill, student engagement is one issue, while attendance is a completely different issue. For example, students can be marked present in their virtual classroom by logging into the live instructional meetings, turning in assignments, or through a parent notification via email or phone call to the teacher or office staff, and still not truly be engaged in their learning. The panelists shared how teachers are feeling frustrated as students seem unmotivated, unwilling to produce simple assignments, or respond to questions asked during live instruction. Thus, the notion of learning loss is perceived to be real when attendance is down and grades are continually dropping due to student disengagement and lack of doing work (Brume & Barajas, 2020).

Learning Loss or Learning that Has Not Been Attained?

As the pandemic spread in the spring of 2020, online, remote, or distance learning became the delivery mode of instruction. Because of this abrupt change and presumably, the relative unpreparedness of schools and most of its administrators and teachers, there was a reliance on asynchronous distance learning (Watson, 2020), banking model of instruction (Freire, 1970), and didactic teaching methods instead of collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and valuing the authentic voices and artistic expressions of students in either in-person or remote teaching contexts (Hollingsworth, 2020). Currently among educators, there seems to be an internal feeling of needing to make up for the time lost in the spring, as well as the beginning of this school year, which results in an overemphasis of pouring in as much information into students' heads as possible.

The panelists shared that even though students were given a device and a hotspot when

schools first shut down and converted to distance learning, some students feel uncomfortable showing their faces on camera while learning from the personal spaces of their rooms and homes. Students that are not as fortunate, might not want to reveal to their classmates the daily realities of their families' living environment. One panelist mentioned that some students live in a space of a rented garage and are ashamed of these realities. Another panelist shared how the living environments can be chaotic with babies crying and parents yelling, without the realization of how this may be impeding the learning of their students. Administrators, in the panel, commented that while doing virtual walkthroughs and classroom observations they noticed that mostly everyone keeps their cameras off and their microphones muted the entire time, which leads to little, or no lively interaction with the students at all. One panelist commented that teachers should embrace an asset-based approach, building off of the values that students already have, rather than looking at them with a deficit-based approach and seeing what they do not have. All panelists asserted that educators are the ones who must exhibit the high expectation that all students can learn. Not surprisingly, the panelists agreed that there is a need to redefine our purpose in education and approach in teaching during distance learning.

All the panelists raised excellent points about the new skills and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1979b; 1987) that students are acquiring in this new setting. Cultural capital refers to culturally-based common practices of students that may put them at an advantage over others. Examples of culturally-based practices include cultural awareness, knowledge about a variety of practices at school, home, and community, as well as propensity for going to the museums and art exhibits, and taste of music, art, food, and other creative forms (Lalas et al., 2019). Some panelists believed that this new delivery of instruction via distance learning in students' homes may present a transformative opportunity to implement teaching and learning outside the hegemonic systems of schools by recognizing the wealth of students' funds of knowledge, which is comprised of the students' multiple identities, social backgrounds, and lived experiences at their home, neighborhoods, and communities (Macias & Lalas, 2014).

Subsequently, the group "moved forward" and discussed learning loss from an asset-based perspective. One of the panelists powerfully retorted, "How can you have 'learning loss'? Instead it should be defined as 'learning that has not been gained or obtained', so there's really nothing to lose!" The panelist continued by explaining how it is unjust to penalize students for opportunities that were never presented to learn. Instead of punishing and discouraging students by giving them low grades based on standardized curriculum and competitive forums, educators need to focus on creating opportunities for collaborative and compassionate learning where grades do not become the sole measure for knowledge that has been attained. At this time of the pandemic, educators need to rethink their traditional ways of measuring learning (Brume & Barajas, 2020) by discouraging standardized grading practices and instead, adopting more relatively progressive nontraditional virtual platforms. By continuing to grade and measure learning through traditional methods, teachers are essentially grading students, especially those from low-income families, without considering the quality of home resources, which include not only the physical space where learning is occurring, but also the availability of adults and parents who can support and supplement their learning in the home (Brume & Barajas, 2020).

Moving Away from a Deficit-Based Mindset and Moving Towards Asset-Based Learning

Clearly from the panelists' comments, the term learning loss does not appear to take into consideration the continual cultural and social learning that has been occurring in the students'

homes. One panelist stated, “The demographic divide is not new and these challenges have always plagued our diverse and historically underserved communities. It is now the time to change it.” From this panelist’s comment, it is inferable that educators and parents are attempting to adapt to an uncharted territory that requires flexibility in allowing diverse opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in ways that are relevant and meaningful to them (Hollingsworth, 2020). Thereupon, the panelists switched up the whole idea of learning loss to learning gain, which may be liberating for the audience as expressed by some in the webinar chat. They explained how there is so much more learning that is occurring in the home that goes unrecognized.

In practice, we, the authors of this commentary, think that distance learning in virtual contexts are redefining the term homework as *home-work,* or work done at home. Students are engaged in doing *home-work* that is culturally and socially situated, which exemplify the use of funds of knowledge through very real-life experiences such as doing family chores, going grocery shopping with parents or older siblings, language translations for parents, babysitting, and using Algebra or math facts to purchase food and supplies (Gonzales et al., 2005; Moll et al., 1992). *Home-work*, as we call it in this commentary, tends not to be valued in education as a source of social and cultural learning gains. However, with due recognition of the importance of *home-work* and other funds of knowledge and home resources, the quality and quantity of online learning experiences children receive at home may improve (Erdogan et al., 2019). Thus, it is vital that parents and educators both recognize how their beliefs and values pertaining to virtual and physical spaces can enhance or impede the learning that occurs in students. The obvious practical solution is for school districts to invest in high-quality professional development on effective participation in distance learning for parents, teachers, and administrators.

The switch from deficit thinking to asset-based view must include the recognition of the important role homes can play in distance learning during the pandemic. One of the panelists made this powerful statement that, “generally, we need to move away from the thought that if students are not getting their knowledge from us, from teachers, that they aren't getting it at all.” For thinking to shift, the panelists agreed that transformation in our view of the role of homes in distance learning requires open courageous dialogue, extended conversations, and critical reflection.

What Can Administrators and Teachers do to Transform the System?

While all stakeholders want transformational change, it was evident by their comments that many felt constrained by the perpetuation of the top-down system. As administrators and teachers, we need to create a culture of authentic critical thinking that literally dismantles not just the prescriptivist nature of education, but also recognizes the communities that it benefits. This is the true essence of Freire's (1970) notion of humanization which requires educators to demonstrate true generosity in prioritizing the well-being of their students over detached policies and ideologies surrounding distance learning in general, and learning loss, in particular. Learning loss seems to be a concept driven by the educational system in describing the perceived negative impact on student outcomes due to school closure, rather than the school system’s failure to influence the attainment of student learning by further developing the students’ newly acquired proficiency in using technology, recognizing students’ funds of knowledge, providing parent training on the use of technology, and valuing how learning gain could be achieved in doing practical *home-work*. Whether a deficit- or asset-based lens is used in addressing learning loss, school leaders must be committed in making sure that equity is at forefront of their efforts in providing instructional

programs that meet the needs of all students, especially the most vulnerable—those who need the most assistance, and who are historically marginalized.

Strategies to Engage, Rethink, and Reimagine Education

It is time to rethink and reimagine education. This pandemic has shed light on the educational disparities, inequities, and injustices that are driven by a deficit view of learning and teaching. During COVID-19, attendance is down, students might not be as actively participating, and teachers and administrators may naturally assert that students are not motivated. However, educators need to reflect and think: Is it the digital divide? Is it our pedagogical practices? Or is it our mindset in approaching education in virtual contexts? If educators define learning loss as losing time and not experiencing school because of extended time away from face-to-face instruction, that could be the traditional way of looking at a loss. Perhaps, our students are not coming back to us with a "learning loss," but rather bring with them many life-skills and academic competencies gained during this time of online education—learning that would not have been attained in the traditional classroom setting.

Therefore, moving forward to enhance learning acceleration, all educators, including school leaders and teachers, must be facilitators of knowledge and engagement (Lalas & Strikwerda, 2020). Although there are specific complementary strategies that have been recommended such as "high-dosage tutoring" and "accelerated learning" (Sellery, 2021), more importantly, school leaders need to provide opportunities for students to experience trusting their capabilities and to know that they can use their voice, think critically, and ask questions. All educators need to provide safe virtual spaces which allow students to teach each other, while the teacher steps back and guides the conversations. It is also very important to use assessments and checking for understanding to get to know who the students are and how they learn. Creating an environment with relevant activities that students can connect to and find interesting will help them make meaning and have a successful learning experience (Hollingsworth, 2020). Educators and school leaders can increase learning by accepting our students' background knowledge and home resources as assets and finding ways to embrace the essence of teaching as a joyful rigorous experience.

Take-Away: Equity in Virtual or Physical Contexts as a Solution for Learning Loss

Education is a conscious decision-making process. While all of us must recognize the possibility of learning loss, we must at the same time ascertain that the talents of all students including the historically marginalized are valued. Consequently, when they are given opportunities to demonstrate their abilities in ways that are meaningful and relevant to them, learning gain might naturally occur as a predictable outcome. School leaders and teachers must embrace the true notion of equity in envisioning virtual spaces that accept, value, and provide diverse opportunities for our students to demonstrate what knowledge they acquired during the pandemic, and recognize these as a learning gain.

As covered in this webinar, the participating administrators and teachers shared their understanding of learning loss, described the various equitable ways of addressing it, how they handle instruction in virtual spaces while they value their students' assets, and how they provide them opportunities for meaningful engagement. Likewise, Lalas and Strikwerda (2020) support the following implications from the webinar which advises administrators, school leaders,

teachers, parents, and all school personnel that, in providing equitable learning across virtual or physical spaces, they must be cognizant of and prepared to address the following:

- Identifying experiences of anxiety and discomfort in discovering different ways and practices of learning.
- Acknowledging that students have different needs, attention, and services and value what students can do to inform our decisions.
- Allowing students to articulate their own stories and experiences with trauma and social isolation.
- Recognizing students' personal identities as an expression of their authentic voices and identifying the unique talents of students.

Identifying Experiences of Anxiety and Discomfort in Discovering Different Ways and Practices of Learning

Distance learning has caused parents, educators, and students to pivot quickly and rapidly. All educators have been going through the discomfort of change while continually problem solving how to make this mode of learning effective. There is anxiety that naturally exists in the unknown realm of distance learning, while excitement and joy abounds in the adventure of discovery of new practices and learning experiences.

Good intentions from educators and parents are not enough. Educators and school leaders have to discover, reflect, and refine what pedagogical practices are effective in virtual spaces. They have to continue exploring the different ways students can divulge in and pursue their identity, skills, intellect, and criticality, while presenting them with culturally relevant and historically responsive texts and lesson plans (Muhammad, 2020). Parents and educators alike need to be committed and willing to try new methods of teaching and learning that equitably meet the needs of students (Lalas & Strikwerda, 2020).

Acknowledging that Students Have Different Needs, Attention, and Services and Value What Students Can Do to Inform Our Decisions

Students do not come to us as blank slates, but rather, they embody all the vast array of knowledge and different experiences they have acquired since their birth. Thus, it is imperative for educators, including parents, to understand who their students are, how they learn, and what educators can do to motivate and facilitate their engagement in physical and virtual spaces (Lalas et al., 2019). Even during this ongoing pandemic, students still engaged in distance learning are able to gain new abilities by combining the new ways of learning and modes of expression that they are acquiring in this technological mode of instructional delivery.

The transition to teaching and learning through virtual spaces has deepened the digital divide and exacerbated educational inequities experienced mostly by students who are historically marginalized (Hollingsworth, 2020). Even though school districts have triumphantly and generously distributed electronic devices and hot spots to help provide equal learning conditions, the inevitability of inequality currently abounds (Schneiderman, 2018, p.5). Even with these inequalities, students are taking what they know and have learned and are finding ways to build, apply, and expand their knowledge in meaningful and relevant ways.

Allowing Students to Articulate Their Own Stories and Experiences With Trauma and Social Isolation

Empowering students begins with providing safe in-person or virtual spaces where they can share their social and cultural experiences. Opening space for opportunities like these creates the condition for students to know each other better, fosters empathy, and builds trust with their peers and their teachers. It may help them to build self-confidence and experience a sense of belonging in their physical or virtual classrooms. It also provides the needed venue for students who are already feeling the pressure and emotions from the daily realities of many social, cultural, and life issues to release these emotions and thoughts in productive, supportive, and respectful ways.

In addition to building trust and empathy, providing opportunities for students to articulate their stories also creates a safe environment where students can recognize their commonalities within humanity by seeing themselves in others (Boyd et al., 2015). Relatability in human experiences creates a sense of unity within diversity. During times of crises, students need to feel socially and emotionally connected, while honoring their unique voices and feelings that shape their current realities. Providing opportunities for storytelling and shared experiences is fundamental in creating an equitable, peaceful, and caring world (Boyd et al., 2015).

Recognizing Students' Personal Identities as an Expression of Their Authentic Voices and Identify the Unique Talents of Students

Recognition is a powerful tool that can be used to provide much needed educational justice and equity. As stated in Nancy Fraser's book (1997), "nonrecognition and misrecognition… can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, reduced mode of being. Beyond simple lack of respect, it can inflict a grievous wound, saddling people with crippling self-hatred. Due recognition is not just a courtesy, but a vital human need" (Fraser, 1997, p. 14). Similar to adults, students desire to be recognized as having their own consequential identities, and to be valued and honored for their individual talents and skills. They want to be seen, heard, attended to, and cared for. When students feel that their classroom environments do not allow for recognition of who they are, they may disengage and find other ways to feel connected and express themselves.

It is important that virtual and physical classroom spaces provide opportunities for identity development and expression. Educators, school leaders, and parents need to recognize, value, and celebrate students' diverse talents and provide various opportunities for them to demonstrate what they know and learn by redistributing resources and services equitably as they learn about each student's unique individual strengths and weaknesses.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as the pandemic continues to highlight the challenges in teaching and learning in our current educational system, school leaders must always maintain hope and continue the discussion of equity beyond these tumultuous times. Administrators, as well as teachers, are academic leaders who must have the conviction, commitment, professional competence, and generosity to play a huge role in identifying, planning, and implementing equitable educational solutions as they advocate for educational justice for all. They must be comfortable in exercising

their personal and professional freedom of choice to release authority and redistribute power, when needed, and empower students with platforms that allow and encourage them to speak and visualize themselves as our nation's future leaders with the inherent capacity to make much needed equitable change within their social and cultural contexts in virtual or physical spaces. This type of leadership disposition and mindset would create and foster a primary belief of hope among our most vulnerable and traditionally underserved students. Conversely, although we join educators, administrators, and parents in recognizing the resiliency of students, we must not overestimate their attributes as individuals and underestimate the influencing power of the educational system.

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Appendix A

Webinar Panel

The webinar panelists include:

Sandy Torres, Principal Colton Joint USD,

Dr. Maria Ordaz, Assistant Principal, Rialto USD,

Dr. Chris Jackson, Math Coach, Rialto USD,

Frank Mata, High School AP English Teacher, Corona-Norco USD,

David Dillion, History Teacher and Instructional Planner, Riverside USD, and,

Dr. Rachael ReHage, English Teacher Redlands USD.

Book Review

Equity Partnerships: A Culturally Proficient Guide to Family, School, and Community Engagement By Angela R. Clark-Louque, Randall B. Lindsey, Reyes L. Quezada and Cynthia L. Jew (SAGE Publications)

Kimmie Tang
Biola University

M. C. Kate Esposito
California State University Dominguez Hills

The COVID-19 pandemic forced school leaders across educational systems worldwide to find alternatives to the traditional face-to-face instruction. Most responded by moving instruction to a virtual setting. According to the National Center for Education Statistics' recent Report on the Condition of Education, an estimated 80% of children transitioned from school-based learning to home-based learning (Hussar et al., 2020), and the number has dramatically increased in 2021 (Irwin et al., 2021). In doing so, long-standing technological and socioeconomic inequities facing society's most educationally vulnerable K-16 students become undeniably more evident (Andrew et al., 2020; Busby, Tanberk & BroadbandNow Team, 2020a; Tanberk & BroadbandNow Team, 2020b; Busby, Tanberk & Cooper, 2021). The reciprocal relationship between parents, schools and communities was further highlighted—bringing schools into the homes of students across the globe and thus, necessitating strong school-home partnerships. If the nation seeks to mitigate deleterious academic outcomes resulting from the COVID Pandemic, it is clear that families, schools, and communities must engage in thoughtful work situated within an equity framework.

Equity Partnerships: Cultural Proficient Guide to Family, School and Community Engagement provides readers with both a conceptual framework and specific strategies that families, educators and community members can engage in to foster equitable partnerships. The book is organized into four sections: understanding the central tenets of cultural proficiency; understanding the quality of previous engagement with families and communities; implementation of inclusive strategies for engagement; and finally, the tools needed to engage in such work. As the book's authors note, this structure seeks to "provide opportunities to learn concepts and strategies for engaging families, and communities through a lens of culturally proficient relationship building" (p. 1). This is achieved by providing both theory and opportunities for the application of such theories.

The first section, *The Basics of Cultural Proficiency and Engagement*, calls upon the readers to identify inequities manifested within the educational system, which the authors identify as "barriers." It is through the identification of these 4 barriers in the first chapter*, The Cultural Proficiency Framework: Tools for Family, School and Community Engagement,* that educators

evaluate the extent to which one is culturally proficient. The reflective tools enable the reader, through transformative actions, to include all stakeholders in the "design team." They further assert that the involvement of all stakeholders at the early stage of design is absolutely critical in promoting cultural proficiency through partnership and engagement. *The Why of Engagement* in chapter two provides the reader with a well-developed rationale specific to the formation of strong collaborations among families, communities, and schools. While partnerships between families and schools are "an integral part of students' educational lives and academic achievement" (p. 22), meaningful collaboration and partnership can be difficult to achieve. In addition, the authors make a case for the need to understand the historical, legal, and educational mandates and considerations that have fostered equity, inclusion, and collaborative partnership. In Chapter 3, *The Moral Imperative for Partnership,* the authors emphasize the need for culturally proficient leaders to prioritize family, school, and community engagement because of the *strong connection* partnerships bring to student achievement and to the *narrowing of the achievement gap* (p. 36). This historical perspective regarding the building blocks of learning as the moral imperative of effective engagement is necessary, particularly in the promotion and improvement of future engagement and partnerships.

The second section, entitled *Embracing to Engage*, focuses on the importance of engagement with families and communities. Specifically, Chapter 4, *How Cultural Proficiency Intersects with Family Engagement*, compares and highlights how four different frameworks (e.g., Cultural Proficiency's Essential Elements, Epstein's Six Types of Parent Involvement, Constantino's Five Sample Principles, Mapp & Kuttner's Dual-Capacity Building) are aligned to support the main premises of cultural proficiency and promote accessibility, equity, and inclusion (p.48). The authors further emphasize the need for *mindful intentional-ness* where "once awareness is piqued, it must be followed by action" (p. 46). This conceptual understanding of putting awareness into action leads to the next phase of building effective family, school, and community engagement and partnership, which is discussed in Chapter 5, focusing on *The 7 Cs of Engagement*. These concepts build upon the previous chapters and focus on the operationalization of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency. This serves to ensure that partnerships—fostered through collaboration as equal partners—are effective, and enables school systems to dismantle inequities, thus improving student outcomes. In summarizing the extant literature specific to effective collaboration, the authors provide examples of the "do's" and "don'ts" when communicating with families regarding academic progress. These detailed examples should greatly benefit new educators and educational leaders seeking to effectively communicate with their students and parents/caregivers. The reviewers agree that "caring" is not the sole responsibility of parents/caregivers, instead it is a moral imperative that must permeate across all systems.

In the third section, entitled *From Marginalization to Inclusion*, the authors call upon readers to view existing inequities manifested and perpetuated within the educational school system. In Chapter 6, *Barriers to Family, School, and Community Engagement,* they challenge readers to view the inequities not through "harsh observations" of failure or blame, but instead, through a culturally proficient lens where educators see all students as capable and successful learners (p.73). Although the authors acknowledge that systemic barriers exist, they assert that the application of the *Guiding Principles of Cultural Proficiency*, with a centralized moral imperative, enables systems to institutionalize values "focused on the students and community we have" (p.74). The vignettes presented in Chapter 7, *The Guiding Principles Foster Essential Elements as Educator and School Action*, are personal and aim to provide clarity to families and schools working together to resolve differences. This section guides readers to view negative school

interactions not from one's own position as the teacher, but from the perspective of being a parent—an exercise that will surely benefit teachers, and educational leaders, on their journey to becoming caring parent/caregiver collaborators. We certainly appreciated the real-life examples presented in the vignettes and see the applicability to our own university teaching practices.

The final section (*Commit to Action*) calls upon educators to act. The authors provide the reader with specific strategies that can be implemented when "planning, initiating, and, increasing engagement with the diverse communities" (p. 96). In short, Chapter 8, *The 8th C-Commit to Action*, is a "planning to plan" guide, where the family, school and community build capacity and engage in action (p. 96). As with previous chapters, the examples are explicit and provide realistic solutions that educators can implement. The self-assessments and various planning tools are valuable resources that schools and districts can follow when seeking to achieve true family engagement. The presentation of the plan in prescribed parts is a valuable approach that should lead to success. Finally, Chapter 9, *Resources: Inclusive Partnering and Capacity Building Learning Strategies*, presents the reader with specific strategies to engage families and communities, which are juxtaposed against traditional parent involvement strategies. Furthermore, the authors present the reader with a plethora of resources that, when utilized, will assist in transforming schools and school systems. In addition, the added brief "Summary" and "Looking Ahead" sections at the end of every chapter are helpful for readers to capture the essence of what was read and see how it is connected to the next chapter.

In summary, the book is a well written text that adroitly blends theory and practice. We also appreciated its interactive nature, which provides the reader with multiple opportunities to reflect and link theory and practice. It will greatly benefit teachers, school leaders, administrators, and the families they serve. This book will also serve students enrolled in teaching and school leadership programs, educators seeking to work as a team, and family centers.

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