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Culture of Care and Prosocial Leadership: Autoethnography of an Elementary School Principal Navigating Covid-19

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Culture of Care and Prosocial Leadership: Autoethnography of an Elementary School

Principal Navigating Covid-19

by

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CULTURE OF CARE AND PROSOCIAL LEADERSHIP

Abstract

Since 2016, I have been serving as principal at Davis Elementary School, a Title 1 school in Portland, Oregon. This autoethnography is a reflective account of my role as a principal during Covid-19 school closures and reopening. School systems and school leaders had to become more adaptive to change and had to find ways to creatively deal with Covid-19 challenges. Utilizing the conceptual frameworks of (a) culture of care informed by the constructs of ethic of care, cultural wealth in critical race theory, and culturally responsive leadership; and (b) prosocial leadership, this autoethnography used self-reflection and thematic analysis to elucidate the shared experiences and challenges of many education professionals. Through writing this autoethnography, I explored my own entanglements in the day-to-day nuances of addressing a crisis never before experienced by our modern educational system. Thematic analysis revealed an overarching theme of an ethic of care that undergirded all aspects of my prosocial leadership style and philosophy, the strategies I used to sustain my school community through school closure and reopening, and my approach to supporting students, families, and staff. Five additional themes emerged: communication and connection, leadership, self-care, creating and sustaining a culture of care, and equity. By telling my story, I hope to grow as a leader and gain a more holistic understanding of leadership in times of challenges, emergencies, and crises. This study also contributes to the newly developing body of research about leadership during the Covid-19 pandemic and ways school leaders can effectively support their school communities.

Dedication

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Eric, who provided constant encouragement throughout this journey, steadfast support, and patience as I completed my program. He encouraged me on the most difficult days when I doubted myself. Without you by my side, I would never have achieved one of my life's goals of receiving my doctorate. Thank you for your love and support. I could not have completed this without you. I love you!

To my mother, Elaine Furlong, who is the hardest working and most dedicated person I know. My mom has taught me perseverance, work ethic, and how to never give up on something you have started. As I was working toward completing my dissertation, she would encourage me to keep writing and was one of my biggest cheerleaders in the process. Without everything she has taught me in my life, I would not be where I am today.

To my father, James Furlong, who initially inspired me, when I was a senior at the University of Oregon, to pursue my doctoral degree and become an elementary school principal. He would have been 70 this year. My dad always taught us to reach for our goals and never give up. He was always the life of the party and would have wanted to celebrate this accomplishment. I know he would be bragging about how proud he is to have raised a doctor, and I know he is smiling about this accomplishment today!

And to my friends and family who have supported me with completing my program. You all encouraged me to keep going and understood when I had to write

during a family event or missed out on something because of school. You each have supported me both as a doctoral student and a principal. I am grateful for you all.

And lastly, to our son Theodore Randy Davis, whom we will be meeting in May. After I found out I was pregnant in September, I knew I had to complete my dissertation before we welcomed you into the world. I look forward to the day you can read about what it was like to be a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic, which I hope is long over by the time you can read!

Acknowledgements

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I would also like to acknowledge my cohort and professors from Concordia University. For the two years we attended in-person classes, I looked forward to Wednesday nights when we would get to learn, laugh, and support each other through our doctoral program. Even though Concordia has closed, and we are all at new universities, we have continued to support each other through both life and completing our dissertations.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

On March 12, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared Coronavirus Disease 2019 (Covid-19) to be a pandemic (World Health Organization [WHO], 2020). National school closures were implemented in 107 countries by March 18th, impacting 862 million children, or half the world's student population (Viner et al., 2020). By April 8th, less than one month later, 90% of students in 188 countries—1.5 billion students worldwide—were no longer going to school in person (Lee, 2020). Schools across the world were forced to transition to distance-learning models with no time to prepare. The decision to close schools was an attempt to interrupt the transmission of the virus and was based solely on evidence from influenza outbreaks that children tend to drive transmission (Viner et al., 2020).

In March of 2020, the state of Oregon closed its schools and moved its students to online distance learning. In June of 2020, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) and Oregon Health Authority released reopening guidance to K–12 schools. The guidance, called "Ready Schools, Safe Learners: Guidance for School Year 2020–2021" (ODE, 2020), was based on community transmission metrics of Covid-19 and school blueprints for safe reopening (ODE, 2020). These blueprints were required submissions from each school that outlined their communities' needs to safely reopen. K–12 schools were given three options to safely reopen schools: all on-site, hybrid, or comprehensive distance learning (ODE, 2020).

Along with Covid-19, there were numerous other challenges faced by Oregonians in 2020. Some of these included racial unrest following the killing of George Floyd,

protests in Oregon and across the United States in line with the Black Lives Matter movement, extensive wildfires, a rocky social and political climate in the United States, and turmoil associated with the 2020 US presidential elections. These types of crises are examples of widespread and quickly escalated natural and social situations that are increasingly common, and leaders must become more prepared to lead during such challenging times. Further, school systems and school leaders alike must become more adaptive to change that affects our institutions and our students.

Since 2016, I have served as principal at Davis Elementary School, a Title 1 school in Portland, Oregon. This dissertation has been developed as an autoethnography, which is a reflective account of my role as a principal during Covid-19. I chose the autoethnography method because it supports self-reflection, and I am deeply entangled in the day-to-day nuances of addressing a set of crises never experienced before. In telling my story, I hope to also grow as a leader and gain a more holistic understanding of leadership in times of challenges, emergencies, and crises. This study also contributes to the newly developing body of research about leadership during the pandemic and ways school leaders can effectively support their school communities through prosocial leadership, the theory of cultural wealth, culturally responsive leadership, and a culture of care.

Background and Significance of the Problem

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, many K–12 schools already struggled to manage student behavior in meaningful and effective ways because of children's and adolescents' mental health needs, which is a nationwide problem (Cook et al., 2015). Many children

come to school needing support with social–emotional skills, and some students do not feel connected to school (Durlak et al., 2011). As a result, these students have limited self-regulation and social interaction skills. It is estimated that one in six children between the ages of six and seventeen in the United States (16.5% of youth) experience mental illness each year (National Alliance on Mental Health, 2019). As of 2016, only 50.6% of youth received treatment for mental health disorders, and support does not begin until children reach an average of 11 years of age (National Alliance on Mental Health, 2019). Research indicates that half of the nation's children, or about 35 million children, experience one or more types of childhood trauma referred to as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE; Stevens, 2013). Research has also shown a relationship between traumatic experiences in childhood and adverse outcomes that may happen later in life (Bateson et al., 2020). The epidemiologist team who developed the ACE assessment found that early ACEs affect brain development and that traumatic childhood experiences can lead to disease later in life (Felitti, 2002). According to Plumb et al. (2016), most ACEs are considered complex trauma, which is "an extreme form of stress that affects brain development of children" (p. 38), and are a result of neglect from caregivers over a length of time. Currently, interventions and educational policies do not address the needs of those students affected by ACEs, and they are left to suffer the impacts of trauma (Plumb et al., 2016).

The Covid-19 pandemic has further brought light to the mental health needs in our schools, particularly in terms of accommodating the needs of changing student populations. In the past 20 years, enrollment in public K–12 schools in the United States

has increased by 3.5 million students (from 47.2 million students in 2000 to 50.7 million

in the fall of 2020), and racial and ethnic student populations have shifted (National

Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2020). According to the NCES (2020),

> Between fall 2000 and 2017, the percentage of public-school students who were
>
> White decreased from 61 to 48 percent, and the percentage of students who were
>
> Black decreased from 17 to 15 percent. In contrast the public-school students who
>
> were Hispanic increased from 16 to 27 percent during the same period.

With these changing demographics in schools and the increase of cultural diversity in the

US as a whole, cultural considerations are crucial and must be deliberated by school

leaders to guide decisions for supporting student learning. Educational programs need to

be developed with sensitivity to diverse student populations' needs, particularly regarding

social skills (Riveria & Adkinson, 1997).

Social and emotional needs, along with basic survival needs, have only been

exacerbated by Covid-19 and the pandemic-related trauma and economic instability that

have resulted. During the Covid-19 pandemic, schools have continued to struggle to meet

students' social and emotional needs. As the pandemic continues, children in poverty,

who rely on school-based services for nutritional, physical, and mental-health needs, have

been affected disproportionately (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020).

Statement of Purpose

This study provides personal experiences of being a principal during the Covid-19

pandemic and examines the complexities and problems I experienced as a principal

during the school closure and reopening. I share the experiences I had as a leader during

the Covid-19 pandemic and what I found to be most effective in leading a community of students, families, and staff through unpredictable times of stress and unknowns. Creating a culture of care and loving the people we serve is always important in leadership, but during the pandemic it became absolutely necessary for successfully navigating the work of a school principal. I hope that this autoethnography allows my colleagues and educational peers to reflect on their own experiences during the pandemic and how they have and can build relationships in their own school communities to hold one another up through times of ambiguity, fear, anxiety, and uncertainty. The school closures of 2020 provided a unique leadership and growth opportunity for principals, and I hope my dissertation encourages leaders to reflect on experiences that may be similar or different than my own in how they dealt with the challenges posed by this unprecedented time. An understanding of how leaders respond to large-scale complex problems is especially needed given impending ecological and socio-political challenges.

Purpose of the Study

In this study, I used autoethnography to reflect on my time as principal at Davis Elementary School in Portland, Oregon during the Covid-19 school closure and subsequent reopening. I documented and explored the systems that I built as a leader to support the community of teachers, staff, students, and parents. The self-analysis and evaluation inherent in the autoethnography methodology support my reflection on my experience of being a leader during the pandemic. The timeline of the study begins with the initial school closure of Oregon public schools in March of 2020.

Every school and district in Oregon had unique circumstances during the closure, but an exploration of my experience may offer insights to other educators into their own experiences of the pandemic and school closures. For instance, remaining calm and always thinking a step ahead were imperative strategies for me to lead my school community through an unpredictable year. Being resilient to constant changes was crucial as a leader during this time. Also, leading from a place of hope kept me going. I encountered and addressed innumerable problems that strengthened my leadership practice as an elementary school principal, which may provide insight to other school leaders who also navigated the Covid-19 pandemic.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for my dissertation is based on (a) a culture of care, informed by the constructs of ethic of care, cultural wealth in critical race theory, and culturally responsive leadership, and (b) prosocial leadership theories. Each of these concepts helped frame my research as a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ethic of Care

The ethic of care (EoC) is a theoretical framework based on care and compassion that became prominent in the 1980s (Noddings, 1984). In a school that has established an EoC, all staff, including teachers, believe in the importance of the holistic well-being of the students, and they support students through trust and relationship building.

Cultural Wealth in Critical Race Theory

Cultural wealth in critical race theory is grounded in the knowledge, skills, and abilities that communities of color must obtain in order to survive and resist systems of

oppression (Yosso, 2005). Cultural wealth is described as having six forms of cultural capital: aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational, and resistance. Davis Elementary has a very diverse student body. In this study it was important to explore the cultural wealth in our community and the strengths our students and families bring to our school.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsive leadership is a leadership style that supports inclusive learning environments for students and families from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Culturally responsive leadership uses leadership pedagogies, practices, and policies to create culturally inclusive school environments.

In an extensive literature review by Khalifa et al. (2016), four major strands were identified involving the behaviors of culturally responsive school leadership. These strands include: critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, culturally responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and parents in community contexts. These strands will be explored in Chapter 2.

Prosocial Leadership

Prosocial leadership is a leadership style that puts people first within an organization. In an organization with a prosocial leader, the leader has the skills and knowledge to effectively influence the organization and goals that serve the common good of the organization (Lorenzi, 2004). In a school, a prosocial leader has two primary focuses. First, the principal's own social and emotional competence is a focus, which allows the leader to model caring for students and staff while also being able to handle

stress. The second focus is on positive social, emotional, and academic outcomes for students while making sure all members of their communities (parents, students, and staff) feel safe, cared for, respected, and valued.

Research Methods

This dissertation uses the formal methodology of autoethnography to describe my story of being a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic, told through my cultural lens of being an elementary school principal. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method used to examine an individual's personal experience (Adams et al., 2014). This method "offers nuanced, complex, and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about a large group of people" (p. 21). "As method, autoethnography is both a process and a product" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 273).

Documenting my story during the pandemic for my autoethnography has allowed me to grow as a leader and learn from my experiences. "As our stories illustrate, autoethnography is a method that allows us to reconsider how we think, how we do research and maintain relationships, and how we live" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 21). I have learned more about how I live as a leader and maintain relationships while reflecting on my lived experiences.

Through the autoethnographic process, I share and reflect on my own experience of creating a culture of care and relationship building that led my community through the crisis. I will describe the ambiguities, fears, and barriers that I had to confront daily and the systems that I had to create to support students, teachers, staff, and parents. I am not

on an island by myself, and I will describe the supports I sought and was given as I coped with challenges during the pandemic.

This study's research tools included documents created by me and external documents that substantiate my self-reflections about my experiences of leading during the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary data source was a reflexive journal, in which I documented and reflected on my experiences; this creates transparency in the research (Ortlipp, 2008). I also collected data through agendas, email, staff newsletters, social media, the Remind app (used for parent communication), calendars, with which I used reflective analysis. I used these tools to understand and share my experiences, and I discovered and traced common attributes through these multiple research tools.

Research Questions

There is limited research regarding the principal's role in a school during the Covid-19 pandemic. My autoethnography of the principalship during the Covid-19 pandemic examines the following questions:

Q1.   As a principal, what were the most critical aspects of my leadership in supporting my school community?

Q2.   How did I promote a culture of care at my school?

Q3.   How did I show up as a culturally responsive leader each day?

Q4.   What did my school do to acknowledge the cultural wealth of our diverse community?

Q5.   How did I practice self-care during the pandemic?

Q6.   What did I learn about myself as a leader during the pandemic?

> Q7.   What are the best practices I learned during the pandemic that are useful
>
> for continued application?

Definitions of Key Terms and Concepts

To provide a shared understanding of this research study, the main concepts and terms used in the study are defined as follows:

Autoethnography: Qualitative research in which an author uses personal experiences as data to self-reflect, analyze, and understand one's experience.

Culturally Responsive Leadership: Leadership that supports inclusive learning environments for students and families from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Culturally responsive leadership uses leadership pedagogies, practices, and policies to create culturally inclusive school environments.

Culture of Care: A theory that puts emphasis on relationships within an organization.

Distance Learning: Taking the components of a typical school day and moving them to an online environment to educate students who are off site.

Ethic of Care: A moral theory that emphasizes the importance of caring for others through relationships, concerns, and responsibility.

Hybrid Learning: Combining in-person classroom experiences and online learning. Students attend part of the school week in person and the other part online.

Model of Cultural Wealth: Yosso (2005) defined cultural wealth as "an array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (p. 154).

On-Site Learning: A typical school environment where students attend in person.

Prosocial Leadership: A set of habits, values, beliefs, and skills that facilitate achievement of an organization by attending to the well-being and functioning of the members of the organization.

Reflexive Journal: A written record kept by a researcher during the research process detailing what they did and why they made the decisions that they did.

Social and Emotional Learning (SEL): The process of developing skills of self-awareness, self-management, relationships skills, and social awareness.

Summary

An autoethnography is a highly personalized account of a lived cultural experience. My autoethnography tells the story of my time as an elementary school principal during the Covid-19 pandemic. Schools were unprepared for the closures, and as a leader I had no choice but to persevere and figure out how to educate our students at home in a distance-learning model. Then, after a year, I had to figure out how to reopen the schools in a hybrid-learning model. During this period, I learned a great deal about myself as a leader and about implementing leadership practices that support the work I do in my school community. Utilizing the theoretical frameworks of: (a) culture of care, informed by the constructs of ethic of care, cultural wealth in critical race theory, and culturally responsive leadership, and (b) prosocial leadership, this autoethnography used self-reflection to elucidate the shared experiences and challenges of many education professionals. Autoethnography allowed me to tell my story of being a principal during the year 2020–2021 and of how I supported, and continue to support, my school community through resilience and an established culture of care.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter examines the existing educational literature related to leadership models, a culture of care, ethic of care, and culturally responsive leadership. The literature review supports the development of conceptual frameworks to provide an understanding of my personal account of being a principal during the 2020–2021 Covid-19 pandemic and address the complexities posed during that time period. This literature review examines various leadership frameworks and the ethic of care. It also examines critical race theory with a focus on the model of cultural wealth. As a leader, an understanding of these frameworks provides a way to organize my self-reflective data. Leadership styles, cultural wealth theory, and culture of care are important and relevant to my experience of being a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic because they provide the framework for me to examine my experiences, with these concepts being the most important in my school community.

Leadership

Leadership is the ability to organize a group of people to achieve the goals and objectives of an organization (Kalkan et al., 2020). Kruse (2013) defined leadership as "a process of social influence, which maximizes the efforts of others, towards the achievement of a goal" (p. 3). Leadership must be manifested at all levels of an organization, not just at the top of the organizational hierarchy. In the case of school districts, leadership development must be supported within all levels of their organizations. As schools grow and adapt to best support changing student populations,

adept leadership is one of the most critical factors in school improvement (Vélez et al., 2017).

A significant body of research shows that strong leadership is imperative to the successful functioning of schools, as well as to continuous school improvement. Sparks (2018) defined continuous school improvement as "a cyclical process intended to help groups of people in a system—from a class to a school district or even a network of many districts—set goals, identify ways to improve and evaluate change" (p. 1). Continuous school improvement looks at concepts in other fields, such as health care and technology, to improve schools. Tools and strategies often used in continuous school improvement include design-based implementation research, networked improvement communities, and improvement science (Sparks, 2018). School leaders are under immense pressure to improve schools, and there is a social demand for schools to be more dynamic because of rapid changes and increasing needs that impact schools (Kalkan et al., 2020). We know that leadership is instrumental to school improvement, and it is important to understand the role of leaders and their leadership styles that promote school success.

Schools have organizational structures in place to run effectively, one of which is the school leader, the principal, who is responsible for meeting the goals and objectives within their school and for supporting leadership development throughout their organization. A school principal's leadership style plays an instrumental role in determining the organizational structure and outcomes of a school. Many principals, however, lack the skills and capabilities to lead effectively (Doyle & Locke, 2014);

therefore, it is essential to look at leadership styles and the training available to principals to help them lead effectively.

In leadership research, many styles of leadership have been studied, some of which are more successful than others. "Leadership theories have focused on what leaders are like (personality or trait-based approaches), what leaders say (charismatic), what leaders do (style based), and when leaders do it (contingency theories)" (Lorenzi, 2004, p. 282). This literature review explores the following leadership styles: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, servant leadership, authentic leadership, prosocial leadership, and culturally responsive leadership. My research is grounded in the latter two leadership styles—these leadership frameworks are most closely tied to who I am as a leader at my school. I believe supporting employees is crucial as a leader, which is a direct aspect of prosocial leadership. I also serve a very diverse school community, where our community represents 23 different languages; therefore, it is imperative to my work that I am a culturally responsive leader. However, these two leadership styles are better understood when contextualized by the first four styles. This literature review, therefore, briefly describes the first four styles, then puts special emphasis on prosocial leadership and culturally responsive leadership.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is the style that many researchers find the most appropriate for school today (Anderson, 2017). In the last three decades, transformational leadership, originally established in 1985 by Bass and colleagues as transformational–transactional leadership, has become one of the most prominent leadership theories (Bass,

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1985; Bass & Avolio, 1990). Transformational leadership was preceded by transactional leadership, which was a well-established leadership model based on an exchange relationship in which the follower complies for expected rewards (Barnett et al., 2001). In contrast, "transformational leaders help followers grow and develop into leaders by responding to individual followers' needs by empowering them and by aligning the objectives and goals of the individual followers, the leaders, the group and the larger organization" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 3). In transformational leadership, leaders are influential because they create new visions and missions for their organization, establish new norms, support changing employees' attitudes, and make necessary changes to the organization's culture (Simsek, 2013). Transformational leadership began to be seen as a type of leadership that would motivate those within the organization to meet the mission and vision (Barnett et al., 2001).

A principal's role is complex, and transformational leadership provides a framework for understanding a principal's role (Chirichello, 1999). Principals are held responsible for transforming school cultures to meet all local, state, and federal stakeholders' demands. Simultaneously, they must complete leadership tasks, such as supporting struggling students, evaluating staff, hiring and developing teachers, participating in community outreach, developing budgets, strategic planning, and managing infrastructure (Anderson, 2017). Because transformational leaders motivate staff to inspire employees and enhance performance, transformational leadership is closely tied to teacher commitment, job satisfaction, and other areas that improve schools, as documented by numerous studies (Anderson, 2017; Dumay & Galand, 2012).

Kalkan et al. (2020) researched school administrators' leadership styles by examining school culture and organizational image with a sample of 370 teachers. They used a relational survey model to examine the relationship between leadership of school administrators, school culture, and organizational image. This study looked at three leadership styles: transformational leadership, transactional leadership, and laissez-faire leadership. Teachers' perception of their school's culture is vital, and cooperation and trust must be a part of the school culture in order for the school to operate successfully. Transformational leadership also supports administrative and teaching teams to work together cohesively, and the researchers found that in schools where transformational leadership was high, there was a strong sense of the school's culture and organization image among the staff. This study also found that when teachers have a positive perception of school culture, this is an indicator of cooperation and trust, which are "very important aspects of the efficiency and productivity of educational institutions" (Kalkan et al., 2020, p. 10). Cooperation and trust are built through relationships that form strong school cultures, influencing a school's productivity and performance (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

The results of Kalkan et al. (2020) showed a significant relationship between transformational leadership and school culture, which was similar to previous research findings. Kalkan et al. (2020) stated, "it would be beneficial to provide a sustainable structure to educational institutions, to develop transformational leadership behaviors of school administrators, and to organizational training and development programs for a

strong culture and organization image" (pp. 11–12). A transformational leader will foster

the commitment of their followers and inspire them to enhance their job performance.

Transactional Leadership

Transactional leadership, which is concerned about the day-to-day and normal

operation of an organization, is the polar opposite of transformational leadership.

Robbins and Judge (2013) describe transactional leaders as "leaders who lead primarily

by using social exchanges and transactions" (p. 475). In transactional leadership,

employees receive rewards based on their performance at work. A reward is given by a

leader who communicates to their followers (employees) why they are receiving the

award (Wahyuni et al., 2014). An employee in an environment with a transactional

leadership style is rewarded for a job well done with commitment to the organization and

is punished if not. With this leadership style, there is very little looking ahead within the

organization; rather, there is a focus on the day-to-day operations.

Servant Leadership

Servant leadership is another style found in leadership research. This leadership

style, which puts serving the people of the organization as the top priority, was

popularized in the 1970s by Robert Greenleaf (R. Wilson, 1998). This type of leadership

focuses on helping followers do their jobs, rather than controlling or directing them, as in

a transactional leadership style (Wahyuni et al., 2014). "Servant leadership begins with

the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, then lead as a servant" (Cerit,

2009, p. 600). R. Wilson (1998) describes the characteristics of a servant leader to

include listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community.

Servant leaders are often not motivated to be leaders at first but take the position in order to respond to a need for group success (Cerit, 2009). Laub (1999) identified the following six characteristics of a servant leader: valuing people, developing people, building community, displaying authenticity, providing leadership, and sharing leadership. Each of these characteristics promote serving the people within the organization and encouraging them to do their best.

There are many benefits in a servant leadership model, including altruism, simplicity, and self-awareness (Johnson, 2001). There are also, however, criticisms of the servant leadership model, including the negativity of the term servant (slave), which can be seen as unrealistic, and that it may not work in every context (Johnson, 2001). Cerit (2009) found that servant leadership in a school context can have a positive impact on job satisfaction. "It can be said that school principals should be servant leaders to improve job satisfaction, which in turn contributes to the effective work of teachers" (Cerit, 2009, p. 616). Many characteristics of servant leadership are found in prosocial leadership, which will be explored in a following section.

Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership is "founded on a leader's ability to establish meaningful relationships by demonstrating self-knowledge and genuineness in representing oneself to others, coupled with openness to others' perspectives and a moral commitment reflecting

unflagging personal integrity" (Atwijuka & Caldwell, 2017, p. 1040). Knowing your people and building relationships is crucial in this leadership style.

Walumbwa et al. (2008) defined authentic leaders as possessing four characteristics: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and moral perspective. Self-awareness is the ability for one to have insights into their own strengths and weaknesses. Goleman (2005) argued that self-awareness is a part of social and emotional intelligence and a leader's own understanding and awareness of the verbal and non-verbal cues they give when leading. Relational transparency is defined as alignment between a leader's true self and their behaviors when they deal with others (Atwijuka & Caldwell, 2017). "Leaders demonstrate their internalized moral values and ethical assumptions, and their conduct reflects those underlying beliefs with no attempt at misrepresentation or deception about who they are and what they believe" (Atwijuka & Caldwell, 2017, p. 1041). In authentic leadership, a leader takes into consideration all viewpoints and makes a decision based on all the information they have received, regardless of their own viewpoint, known as balanced processing (Atwijuka & Caldwell, 2017). Finally, authentic leaders possess moral perspective, which Atwijuka & Caldwell (2017) describe as a perspective that, "enables them to call upon moral and ethical guidelines in the decision-making process—and it is that defining moral standard that forms the basis for decision making for themselves and their institutions" (p. 1041).

Prosocial Leadership

Prosocial leadership (Figure 1) is the first of the two primary styles that frame my autoethnographic research. Prosocial leadership, one of the most explored styles in

organizational leadership, has gained popularity over the years because it creates

organizational effectiveness and makes work more meaningful (Grant, 2007).

Lorenzi (2004) defined prosocial leadership as follows:

> A positive, effective influence with constructive goals that serve the common
>
> good. The leader's intentions, visions, and goals are positive ("pro"); they create
>
> value. The leader is also capable of implementing change. The leader manages,
>
> follows through, delivers. The leader's actions attend to the broader group's needs
>
> ("social") rather than to limited, personal interests. (p. 283)

Figure 1

Components of Prosocial Leadership

Note: Adapted from *Principal's Social and Emotional Competence: A Key Factor for*

Creating Caring Schools by Mahfouz et al. (2019).

Further, Brief and Motowidlo (1986) describe prosocial behavior as:

> (a) performed by a member of an organization; (b) directed toward an individual, group, or organization with whom he or she interacts while carrying out his or her organizational role; and (c) performed to promote the welfare of the individual group or organization toward which it is directed. (p. 711)

In a review of prosociality in educational leadership, Yada and Jäppinen (2019) defined several components of prosocial leadership: prosocial motivation, prosocial behaviors, and prosocial impacts. Prosocial motivation is the value recognized by the leader in helping others. Servant leadership, empathy, and caring are all connected to prosocial motivation (Yada & Jäppinen, 2019). Servant leadership, as related to a leader's own identity or worldview, is tied to the goal or motivation of serving and of helping individuals realize their capabilities (Stewart, 2012). C. Wilson (2016) argued that a principal's prosocial motivation, or caring, is pivotal in leading a school, especially in schools with racial minorities. Principals must act in a caring way toward the staff and teachers they supervise in order to establish trusting relationships to support the work of the school.

Prosocial behaviors relate to the actions a leader takes to support others and the positive effect on employee's lives (Grant, 2007). Servant leaders have prosocial behaviors that put others' needs over their own. "The prosocial behavior of servant leadership is oriented toward individuals as well as organizations" (Yada & Jäppinen, 2019, p. 987). Another prosocial behavior includes mentoring because it provides individualized support to mentees for their professional development (Yada & Jäppinen,

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2019). Other types of prosocial behaviors include induction, coaching, and knowledge

sharing. Induction is the support provided to new teachers. Coaching is a process in

which an individual supports another person at achieving and realizing their goals.

"Knowledge sharing is also considered as prosocial because it is aimed at facilitating

organizational members' own learning and practice, and creating common understanding

and trust" (Yada & Jäppinen, 2019, p. 988). Within an organization these actions support

prosocial behavior within the organization.

Research has found that prosocial leadership increases organizational

effectiveness by improving employee performance and emotional well-being (Grant,

2012). Through prosocial educational leadership, supporting employees, students, and

people can benefit the entire organization (Yada & Jäppinen, 2019). However, there is

limited research on the role of prosocial impact in educational leadership, and more

research is needed.

Mahfouz et al. (2019) defined two critical characteristics of prosocial school

leaders, those leaders who embody the three components of prosocial leadership (Figure

1). The first characteristic is strong social and emotional competence (SEC) of a principal

and the ability to handle stress (Mahfouz et al., 2019). A prosocial leader with strong

SEC is aware of their own and others' emotions, leading to effective and positive

leadership. An effective prosocial leader proactively supports their community, is people-

centered, and keeps people's needs above those of an organization while also creating a

culture of collaboration (Harris, 2002). Also, principals with strong SEC are empathic

listeners who lead toward change because they can accurately identify others' emotions (Berkovich, 2018).

It is also imperative that a principal model caring and social and cultural competence with both students and staff (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Louis et al. (2016) argued that principals "set expectations in a school that create mutual obligations to support all students and not just those who are 'ready to learn,' and they can engage in regular acts of caring with individual students that model expectations for others" (p. 334). If principals with strong SEC are modeling positive relationships with students and staff, this will become an expectation for teacher–student relationships.

The second, but related, characteristic of a prosocial principal is that they ensure that the school community (students, staff, parents, and community members) feels safe, cared for, and respected to create a healthy school culture. Louis et al. (2016) argued that "caring and caring leaders provide a foundation for school community" (p. 312). Similarly, Mahfouz et al. (2019) stated, "Principals are responsible for the complex task of creating a caring, healthy school climate that is welcoming, supportive, culturally affirming, and respectful of all members of the school community" (p. 4). A prosocial leader with high SEC has skills that build a healthy school culture, including effective leadership, healthy relationships, effective family and community partnerships, effective social and emotional learning implementation, and positive social and emotional and academic outcomes.

Positive relationships between all stakeholders are at the center of a healthy school community, and a prosocial leader believes in and develops healthy relationships

with the community that they serve. At its core, school leadership is a social relationship

(Louis et al., 2016). In one study, Harris (2002) found that principals with high emotional

intelligence were aware of the need to build positive relationships with students, staff,

and parents. A prosocial leader establishes caring relationships, including attentiveness,

motivational displacement, situationality, mutuality, and authenticity (Louis et al., 2016).

Noddings (2005) argued that it would not be possible to care for another genuinely

without understanding the individual through attentiveness. Leaders must attend to all

members of their school community to have healthy relationships. Noddings (2005) also

argued that one must put others' needs ahead of their own—motivational displacement—

because one must care for another in a selfless way to truly build a strong relationship. In

a school setting, caring is situational and must be dynamic rather than rule driven

(Noddings, 2005). Care must also be grounded in mutuality, and caring roles are not

fixed and may shift in a relationship (Louis et al., 2016). Further, healthy relationships

are established through authenticity, which requires transparency, openness, and being

genuine (Noddings, 2013).

In addition to building positive relationships within the school, a prosocial leader

welcomes both family and community partnerships. Prosocial principals recognize that

families are essential for school improvement processes to lead to improved outcomes for

children (Green, 2018). Chrispeels (2004) argues that principals "learn to share leadership

and shift their roles and responsibilities to include teachers, parents, and students in the

messy and challenging work to achieving educational excellence" (p.4). The same applies

to community partnerships. Principals with high SEC strive to build relationships and

connections with all school community stakeholders to serve their school communities, including non-profits, mental health organizations, businesses, and other community organizations (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Schutz (2006) points out that the partnership between the community and schools can, and should, be improved, stating, "communities are helpful to schools when they support the school's mission and harmful when they resist or criticize the mission in some way" (p. 704).

Social and Emotional Learning Implementation. In the prosocial leadership model, the implementation of social and emotional learning (SEL) is essential because it informs the important task of addressing the needs of students with emotional and mental challenges. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process by which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2018). Research has demonstrated that SEL is key to important life outcomes both in school and in students' future careers (Swartz, 2017). In the K–12 education system, SEL is often referred to as 'the missing piece' (Gayl, 2018).

Many students come to school having experienced complex trauma and stress, which impairs emotional regulation and executive functioning (Compas, 2006). Of the children surveyed by the National Survey of Children Exposed to Violence, 60% have been exposed to trauma (Wiest-Stevenson & Lee, 2016). This trauma is not always visible and may manifest as behavioral issues at school, affecting a student's ability to

pay attention and remember information learned at school (Mendelson et al., 2015). For schools to address the needs of students, it is imperative that they consider the needs of the whole child—academically and emotionally—by creating trauma-sensitive schools. Trauma-sensitive schools understand trauma and the impact it has on the brain, which allows them to put supports in place to help students succeed in the classroom (Plumb et al., 2016). These trauma-responsive schools have systems in place to increase students' coping skills, improve attendance and classroom behavior, increase graduation rates, and provide emotional and physical safety for students (Hoover, 2019).

To mitigate trauma and teach social skills, schools are putting systems in place and training staff to address mental health needs in schools, of which SEL is just one. Other evidence-based practices include Response to Intervention (RTI), which is a process used by educators to help students who are struggling with a skill or concept, and Positive Behavior Intervention Supports (PBIS), which supports core behavioral curricula (Cook et al., 2015). SEL also infuses self-determination strategies into the curriculum (Bohanon & Wu, 2012). Both PBIS and SEL address different mental health needs (Cook et al., 2015). In a classroom implementing both PBIS and SEL, these methods had the most significant effect, with a 1.0 effect size in a pre and post screener that rated students on externalizing behavior (Cook et al., 2015). In addition to formal systems, schools are also using restorative practices and mindfulness to support students.

Taken as a whole, these systems and practices are part of the Multi-Tier Systems of Supports (MTSS). MTSS provides universal support for all students and is an effective way to organize and deliver a continuum of support at school to address students' social

and emotional, as well as mental, health (Cook et al., 2015). The key to an effective

MTSS system is that it focuses on schoolwide SEL.

For school systems to effectively teach prosocial skills, social and emotional

supports must be provided systemically by involving families, the community,

implementing school and districtwide SEL practices, and using social and emotional

curricula to instruct (Lenz et al., 2018). SEL curricula are effective as both core

instruction and intervention. The five competencies taught in SEL are: self-awareness,

self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making

(CASEL, 2018). To enhance learning, instruction of social and emotional skills must

occur, and students must have the opportunity to apply these skills in a culturally

appropriate way (Durlak et al., 2011). SEL skills foster youths' ability to manage

emotions and behaviors that lead to positive results in academics and behavior.

History of SEL in Education. Social and emotional learning has a long history

and is not a new concept in educational theory and practice (Comer, 1988; Edutopia,

2011). In 1968, James Comer started a pilot program called the Comer School

Development Program, or the Comer Process, at Yale's School of Medicine Child Study

Center in two New Haven schools (Comer, 1988). These two schools had the lowest

attendance and the worst academic outcomes for students in the city. Unlike other school

reforms that were focused on academics, the Comer Process focused on improving the

educational experiences of minority youth, predominantly African American students

living in poverty (Coulter, 1996). This program's goals were to promote a positive school

climate and to create supportive relationships and bonds between school staff, children,

and parents, goals that are shared with modern-day SEL. The schools established a

collaborative-management team that included teachers, parents, the principal, and a

mental health worker (Comer, 1988) to support academic and social programs in the

school. By 1980, by focusing on social and emotional learning concepts, the two schools

had improved academic performance, decreased truancy and discipline incidents, and

surpassed the national average in academics (Comer, 1988).

The Comer Process became the steppingstone for social and emotional

programming in schools. It was followed in 1982 by the New Haven Social Development

Program, the first districtwide, K–12 social development program, implemented by Yale

professor Roger P. Weissberg (Shriver & Weissberg, 1996) and in 1986 by the William

T. Grant Consortium for School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, a

multidisciplinary group focused on the implementation and design of social and

emotional programming for K–12 schools (Weissberg, 2019). Following this work,

CASEL was created in 1994 to establish evidence-based social and emotional learning as

part of preschool through 12th grade (CASEL, 2020). During a meeting in 1994 at the

Fetzer Institute, the term social and emotional learning emerged (CASEL, 2020), which

became part of popular culture in 1995 when Daniel Goleman published *Emotional*

Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ, where he argued that character could be

developed through teaching social and emotional skills (Edutopia, 2011). Soon after, in

1997, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published *Promoting*

Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators, in which nine CASEL leaders

defined the field of social and emotional learning (Edutopia, 2011).

Effectiveness of SEL in Schools. Durlak et al. (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of 213 school-based social and emotional learning programs that included 270,034 K–12 students. This study, which is one of the most extensive studies on SEL to date, examined school-based SEL programs and their effect on children's behaviors and academic outcomes. This research focused solely on universal school-based social–emotional development programs and evaluated the impact on the development of academic performance, social behavior, and problem behavior. The study addressed the implications of the findings for educational practices and policies and concluded that teaching SEL skills led to improved competencies and attitudes about self, others, and school. The study showed that SEL instruction is successful in K–12 and urban, suburban, and rural schools and is not dependent on students' socioeconomic status. The study also found that with the implementation of SEL instruction, there was an 11% gain in academic performance, indicating that SEL instruction improves students' connections to school and, therefore, academics. Further, the study found that schools could implement SEL instruction without the need to add any additional staff. This body of research indicates that universal school-based SEL instruction can enhance educational outcomes for all students.

O'Connor et al. (2017) assessed SEL programs to identify qualities and components that determined their level of success. They found that effective SEL programs had three things in common. First, effective SEL programs met the specific needs of a district, school, or classroom. The first step in an SEL program is making students' social and emotional competency a priority (O'Conner et al., 2017). Using an

evidence-based SEL program provides a theoretical framework, supportive materials, planned activities, and guidance for implementation, assessment, and evaluation, which can be used to directly address the unique needs of a region, school, and classroom. Second, an SEL program must be aligned both vertically (across grade levels) and horizontally (throughout different contexts in a school). Horizontal alignment allows students to practice SEL principles in various environments, such as classrooms, cafeterias, school buses, and even their own homes. Finally, an SEL program must have sustainable school and community support. An SEL implementation plan must be put in place with all stakeholders at the table, including teachers, administrators, families, and the community. With all partners on board, SEL becomes the way schools do business, rather than an afterthought.

Teachers' Roles in SEL. Teacher training is imperative, not only in SEL implementation, but also in preparing teachers' own social and emotional competencies. Teachers' beliefs are shaped by their own life experience and backgrounds, which impacts their social and emotional competencies (Hanson-Peterson et al., 2016). When teachers are prepared to teach SEL skills, they are able to manage their emotions in positive ways, be compassionate, respectful, responsible, and resilient members of the community who are kind to self and others, have strong relationships, manage peer conflicts and pressure, and become their best selves. Schonert-Reichl (2017) stated, "teachers are the engines that drive SEL programs and practices in their classrooms, and their social–emotional competence and well-being strongly influence students" (p. 137). Malm (2009) further argued, "there is an urgent need for teachers today to develop new

and creative emotional competencies to cope with an increasingly complex, changing and

diversified school environment" (pp. 79–80). Teachers must be prepared to meet students'

needs by building their own emotional competencies, and teacher preparation programs

are crucial to developing these social and emotional skills within our teachers.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

Culturally responsive leadership (CRL) is the second leadership style that

provides a framework for this study. This leadership style takes into account different

cultural needs and backgrounds, and it is a particularly relevant style in current K–12

education because of changes in student populations and demographics. Growing student

populations—enrollment in K–12 school increased more than 300% from 2000 to 2015

(NCES, 2020)—and shifts in racial and ethnic student populations mean that cultural

considerations are crucial in school leaders' decision making. All racial and ethnic groups

other than White (and American Indian/Alaska Native, which remained at 1%) increased

during that same period (NCES, 2020), underscoring the importance of developing

educational programs that are sensitive to these diverse populations' needs and

particularly in terms of social skills (Riveria & Adkinson, 1997).

Although culturally responsive teaching is important, Gay (2013) argued that it

cannot alone solve the problems facing diverse student populations. All aspects of the

educational system need to be transformed, including funding, policy making, and

administration. Research has found over many years that school leadership is essential to

any school reform effort (Leithwood et al., 2004), and culturally responsive leadership is

necessary in schools that are attempting to implement culturally responsive pedagogies.

Culturally responsive leaders must develop, support, and promote a welcoming climate in which the school is inclusive and welcoming to minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016), who are defined as "individuals from racially oppressed communities that have been marginalized—both legally and discursively—because of their non-dominant race, ethnicity, religion, language or citizenship" (p. 1275). Minoritized students have been a part of historically oppressive structures in schools, in which schools have been complicit (intentionally or unintentionally) in reproducing systems of oppression. School leaders have an ethical obligation to counter this oppression by being culturally responsive leaders. Khalifa et al. (2016) further advocated the benefits of culturally responsive school leaders:

> Culturally responsive leadership influences the school context and addresses the cultural needs of the students, parents, and teachers. For example, culturally responsive school leaders are responsible for promoting a school climate inclusive of minoritized students, particularly those marginalized within most school contexts. Such school leaders also maintain a presence in, and relationships with, community members they serve. They lead professional developments to ensure their teachers and staff, and the curriculum, are *continuously* responsive to minoritized students. (p. 1274)

The Four Strands of Culturally Responsive School Leadership. An extensive literature review by Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four major strands involving the behaviors of culturally responsive school leadership (CRSL). These strands include critical self-awareness, culturally responsive curricula and teacher preparation, culturally

responsive and inclusive school environments, and engaging students and parents in community contexts.

In CRSL, critical self-reflection of one's leadership practices is ongoing and constant (Theoharis, 2007). A culturally responsive leader is committed to their own continuous learning of cultural knowledge and contexts (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Leaders must understand their own cultural background and the biases, assumptions, and values they bring with them in order to be anti-racist leaders. Dantley (2005) stated, "A psychology of critical self-reflection involves the educational leader coming to grips with his or her own identity and juxtaposing that against the identity of the learning community" (p. 503). Culturally responsive school leaders constantly examine their own biases to identify how those biases are affecting their leadership practices (Dantley, 2005). In CRSL, leaders are transformative leaders for social justice. They measure student inclusiveness, policy, and practice using equity audits and school data to critically reflect on the culturally responsive practices within the school (Khalifa et al., 2016). Ishimaru (2013) discussed the importance of the community voice in measuring the cultural responsiveness of a school. Low-income parents and parents of color often do not feel welcomed at their children's schools, but principals can support parents, educators, and the greater community in developing relationships to create a sense of belonging (Ishimaru, 2013). Ishimaru (2013) found that with parents, shared leadership was non-negotiable. "A shared conception of leadership consistent with organizing principles may begin to bridge the 'worlds' of professional control and community interest" (Ishimaru,

2013, p. 41). Social capital was also found to be important between educators and parents in elevating parent voices in a school (Ishimaru, 2013).

While self-reflection is essential in culturally responsive leadership, so is the development of culturally responsive teachers within the school. Khalifa et al. (2016) believe that principals focusing on developing culturally responsive teachers is one of the most important aspects of being a culturally responsive leader. Some of the ways principals can support teachers in becoming culturally responsive include reforming the school curriculum to be culturally responsive, modeling culturally responsive teaching, using culturally responsive assessment tools, facilitating collaborative walk throughs, and developing teacher capacity to be culturally responsive educators (Khalifa et al., 2016). Another action principals can take toward fostering culturally responsive teachers is to establish a CRSL team that is responsible for reviewing culturally responsive practices and looking for new ways that teachers can be culturally responsive (Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). Khalifa et al. (2016) described necessary leadership actions:

> Such leadership activities will vary from one context to the next, but overall school resources, leadership teams for cultural responsiveness, and mentoring (or challenging) teachers for culturally responsive teaching must be a constant part of the ongoing professional development in schools. (pp. 1287–1288)

The leader must also use school data to identify cultural gaps in student achievement, discipline, enrichment, and remedial services to guide the culturally responsive work in the school (Skrla et al., 2004). Lindsey et al. (2004) argued, "Culturally proficient educational leaders take responsibility for helping each student

understand himself or herself as a unique, competent, and valued member of a diverse cultural community rather than a deprived minority in a dominant culture" (p. 44).

Third, culturally responsive leaders promote a vision for a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment and behavior practices through modeling CRSL for staff and through building relationships (Khalifa et al., 2016). In a culturally responsive and inclusive school environment, all students are accepted, and you will find student voice, acknowledgment of the social capital of students, and recognition of the value of student's indigenous cultures (Khalifa et al., 2016). School data can also be used to look at exclusionary practices and to challenge policies, teachers, and behaviors that lead to exclusion (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Building relationships between students and staff is critical in culturally responsive school environments because it supports reducing anxiety among students, and relationships between students and school leadership are equally as important (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

The fourth culturally responsive leadership practice is engaging students and parents in community contexts. Culturally responsive leaders care for students and families and connect directly with students (Khalifa et al., 2016). They create a nurturing and caring environment and find ways in which the community and school spaces can overlap (Cooper, 2009). "This often occurs through the promotion of overlapping school–community spaces—bringing the community into the school and establishing a school presence in the community; this happens by leveraging school resources for cultural responsive schooling" (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1297). It is important for culturally responsive leaders to develop positive relationships with the community and to provide

opportunities for the greater community and parents to be a part of the school community

(Gardiner & Enomoto, 2006). The mindset school leaders have about the community they

serve is important because it will impact the work that they do within the community.

Culturally responsive school leaders also make sure not to have a deficit mindset about

students and families they serve (Flessa, 2009). A leader must understand and

acknowledge the cultural wealth of the individuals that they serve.

Cultural Wealth Model

The students attending schools in the United States are more diverse than ever,

but the teaching and administrative personnel do not reflect these changing

demographics. The proportion of students of color in our schools is increasing and

projected to continue on that trajectory. By 2024 the NCES predicts that 46% of US

students will be White, 29% will be Hispanic, 15% will be Black, and 6% will be

Asian/Pacific Islander (Policy and Program Studies Service, 2016). However, 82% of the

educator workforce is White (NCES, n.d.). Over time, educator diversity has slightly

increased, from 13% teachers of color in the 1987–1988 school year to 18% in 2011–

2012. During this same school year, only 20% of principals were people of color.

Our diverse student bodies bring community cultural wealth to our schools.

Community cultural wealth (Figure 2) can be described as "an array of knowledges,

skills, abilities, and networks possessed and utilized by communities of color to survive

and to resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 1).

Throughout history, racism has shaped our social institutions, including our schools. To

serve successfully as educators of diverse student populations, school leaders need to

understand the lived experiences of people of color. Critical race theory (CRT) established by Delgado and Stefancic (2012) is a well-established and research-based framework for educators to do this work. Yosso and Burciaga (2016) describe CRT as "a dynamic interdisciplinary framework used to identify, analyze, and challenge the ways race and racism intersect with multiple forms of subordination to shape the experiences of People of Color" (p. 1).

The CRT framework has been applied to school settings to examine the impacts of racism in schools and to make changes (Parker & Stovall, 2004). Using the CRT framework, we can see the historical experiences of communities of color through examining their lived experiences. There are six types of cultural assets described in the cultural wealth model (Yosso, 2005), including:

- Aspirational capital— the ability to maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.

- Linguistic capital—the intellectual and social skills attained through communication in multiple languages and/or language styles (including communication through art, music, poetry, theatre and dance).

- Social capital—networks of people and community resources.

- Navigational capital—skills in maneuvering through social institutions. Historically, this implies the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with communities of color in mind.

- Familial capital—cultural knowledges nurtured among familia (kin) that carry of sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition.

- Resistant capital—knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenge inequality (Yosso and Burciaga, 2016, p. 2).

Figure 2

Kaleidoscope of Community Cultural Wealth
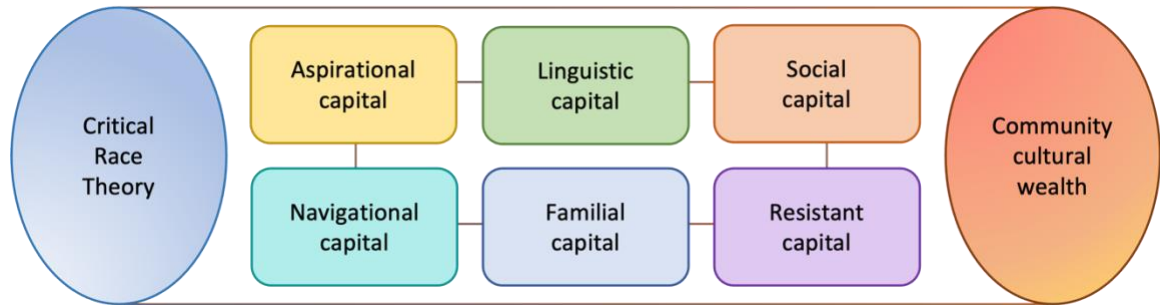
Note. Critical race theory, the community cultural wealth model, and the six cultural assets representing community cultural wealth within critical race theory (Yosso, 2005). This model originally appeared in Yosso and Garcia (2007), and this figure is adapted from Villalpando and Solórzano (2005) and Yosso (2005, 2006).

These six cultural assets reframe culture as a resource for communities of color instead of a barrier and provide points of consideration for educators working within communities of color. Communities of color have passed down these cultural assets through generations and preserved them, despite dealing with difficult experiences, such as violence and unfair laws. "As we consider the generations of communities who have preserved and passed down cultural wealth despite harsh conditions, let us be fierce visionaries for generating opportunities to cultivate community cultural wealth as a tool of reclamation—a tool for social justice" (Yosso & Burciaga, 2016, p. 2).

Culturally Responsive Social and Emotional Learning

Cultural wealth and cultural assets can be called upon in SEL that is focused on being culturally responsive. Culturally responsive SEL integrates instruction that uses lived experiences and frames of reference of students to reinforce and teach SEL competencies (Barnes & McCallops, 2019). For educators to teach culturally responsive SEL, they must be culturally effective and responsive. A culturally responsive educator is aware of their biases and assumptions, seeks out knowledge of the group of students they are working with, and uses culturally appropriate strategies when working with diverse students (Han & Thomas, 2010).

Current research on SEL in urban schools focuses on "fixing students" exposed to risk factors common in urban areas (McCallops et al., 2019). This is problematic because it bases social and emotional interventions on a deficit model. Integrating cultural wealth into SEL means including and considering students' familial and cultural strengths in social and emotional programming while also considering systemic inequities that lead to

negative social and emotional outcomes for students in urban areas (Gay, 2013). With increasing diversity of student populations in the United States, it is critical to incorporate culturally responsive practices in SEL programming and to have culturally responsive leaders in schools today.

SEL occurs alongside the environment in which one engages (Zwaans et al., 2008). All children face dual demands of family and school, and navigating these social demands can be challenging for some children (Garner et al., 2014). When trying to understand the social and emotional competency of a child, it is important to understand the dominant socio-cultural demands of the child's culture because they shape a child's social and emotional competency (Chen & French, 2008; Graves & Howes, 2011). The socio-cultural factors that significantly impact SEL intervention programs include race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), gender, disability status, family emotional socialization practices, and school context (Garner et al., 2014). Culturally responsive SEL programming in schools needs to address each of these factors.

Considering race and ethnicity is important in addressing social and emotional competence. Through this review of the literature, it is clear that SEL is necessary for improving learning outcomes for all students. If teachers are provided training and tools, schools are able to implement schoolwide universal practices around SEL and students significantly benefit.

Ethic of Care

Creating a Culture of Care

In the last several decades, K–12 educational strategies have focused on school leadership, increasing academic achievement, the rigor of courses, and teacher evaluation (Louis et al., 2016), but this approach has not been sufficient for positive educational outcomes. Many schools have reported an increasing level of challenging and disruptive behaviors, and within these schools there has often been frustration, conflict, and stress from both students and staff (Cavanagh et al., 2012). However, schools can adopt responsive practices to support students and improve outcomes by implementing a culture of care and culturally responsive pedagogies. That is, leaders within school systems can shift their focus away from impersonal academic measures and toward caring for their students.

A caring community provides a safe and supportive school learning environment. School communities that are caring communities have "an 'ethic of care' that works to develop students who will become empathetic adults and transport a caring mission beyond the walls of the school to their communities" (Doyle & Doyle, 2003, p. 259). Also, when a school has a culture of care, equity is a focus and vision (Doyle & Doyle, 2003). All members of the school community must look at the systems that serve students in order to ensure equitable decisions are being made and that inclusion, which "begets equity and models caring for everyone in the school community" (p. 259), is a priority.

Positive school culture is directly tied to student outcomes, and, therefore, schools benefit when their principal takes on a caring role as part of their leadership and

management responsibilities (Habegger, 2008; van der Vyver et al., 2014). Cavanagh et al. (2012) described the need, when creating a culture of care, to be "cognizant on how the school and classroom values, beliefs and practices make it safe for all students to engage, to contribute, to belong and to feel confident in their own cultural identities" (p. 443). Creating a culture of care is part of fostering a trauma-sensitive environment where students can access both academic and social and emotional learning. Further, creating a culture of care involves all components of an educational community—not only school leadership but also the teachers, students, administration, and community at large. Doyle and Doyle (2003) used Lincoln Center Middle School (LCMS) in Milwaukie, Wisconsin as an example of a caring school community, which was created through five critical activities including "establishing powerful policies for equity, empowering groups, teaching caring in classrooms, caring for students, and caring by students" (p. 259).

At the helm of creating a culture of care in a school community is the school principal. In order to instigate a caring culture within their school, "the principal has to act in a caring way towards the teachers under his or her supervision. . . . the principals' leadership/management function also includes a caring role" (van der Vyver et al., 2014, p. 1). A principal who holds to a culture of care will model caring for their staff, which influences the entire organization's culture. There must be a districtwide effort to create a safe and supportive learning environment in our schools. School staff, teachers, and principals cannot do it alone.

Effective teachers must have the ability to implement a culture of care in their classrooms (Owens & Ennis, 2005). Owens and Ennis (2005) stated, "teachers need to be

able to care for themselves, their students, the content, and other members of the school community" (p. 392). Teachers being empowered in their own development is very important within a culture of care. "Because professional development directly influences teachers' role responsibilities, teachers need to have decision-making authority for their own professional development" (Doyle & Doyle, 2003, p. 260). For example, at LCMS this meant some teachers were provided funding to attend conferences and given time to share what they learned with the other staff. Teachers were also provided with funds to develop writing competencies for creating curricula (Doyle & Doyle, 2003).

Caring communities also include structures that allow for shared decision making. These structures include parent committees, such as parent–teacher associations, and school improvement/leadership teams. Caring communities look at structures for developing the capacity of the members of their communities by empowering them to support the school in making decisions (Doyle & Doyle, 2003). This shared decision making requires that schools allow community members to "have authentic decision-making power," rather than just "advisory input" (p. 260).

Another key component to a school with a culture of care is caring for students. In a school with an established culture of care, "schools and teachers take ownership and responsibility for students' holistic well-being (adopting an ethic of care), for building trusting and respectful relationships and for repairing those relationships that have been harmed through wrong doing" (Cavanagh et al., 2012, p. 444). Reciprocal and respectful student–teacher and student–student relationships facilitate student learning and allow students "to know that they belong and feel safe to participate without threat of their

culture identities, values and practices, all characteristics of an effective culture of care" (p.452). Additionally, "students need to feel that their teachers care about them, want the best for them, and are invested in their success, before students will give their full effort" (Shann, 1999, p. 409).

It is important that students are not only cared for, but that they care for others. "To make caring a metacognitive activity, student must be not only cared for, but they must also think, plan, and reflect on how they are involved in caring for others" (Doyle & Doyle, 2003, p. 261). Schools must embed opportunities for students to learn about caring for their community within their curricula. As an example, LCMS staff implemented service learning as part of the social-studies curriculum. Students were involved in projects in the community, such as visiting nursing homes, painting a daycare center, and visiting a nearby elementary school to share their experiences of service learning, which promoted care in the greater community (Doyle & Doyle, 2003).

Trust in Caring School Communities. "Trust is increasingly recognized as an essential element in vibrant, well-performing schools" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015, p. 257). The concept of trust includes five commonly recognized concepts: benevolence, predictability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy, 2003). Trust is based on the belief that individuals or groups act in ways that are in the best interest of the group (Hoy et al., 2006). Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015) found that trust in schools is associated with effective leadership practices that support student achievement, teacher efficacy, and teacher professionalism.

A 2015 case study about Martha Johnson, principal at Bullen Elementary in the Belmont School District in Belmont, North Carolina, illustrated the role of trust in building a community of care to improve teaching and learning (Brown III, 2015). In the 25 years prior to Johnson becoming principal, there was a history of principal turnover because the position was a difficult one. Johnson, who has now been an effective leader at Bullen Elementary for 18 years, was able to regain the trust of the community, staff, and families and to build a culture of care at the school.

In rebuilding trust with the school community, Johnson took three actions (Brown III, 2015). First, Johnson changed the physical environment of her office by putting in a table and chair to welcome staff, families, and students who came to meet with her. She added student-made decorations throughout the school, creating a welcoming environment. Through extensive personal involvement in modifying the school's physical environment, she also made it apparent that she was invested in her role as principal. A fifth-grade teacher at the school related, "the physical environment shift gave the initial impression to the staff that she was not looking to be here short-term, she and her husband practically lived here the first summer helping the custodial staff decorate the building" (Brown III, 2015, p. 312).

Second, Johnson worked to develop home–school relationships. Johnson knew that parent involvement would be a key to her success at Bullen Elementary. Under Johnson's leadership the school offered many opportunities for families to be actively involved in their children's educational experience. She invited parents to join the school leadership team and to be a part of the after-school program. The school began hosting

parent events, workshops, and festival nights, which empowered parents and built trust and a sense of community.

Finally, Johnson used a shared leadership model. In her first year, she worked with the superintendent to change the negative school culture by replacing six teachers. She also implemented Professional Learning Communities during which she gave teachers additional time to look at data and monitor students (Brown III, 2015). Allowing for shared decision making and empowering teachers to incorporate caring into their approach toward students contributed to a community of care. This case study illustrates actionable methods for improving a school's outcomes by incorporating trust and caring by a school principal. Johnson was able to rebuild trust with the community through changing the physical environment, developing home–school relationships, and using a shared leadership model.

Mindfulness in Caring School Communities. Mindfulness is a concept that is useful for creating a culture of trust in school communities. Two types of mindfulness, individual and organizational, can support principals and teachers in making intentional decisions and building trust within their school systems (Hoy et al., 2006). Hoy et al. (2006) described individual mindfulness as

> A habit of mind that continuously seeks disconfirming evidence to test assumptions. Mindful administrators know that "believing is seeing," and they are on guard—wary of the obvious and searching for "the danger not yet arisen." They are suspicious of facile explanation as well as their own success. (p. 239)

Organizational mindfulness comprises five processes: preoccupation with failure, reluctance to simplify, sensitivity to operations, commitment to resilience, and deference to expertise (Weick & Sutcliffe, 2001). A preoccupation with failure and always looking for small mistakes prevents them from becoming large problems (Hoy et al., 2006). Hoy et al. (2006) argue that "because success breeds complacency and sometimes arrogance, preoccupation with failure prevents being lulled into a false sense of organizational confidence" (p. 239). Mindful organizations are also reluctant to simplify because "life in schools is complex, [and] teachers and administrators need to adopt multiple perspectives to understand the shadings that are hidden below the surface of the obvious" (p. 239). Mindful schools are also sensitive to operations, which means that they remain focused on the education of their students (Hoy et al., 2006). A commitment to resiliency is important in a mindful organization as well. Educators must be flexible and emotionally strong in order to cope with inevitable unexpected events (Hoy et al., 2006). Finally, mindful schools defer to expertise. They are flexible in decision making rather than adhering to strict rules and regulations without regard for specific situational needs (Hoy et al., 2006).

The Ethic of Care Framework

In social science research, there is a theoretical framework based on care and compassion called an ethic of care (EoC), which became prominent in the 1980s. This framework was created by philosopher and educator Nel Noddings and psychologist Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, 1993; Nodding, 1984), who argued that there should be care at

the center of the educational system. The EoC can be applied in many fields and used to re-imagine current educational practices.

In the book *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, Noddings (2005) provided recommendations for schools in creating classrooms based on care ethics. She stated,

> In particular, we believe that students should be given opportunities to learn how to care for themselves, for other human beings, for the natural and human-made worlds, and the world of ideas. This learning to care requires significant knowledge; it defines genuine education. (p. xxxi)

When there is care, there is an established relationship. In a caring relationship, relational practices are in place that foster mutual recognition and realization, growth, development, protection, empowerment, and human community, culture, and possibility (Owens & Ennis, 2005).

In Noddings' ethic of care, there is a reciprocal relationship between the "one caring" and the "cared for." These roles can shift depending on context. For instance, in a school, the principal is the one caring, and teachers, students, and parents are cared for. In a classroom, the teacher is the one caring, and the students are cared for. To be considered a caring relationship by this definition, there must be reciprocal care by and from both parties.

In a classroom context, teachers are responsible for empowering students (Noddings, 2005). Noddings (2005) said, "teachers not only have to create caring relations in which they are carers, but they also have the responsibility to help students develop the capacity to care" (p. 18). An important facet of this dynamic to consider is

the possibility that the student does not *feel* cared for. "No matter how hard teachers try to care, if the caring is not received by the student, the claim 'they don't care' has some validity. It suggests strongly that something is very wrong" (Noddings, 2005, p. 15).

Moral Education in a Caring Community. Each person has a different capacity for caring, and it is the responsibility of educators to support students in developing the capacity to care. Care can be taught through moral education, and in the EoC moral education has four components: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation (Noddings, 1984).

In creating schools that embody a culture of care, it is important that the principal models what it means to care about the teachers, families, and students within an organization. "We do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them" (Noddings, 2005, p. 22). Modeling is also important because people need to have the experience of being cared for in order to have the capacity to care.

Dialogue is also important in an EoC, and dialogue must be open ended to connect us with other people. In open-ended dialogue, neither party has an intended outcome to the conversation. Open-ended dialogue affords an opportunity to create understanding, empathy, and appreciation within a relationship (Noddings, 2005).

Next, practice is an important part of moral education. Attitudes and mentalities of people are shaped through experiences and practices. "If we want people to approach moral life prepared to care, we need to provide opportunities for them to gain skills in caregiving" (Noddings, 2005, p. 24). Noddings (2005) believes that if we practice caring

in our schools, eventually we will not only transform our schools into caring communities, but we will transform our society as well.

The final component in moral education is confirmation. This is the act of affirming and encouraging the best in others. "Confirmation requires attribution of the best possible motive constant with reality" (Noddings, 2005, p. 25). Caring is knowing where someone wants to go and being able to confirm and support them toward their goals.

Continuity in a Caring Community. Noddings (2005) also described that in a caring community there must be continuity of purpose, place, people, and curriculum. "Although schools should continue to reflect on and pursue many purposes, their first— their guiding purpose—must be to establish and maintain a climate of continuity and care" (Noddings, 2005, p. 64). In education there must be strong, long-term relationships to establish trust for there to be caring communities, which differs from short encounters with others (Noddings, 2005).

Continuity of purpose in a school happens throughout an entire day and portrays what is important to the school. Students need to be aware that their school is a place where they are cared for and they will be encouraged to care for themselves as well (Noddings, 2005). For continuity of purpose in schools, community members and parents should be welcomed into the school to be a part of the caring community that is the school. Every stakeholder in a school, including administrators, students, parents, and community members, should know and understand the purpose of the school and be able to remind each of that purpose (Noddings, 2005).

Continuity of place is also important for building a caring community. Ideally, students should be in a single school setting for two to three years because "children need time to settle in, to become responsible for their physical surroundings, to take part in maintaining a caring community" (Noddings, 2005, p. 66). Students are often moved from school to school for a variety of reasons, including declining enrollment, specialized programs, and to achieve racial balance (Noddings, 2005); therefore, school systems should be better prepared to address enrollment declines and racial integration without changing a student's school and disrupting their continuity of place.

In addition to benefiting from long tenures at the same school, students also benefit from continuity of people. For instance, staying with the same teachers for a continuous period of time, ideally 3 years, allows students to establish caring relationships with adults in their schools (Noddings, 2005). "Students and teachers need each other. Students need competent adults to care; teachers need students to respond to their caring" (Noddings, 2005, p. 69).

Students also need a continuity of curriculum in which themes of caring are embedded. Noddings (2005) suggested that schools build curricula explicitly around caring, stating,

> I would suggest organizing [the curriculum] entirely around centers or themes of
> care; care for self, care for intimate others, care for strangers and distant others,
> care for nonhuman animals, care for plants and the living environment, care for
> objects and instruments, and care for ideas. (p. 70)

Of course, this kind of restructuring is not possible with current requirements for curricula; therefore, it is important to infuse care into topics already taught throughout the day, such as writing, reading, science, and social studies.

      Themes of Care. In order to take care of others, it is imperative that we take care of ourselves and also teach others how to take care of themselves. This is important, not only for principals and teachers, but also for students to learn and take care of themselves. We can care for ourselves through work, exercise, health management, humor, play, hobbies, and spiritual life.

      Along with self-care it is also important to have caring within an inner circle. Care in one's inner circle may include friends, family, neighbors, children, students, and colleagues with both equal and unequal relationships (Noddings, 2005). Equal relationships are those in which both parties care for each other (e.g., friends, colleagues, neighbors, or spouses). Unequal relationships are those in which one person is cared for and the other is the carer (e.g., parent–child, teacher–student, or professional–client). Our inner circle is made up of the people we draw upon for support and a listening ear. These are established and trusting relationships. Educator relationships with one's equal inner circle are important because you can lean on one another for lesson planning, equity discussions, and problem solving. A teacher–student relationship is also very important because teachers both care for their students and teach their students how to care for others.

      When we have trusting and established relationships with our inner circle, we develop the skills to also have relationships with casual acquaintances, strangers, and

distant others. "An ethic of care counsels us to meet each living other in a caring relation" (Noddings, 2005, p. 111). We must learn to care from a distance for others, while understanding the limits and challenges of caring from a distance. Noddings (2005) explores two challenges in caring from a distance. "First, we cannot be present to those we would care for, and thus we cannot be sure that caring is completed. Second, we may cause suffering to those we hold responsible for the pain we try alleviate" (p. 113). Through caring for strangers and distant others, one learns the difficulty of caring for others and is, thus, more prepared to truly care for others. In caring for others, it is important that students and people have the knowledge of other cultures and customs.

It is also important to teach children to care for animals, plants, and the earth because we are interdependent on them as humans. These are different caring relationships than with humans and teach other attributes of caring. Children can learn to care for animals through having pets, which develops their ability to identify and value the attributes and capacities of animals, as well as to recognize the obligation humans have to care for non-human beings (Noddings, 2005). Caring for plants in school gardens and classrooms also teaches children about nurturing and develops their ability to care. Plants respond to the care of receiving light, water, and nutrients (Noddings, 2005). Today there are many concerns about our environment, such as pollution, overpopulation, and global warming. Schools need to teach students about our environment in order to support the development of caring humans who will make good future stewards of the Earth (Noddings, 2005).

Caring for the human-made world of objects and instruments is also important. "There is no immediate moral impact. Objects do not cry out in pain, exclaim in joy, or express love for us. But how we treat things has an impact on both human and non-human life" (Noddings, 2005, p. 139). Students can learn and explore what objects are used for, how we use them, and ask questions about them. They also can learn about the arrangement of objects, maintaining and conserving them, along with making and repairing them. "As students acquire understanding in the world of objects, they may also gain a greater sense of control over their own everyday affairs" (Noddings, 2005, p. 149).

Students should also be taught to care for ideas. "Students who have passionate interest in a subject should be initiated into the discourse of the disciplinary community; others not be" (Noddings, 2005, p. 150). Students have different interests, which may include math, art, writing, technology, and so on. Noddings (2005) argued that caring for ideas is similar to caring for people. In schools we need to encourage students to become engrossed in topics, but we cannot demand it (Noddings, 2005).

The EoC provides a clear framework for establishing a caring school community. Throughout this section we have explored research on the most important components of creating a caring school community and positive school culture. Schools can establish a caring community through building relationships and caring for all members of the school community, infusing the teaching of care throughout the curriculum, establishing trust, sharing leadership, establishing mindfulness practices, and implementing Noddings' (2005) care ethics.

Summary of the Literature Review

The goal of my autoethnographic research is to provide a personalized reflective account of being a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic. To do so, in this chapter, I have examined various styles of leadership and what is meant by the culture of care. I utilize the frameworks of: (a) culture of care drawing upon the literature review reflected in culturally responsive leadership, cultural wealth, and ethic of care; and also (b) prosocial leadership. In presenting these constructs in the literature review, they became the foundation for my personal narrative. They provided a way for me to reflect on the personal data as I navigated and made sense of my practices as a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Telling our stories is a way for us to be present to each other; the act provides a

space for us to create a relationship embodied in the performance of writing and

reading that is reflective, critical, loving and chosen in solidarity. (Adams et al.,

2014, p. 5)

When schools shut in March 2020, my reality as a leader changed. On March 13,

2020, being a principal was no longer the same as it had been on March 12th. Our entire

school was shifted to an online platform, but our school and community had no existing

infrastructure to support online schooling. We began building that structure from the

ground up. In the fall of 2020, I decided to focus on this experience as my dissertation

topic, and I began to keep a journal documenting the experiences I was having as a

principal during the school closure. That journal, as well as additional narratives I wrote,

serve as the basis for this autoethnographic research study about my experience as a

principal of an elementary school during the pandemic. In this autoethnography I

explored the roles and functions that were necessary for me to meet the needs of my

school community during closure and reopening of schools.

The goal of this study is to provide a personalized experience of being a principal

during the Covid-19 pandemic and to examine how I addressed the day-to-day nuances of

crises never experienced before. To do so I examined the problems and complexities I

experienced during school closures and reopening of schools during the pandemic.

Chapter 2 explored the body of literature that makes up the conceptual framework for my

study. This study connects that body of literature—grounded in leadership theory,

cultural wealth, care ethics, and prosocial and culturally responsive leadership styles—

with my story to create a scholarly personal narrative of experiences. This linking of self-

reflection with formal leadership and social–emotional learning theories allow the readers

to find meaning and take action in their own lives and careers when dealing with

experiences that are similar.

This research project asks: *As a principal, what were the most critical aspects of*

my leadership in support of my school community? How did I promote a culture of care

at my school? How did I show up as a culturally responsive leader each day? What did

my school community do to acknowledge the cultural wealth of our diverse community?

How did I practice self-care during the pandemic? What did I learn about myself as a

leader during the pandemic? What are the best practices I learned during the pandemic

that are useful for continued application?

Research Design

"Research is an extension of researchers' lives" (Ngunjiri et al., 2010). This study

is just that, an exploration of my own experience of being a principal during the closures

and reopening of schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. I chose the qualitative method

of autoethnography for this study because it supports self-reflection, and I am deeply

entangled in this work. Autoethnography provides a framework that allowed me to

understand and interpret my thoughts, behaviors, ideas, and feelings by telling my story

in narrative form through my own cultural lens. Because I have had the uncommon

experience of leading a school during the pandemic and hold intimate knowledge and

experiences from that journey, autoethnography provided the best method to formally and

qualitatively examine and relate information that is both personal and valuable for others.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that "offers nuanced, complex

and specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships, rather than

general information about large groups" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 21). Typically, social

scientists are expected to keep their voices separate from their research and are trained

against subjectivity and to separate themselves from their research (which is an

impossible task; Ngunjiri et al., 2010). The method of autoethnography is different. An

autoethnography is both a process and a product (Ellis et al., 2011), that is, "an approach

to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy)

personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (p. 273).

Autoethnographies are written in the first person and resemble an autobiography

written as a personal narrative. They contain dialogue, contextual details, emotions, self-

consciousness, and stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis &

Bochner, 2000). In this method the researcher uses data about themselves and the context

of the narrative, in this case a school, to take "a systematic approach to data collection,

analysis, and interpretation about self and social phenomena involving self" (Ngunjiri et

al., 2010, p. 2). An autoethnography is self-focused because the researcher is at the center

of the study as a subject and object. "Autoethnography creates a space for a turn, a

change, a reconsideration of how we think, how we do research and relationships, and

how we live" (Jones et al., 2016, p. 21).

According to Adams et al. (2014), autoethnography is a research method that:

- Uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences.

- Acknowledges and values a researcher's relationship with others.

- Uses deep and careful self-reflection—typically referred to as "reflexivity"—to name and interrogate the intersection between self and society, the particular, the general, the personal, and the political.

- Shows people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles.

- Balances intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity.

- Strives for social justice and to make life better. (pp. 1–2)

In the writing of an autoethnography, an author combines aspects of an autobiography and ethnography. When writing an ethnography, authors "study a culture's relational practices, common values and beliefs, and share experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture" (Ellis et al., 2011, pp. 273–274). In an autoethnography researchers combine these characteristics with those of autobiography to "retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or possess a particular cultural identity" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 274).

In this study, the autoethnographic process forced me to be a reflective practitioner of what leadership practices were imperative during the pandemic and how my leadership style affected the school. The process also offered insights into how the

pandemic affected me as a school leader. The data I collected and analyzed allowed me, as the researcher, to gain intimate insight into the way schools functioned during the Covid-19 closure. This research took into account my personal relationships, challenges, celebrations, and journey that shaped my experience as a leader during this time.

Data Collection

Three types of data are at the front and center of autoethnographic research: fieldnotes, personal documents, and interviews (Jones et al., 2016). The goal of this autoethnography is to tell the story of what it has been like to be a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic; therefore, the research tools employed for data collection needed to be supportive in being able to tell my story. The data are subjective because they were derived from recollections of my own experiences. I collected data throughout the development of this paper. The primary source of data was a daily reflexive journal, which I began to write in the fall of 2020 and that I continued to write at the end of each day throughout the pandemic, summarizing the day's events. This was in order to reflect on the day and document any events that happened. Other tools I used for data collection include my daily calendar, emails, meeting agendas, social media, and student artifacts, all related to the unfolding crisis.

In addition to existing documents, I wrote personal narratives about my perceptions and observations during the 2020–2021 academic year. The narratives I wrote depended on my own recollections of my experiences spanning the COVID-19 pandemic. The subjects, stories, and instances I selected to write about were those that shaped my experience during these very challenging time.

Data Analysis

I analyzed data throughout the entire process of completing this research. Writing daily in my journal was, and continues to be, an ongoing process toward being a reflective practitioner. During this study, the gathering and analyzing of data were done simultaneously as themes and theories emerged throughout the research (Erlandson et al., 1993). I used reflection to consistently shape and form the experiences I had as a principal.

Analyzing the collected data was done by finding themes through coding the data. "Thematizing helps us imagine a logic or pattern to our narrative and to explicitly connect personal experience with culture" (Adams et al., 2014, p. 77). By coding the data sources (e.g., journal, calendar, emails), I created a structure to interpret the collected data to discover which themes would emerge. When reviewing the artifacts collected throughout this research process, I used a color-coded system connected to my research questions. With this system, I was able to connect the themes to the research in my literature review to understand my own experiences better. I also recognized, as Jones et al. (2016) described, that the process of analyzing data to recall past events and describe them can be an emotional process. I tried to express these emotions with care as I explored my lived experiences as a principal during COVID-19.

Summary

This autoethnographic study is directly tied to my experiences through the use of the conceptual frameworks of culture of care and prosocial leadership. I employed autoethnographic methods to develop and present narrative stories, to question and

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analyze my experiences as a leader during school closure and reopening during the

Covid-19 pandemic, and to link emergent themes with my conceptual framework.

Chapter 4: Results

In this narrative I will be sharing what it has been like to be a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic and how this time period has shaped me as a leader. I will explore what happened during this time, what was most important, and what I found to be the impactful leadership strategies that I will carry with me post pandemic. Before I begin to tell my story, I want to share a little bit about who I am and about the school that I lead.

Who I am as a Principal

I am an educator, a leader, a wife, and a mother-to-be. Since 2016, I have been an elementary school principal at Davis Elementary School in the Reynolds School District in Portland, Oregon, United States. Prior to being the principal at Davis, I taught first grade for a year, followed by being an instructional coach for two years while I completed an administration program at Concordia University in Portland.

Davis Elementary is located in the Rockwood neighborhood of Portland, Oregon in Multnomah County. We serve a diverse group of 423 students, who speak 23 different languages (ODE, 2021). Forty-nine % of our students are Ever English Learners, which means these students speak English as their second (or additional) language and qualify for English Language Development (ELD) support (or did in the past and have exited from the program). Nineteen % of our students receive Special Education Services, which include two specialized-placement social communication classrooms. More than 95% of our students qualify for free breakfast and lunch; therefore, our whole school gets these meals for free. We have about 60 staff members, of whom 93% are white (ODE, 2021).

During the past two years I have grown both personally and professionally. During the summer of 2020 I got married to my husband. We have been together for three years, and the majority of our relationship has taken place during the pandemic. In the fall of 2021, we found out I was pregnant, and we are expecting our first child in May of 2022. Becoming a parent is a life changing event but presents special gravity now as I navigate the risks of COVID-19 both at work and for my unborn child. For the past two years I have been learning all of the safety protocols around the virus from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and implementing practices within our school community to keep everyone as safe as possible. As I am growing my own child through my pregnancy, I am simultaneously nurturing and protecting the students and staff in my own community.

Principalship has been the most rewarding and challenging professional position I have ever held. Being a principal is all-consuming. I am a building manager, an instructional leader, a counselor, a social worker, a teacher, and so much more. The stress can be high as I deal with the needs of over 1,000 people, when you consider students, staff, and parents. The pressure is high, and the job is demanding. In a single day, I may be working with a family that has recently lost housing, having to call Child Protective Services because of potential child abuse, working with a teacher who is experiencing an emergency with their own family, putting together safety plans for a suicidal student, and doing teacher observations. No day is ever the same, and finding tools for self-care and resilience are imperative to avoid burning out in the position.

During Covid-19, being a principal has become harder, not only because the world has been in a state of crisis due to the pandemic for almost two years, but also because of the challenges associated with school closures. For the first year of the pandemic, all educators and school staff were at home working via computers, with little authentic human connection outside of a screen. My favorite part of being a principal had been the human person-to-person connection I had each day with students, teachers, families, and community partners, and so many of the things that brought me joy as a principal were taken away. If a day was tough prior to the Covid-19 school closures, I could be in a classroom and see teachers connect with students and kids learning. I could walk down the hallway and check in with a teacher or get a hug from a student who would tell me how their day was or about their weekend. Covid-19 meant reimagining how schools could function in the middle of a pandemic. First, it was moving a school to online learning. Then, bringing back students for hybrid learning after a year. Then, reopening the school building full time for in-person learning. During this time, as a school and society, we have been dealing with the fear and impacts of Covid-19, staffing shortages, political polarization and conflicts around vaccines and masks, and so much more.

As a leader I have always held the belief that it is my job to support everyone under my leadership scope by providing what they need in order to serve our community. I believe it is imperative that I listen to and understand what my teachers and other staff need in order to serve our students. Equally important to me is to listen to and understand the needs of students and families who make up our school community. In this narrative I

present an overview of those experiences of educators during the Covid-19 pandemic and specifically what has been like for me as a principal during this time, as documented in a detailed journal and through various other artifacts. I also identify the themes that emerged as I analyzed these reflections and artifacts, which help to guide, organize, and contextualize the narrative.

Throughout this autoethnography I discuss communications, interactions, and events that involve other individuals. To protect the identities of those individuals, I have omitted any identifiers, such as names, genders, or grades. Also, rather than relating events strictly in chronological order, this document will trace linkages among events and ideas because the nuances of my approach to dealing with the pandemic are interwoven with my experience as a principal prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Emergent Themes

While writing this chapter I used my reflexive journal to understand and review the experiences I had during the past two years. When reviewing the journal, I color coded ideas and phrases tied to themes that emerged in my literature review: communication and connection, leadership, self-care, creating and sustaining a culture of care, and equity. The most prevalent theme in my journal was leadership in the context of how I have been leading and supporting my community during the pandemic both virtually and after returning to school in person. And weaving through all of these themes was another, overarching theme of an ethic of care. Care, and a belief in the importance of caring, is at the heart of my communication and leadership styles, in the way I foster a culture of care within my school, the importance I place on SEL, and my unwavering

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dedication to equity. Care is about who I am and how I lead, and this ethic of care emerged as the framework for understanding the ways I have led my school during the Covid-19 pandemic.

As I reflected on better understanding myself as a leader and what was important for successful leadership both before and during the pandemic, I found that my philosophy as a leader has been key. At the foundation of my leadership philosophy is a belief that I need to put the people in my organization first. This means creating strong communication channels, building strong relationships, facilitating a healthy environment through a focus on SEL, and actively seeking ways to increase equity. I consider myself to be a prosocial leader, which I will explore in depth in this chapter. I believe, and have seen firsthand, that the ways leaders treat their employees translates into the kind of culture that accepted, and considered acceptable, within an organization; therefore, modeling care has been very important to me in my leadership practices. Knowing my staff as educators is important, of course, but it is imperative that I know them as people first, which creates a culture of trust within the organization. When I became the principal at Davis, I was in a unique position because I had been both a first-grade teacher and an instructional coach within the building. This presented the challenge of moving from being a peer of the teachers to establishing myself as their supervisor. In my role as a teacher and instructional coach, I had established relationships and had built trust with them in these roles. Because I truly care about them as individuals, I was able to transition into this new leadership role and adapt those relationships into this new context.

I am also a firm believer in self-care for my staff and myself. As an educator, one's work is never done. In my first two years of being a principal, I did not have clear boundaries around my work–life balance. There were many nights I was in the building until 9:00 pm and many weekends that I spent both Saturday and Sunday at work. I quickly learned that this was not a sustainable practice, and if I could not show up for my staff being rested and having taken a break, I was not good for the organization. I also learned that I need to model what I tell my staff. I could not tell my teachers to practice self-care and not practice it myself.

My philosophy as a leader did not change when the pandemic hit, but my core beliefs became central to what I did every day. During the school closure and the process of writing my dissertation, I learned and reflected constantly on what leadership is and what kind of leader I am and areas in which I want to grow. I found that it was important for me to create a culture of care within my school organization and to not lose myself in this process but take care of myself. In this chapter I will explore how I changed and grew as a leader during this time. My story will begin in March of 2020, when schools were first shut down because of the Covid-19 pandemic. The narrative begins with a description of the start of the Covid-19 pandemic and how it immediately affected me, both as a principal and as an individual, and the operation of my school. Next, I focus on each of the 5 primary emergent themes, communication and connection, leadership, self-care, creating and sustaining a culture of care, and equity, to tell the rest of the story. Finally, I apply what I learned through exploration of these themes to reflect on the

research questions I had set out to answer about my experience as a principal leading an elementary school through the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Beginning of Covid-19: March 2020

On February 14th, 2020, my now husband and I were flying to San Diego, California to visit my sister for President's Day weekend. My mother called and told me we should not be flying and should stay home because of Covid-19. At the time I had no idea what Covid-19 was, and we laughed it off as some silly thing my mother had heard on the news. I did not know it at the time, but Covid-19 would soon change my life, both professionally and personally, along with the rest of the world. A few weeks later, this virus would become part of my every waking moment.

Less than a month later, the educational system changed in a way I could never have imagined in my wildest dreams. On March 5, 2020, at our monthly district administration meeting, we discussed the topic of Covid-19. The district would be implementing additional cleaning measures as a precaution to the virus. Many cleaning supplies and hand sanitizers that we needed were backordered. I found it strange that we could not get antibacterial wipes and hand sanitizer easily but did not think about it too much. It reminded me of my second year of teaching in 2009, when the swine flu was spreading in our communities. At that time, as well, we had implemented additional cleaning measures, such as hand washing and frequently disinfecting tables. Shutting down schools did not even cross my mind at this point.

Fast forward 7 days to Wednesday, March 11, 2020, in the early afternoon. I was headed down to Eugene, Oregon with a principal colleague for the annual "COSA

English Learners Alliance Conference." The news of Covid-19 was being talked about much more often in the media, and I remember wondering briefly, "Should I really be leaving school for a conference on a Wednesday afternoon with the Covid-19 news everywhere?" I figured that whatever cleaning procedures needed to be implemented or changed could be done so from the conference in Eugene, so we left. We checked into our hotel room around 2 p.m. I came downstairs 30 minutes later to get a snack because I had class for my doctoral program that evening that I would be participating in via Zoom, while the rest of the class was in person. I had no idea that my whole life would soon be functioning solely via Zoom.

When I got downstairs at the hotel, there were notices posted that the conference was canceled because of Covid-19. I went back to my hotel room and immediately called the district office. I was told to stay in Eugene for the evening because we had already paid for the hotel room and to come back in the morning. At 3:58 p.m. that day, I received the following email from our communication director:

Good afternoon! In light of recently issued new guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and forthcoming new guidelines from Multnomah County Health Department regarding mass gatherings, Reynolds School District will be cancelling in-person conferences next week.

Please take a moment to review the following information that will be shared tomorrow afternoon to staff regarding conferences. Please let me know if there is anything missing that needs to be addressed prior to 9am tomorrow

morning 3/12/2020. Any suggestion will be vetted and decided through Cabinet

prior to adding.

This email asking for review is being sent to all of RTT (principals and

department supervisors), Reynolds Education Association (REA) leadership, and

Oregon School Education Association (OSEA) leadership. **Please DO NOT**

SHARE THIS INFORMATION with staff until all guidelines have been

approved and are ready for distribution tomorrow. Thank you!

● Wednesday, March 18–20 are teacher workdays. Teachers are expected to

report to buildings for work.

● Attend the building Professional Development planned at your building.

● Teachers will communicate student progress to parents during these workdays

in one of 3 ways:

  ○ Email

  ○ Phone call

  ○ Progress report through ParentVue

  ○ Video conferencing (if applicable)

● If students or families report to school, please send them home and

communicate our plan.

Conferences will not be rescheduled.

Following this email, at 4:04 p.m., came an email about increased sanitation measures

that were going to be implemented. At this point we learned that many cleaning supplies

were backordered because cleaning supplies were being ordered around the world to fight the Covid-19 infection.

After that I called my now-husband and shared with him that the conference was canceled and parent–teacher conferences were being canceled the following week, which would roll into our weeklong spring break. At this moment it was unclear to me why the conference was being cancelled. I felt shocked, confused, scared, but a little excited that we may get a little longer spring break, which feels so terrible now after all the lives lost due to the pandemic. That evening, I went down to the hotel bar to get dinner after I finished my class. It was like a movie. Every television showed red world maps and was sharing information about Covid-19. I ate dinner with my colleague and met several other administrators, teachers, and presenters who were supposed to be attending the conference as well. Everyone was in shock and did not really know what to expect next. How long would schools be closed? For how long? What else was going to be closed? How naïve we were back then. As I was sitting and waiting to take dessert up to my room, the news was announced that Tom Hanks and his wife had Covid-19. At that moment, it oddly felt more real. Someone I had grown up watching on TV had this disease they were calling Covid-19.

I headed back to my room to get some sleep, which was good, because I had no idea about what was about to unfold over the next couple of days. At 11:55 p.m. that night, the district sent out a message to the community and staff that conferences and field trips were canceled. The email stated:

With the number of confirmed COVID-19 coronavirus cases in Oregon increasing, including the first instance in Multnomah County, Governor Brown announced new guidance tonight regarding group gatherings and social distancing. We remain committed to keeping our schools open and safe. In accordance with this evening's guidance and in order to minimize potential opportunities for the virus to spread, we have decided to proactively begin together. (Reynolds School District, email, March 11, 2020).

The following evening, we went from having teachers in the building for their workdays to school being shut for an emergency closure. The morning of Friday, March 13th, I pulled my staff together in our library to share the information that we would be closed the following week. It felt surreal, and I felt nervous that I would not say the right thing. We were just learning that there was a ventilator shortage in the country, and Oregon was rumored to only have 7 ventilators in the state. I recall one staff member standing up to tell staff that they needed to stay home, and this was not extended spring break. My secretary put up a sign on our window that "no visitors [were] allowed due to COVID-19" in red letters. I felt like that was too scary, so I had her change the language to "no visitors allowed at this time."

Beginning on Monday, March 16th the Reynolds School District was closed, and we would not be reopening for over a year, which nobody would have predicted at the time. At this point, I lost access to the building, and my badge no longer allowed me entry into the school. I had to work from home. As the principal this felt unreal. My

custodians could be at work, but I had to stay home. On Wednesday, March 18th, I started

a new tradition: a daily email to my staff. Here is the first daily email I sent.

Hi Dragon Team,

It was just yesterday that we were planning for an April 1st opening . . .

how quickly things are changing. A few hours after my email yesterday the

governor announced schools closing until April 28th. I am still processing and

collecting my thoughts about this extension and what it means for our Reynolds

community. I am hearing from the state and district about the hopes for our

students through this extended closure. I will continue to provide a daily update of

what I am learning daily and things I am thinking about. I encourage you to reach

out to me by email, phone, or text with any ideas you may have or just to say

hello. Human connection is so important right now.

Despite the unknowns, good things are happening for our RSD

community. Check out the numbers for breakfasts and lunches that were served

on Monday!

▪ 1,245 breakfasts – total children and adults

▪ 1,140 lunch – total children and adults

▪ Total by school:

- HB Lee: 782

- RMS: 1,010

- WM: 243

- RHS: 390

Updates from Today:

Technology roll call Can you let me know if you DO NOT have a district issued laptop with you at home? The IT department has asked us to send numbers of staff who are currently not equipped with laptops to take into consideration toward any next steps for connecting with and supporting students, families, and one another.

The state expects districts to be working on ensuring/adjusting the following ideas for long term support:

- Continued engagement with students and families during the closures (including meals)

- Currently Reynolds is offering daily meals at specific locations (HB Lee, RMS, Walt Morey, RHS) from 11:30-1:00 pm utilizing nutrition staff and volunteers (thank you to REA for taking on coordination and for those of you signed up!). This food service will remain through March 30th. The district is looking at options to expand food options starting the first week of April. The details have not been determined, so please stay tuned for updates prior to April and continue to share as needed our current food options.

- Currently Reynolds has offered families the an [sic] enrichment learning resources one-pager (attached) with optional student content engagement opportunities which is uploaded online and being advertised in an autodialer later today. I am planning to do a "Facebook live" later this week to check in with parents around learning resources as well. In response to the extended

timeline, the district is looking at more robust options for students to engage

in learning, but do not have details yet on what they might look. I know we

are all eager to keep our students engaged and on track for learning and

commit to letting you know as soon as more information is available in how

this support looks. Stay tuned!

- Reynolds is also currently informing families of important updates through

  district building website, social media, and autodialers. We have been doing

  the same through Remind and on the Davis Facebook page

- Credit options explored specifically for high school seniors to keep them on

  track for graduation.

- Currently DO is working with HS to determine these options.

- Childcare options

- Currently Reynolds is working with the state on further guidance to determine

  what this option could/should look like.

- [name removed for privacy] and [name removed for privacy] are working

  hard to deep clean all our spaces, thank you [name removed for privacy] and

  [name removed for privacy]! There are still **restrictions to getting into the

  building at this time.** As of now I do not have access to the building either-

  but will share a selfie from my impeccable [sic] clean office when I'm back.

- The operations department has been doing their best to field **questions**, but

  have quickly become overloaded with inquiries. To ensure any question

  pertaining to immediate information or needs gets answered, please send them

to me and I will move them forward in my meetings or with direct contact to district staff. We don't want important and urgent questions lingering. If your questions are not immediate and could be postponed to a later time, then please document them to bring up when things have settled a bit. Thank you!

- [name removed for privacy] has been working hard to **support the world** (always) and has offered us a parenting master class to give free to our parents. I shared this resource this morning on Facebook. Here it is for your use and your sharing. She just asks for feedback so she can continue to make it better. She is such a gift. I have not previewed yet, as most of this is hot off the press!

- If parents (or staff) go to www.theparentingpartner.org, they can click on The Master Class in the menu to preview what their family will get to help their family with feelings.

- The code is daviselementary.

- This is a way for parents to bring SEL into their home as feelings are everywhere and can be helped by being named and tamed.

Here are a few things we are working on at Davis....

- Wellness calls to families to check in and offer problem solving as needed- You can reach out to your families through the Remind app (call or texts) to check in on them or send an email.

- Nightly stories on Facebook- I know the kids would love to see all of you! [name removed for privacy] and I are awesome... but you are WAYYYYY more awesome.

- Getting info out to parents about optional resources such as IXL, Newsla, Reading A to Z. [name removed for privacy] and I are working on A to Z rostering as I type . . . thanks for the teachers that got things set up as well! We will send this info out to families ASAP.

- Distribution of our Take Action Inc. weekend backpacks food to families before the weekend.

Please note that I will be suspending daily emails during our regularly scheduled spring break (March 23rd-March 27) to encourage our rest and relaxation. I will be around, and I am here to support you if needed and will, of course, send out anything urgent.

Thinking of you all,

Ashley

Schools are Closed, Now What?

Now that schools were closed, it was time for the administrators to lean into one another to figure out how we were going to reopen our school in a comprehensive distance learning (CDL) model. We had no established infrastructure for online school. Together, we had to build an online school. We were not prepared with student and teacher technology, online platforms, internet for students, technology training for teachers, etc. In my building I have an assistant principal who has served as my other half

in navigating the Covid-19 pandemic. Together, our goals were to support teachers, staff, kids, and families from home. We began to design systems to help us support each other, also, from afar.

Student and family support focused both on basic needs, like food, and maintaining connections. For students, we implemented nightly bedtime stories on our Facebook page. We also implemented a system for wellness checks on families, where every family at our school would get a phone call following spring break. In addition, we had local community churches reach out to us with different supports for families, such as gift cards for groceries and workbooks for student learning. In the first months of Covid-19, we did not have established guidelines for how we could safely interact with people, and at that time I was not allowed at the school. I spent hours with my husband driving around to deliver gift cards to families. We selected families for this financial support through teacher nomination, families who had a history of needing support, and those who reached out for support. In those early days of Covid-19, we gave out nearly $20,000 in gift cards.

We also implemented support strategies for staff. We sent daily emails and had weekly department and grade-level check-ins. Throughout each day my assistant principal and I spent time on Zoom checking in with staff about how they were doing and how they were reaching students. I had never had such constant communication with staff, but I quickly learned how important it was for us to lean into each other and know what was going on throughout the teaching community. This was a change from when we were in school with the students. We had so little time for meetings and check-ins that

communication couldn't happen at this level. During CDL, the schedule was much more flexible because everything was online. The day-to-day of school was not happening in person, so we had more opportunity and ability to offer support in the moment to students and staff who needed it.

Importance of Communication and Connection During Covid-19

In my experience, clear communication is one of the most important parts of being an effective leader, and communication emerged as a primary theme during development of this autoethnography. Since I was a young girl, communication has always been important to me, and, as a principal, I know that communication is key to building trusting and strong relationships within a school community. During the school closure, finding effective communication for staff, students, and families became a way of life for me. My days were spent answering emails and working with teachers and parents through email, texts, Zoom meetings, and phone calls. At Davis, we are a family, and figuring out how to keep communication loops going was a high priority for me. On the flip side, staff and families were feeling communication overload; therefore, teasing out the critical information that people needed was very important. In this section I will discuss the communication systems that were established for all stakeholders, including staff, students, and families, within my school.

Communication and Connection with Staff

There was so much information coming from the state and district. I could have easily sent 10 to 15 emails a day to staff. I wanted to be intentional, though, and provide necessary information without causing information overload, which I was feeling myself.

So, I implemented my daily emails to staff, and during the first three months of the school closures, I sent 48 "Distance Learning Updates" to my staff. I sent these updates each morning with the intention of motivating staff, keeping our team connected, providing a daily schedule, and communicating any important updates for the day. I typically wrote these updates the evening before I sent them out but would sometimes write them in the morning. On April 2, 2020, in my daily update, I wrote:

It was so great to meet with classroom teachers yesterday to talk about ways to support our families and students during distance learning- you are all doing a great job already and we have barely started! Continue to practice compassion for yourselves and each other as we learn more about what can at times be an overwhelming experience- don't forget to lean into each other.

I heard from many staff members throughout the beginning of the closure that they appreciated daily updates and that it created a sense of community and closeness. A daily email is a practice we have continued since the latter part of the 2019–2020 school year. During the 2020–2021 school year, my lead secretary took over the morning updates and has continued them as we have transitioned back into fully in-person school in 2021–2022.

A practice I have followed since I became the principal six years ago has been sending out a weekly staff newsletter. This is a place where I share the schedule for the upcoming week, our school focus for instruction, important information for the upcoming week, celebration of things going on around the school, our staff award winners, and a motivational quote. I have found that having a weekly newsletter allows for all the

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information for the week to be in one place, and it has proven to be a very helpful

communication tool as a supplement for the daily staff email. Having an archive of the

weekly newsletters for staff to be able to refer to is also very helpful, and when needed,

the daily email can include reminders.

At the beginning of the school closure, I scheduled regular virtual connections

with every staff member. These online meetings gave us a scheduled time to connect with

each other, learn how staff was serving students, and problem solve any challenges they

were facing. I was no longer able to walk into a classroom and check in with a teacher or

students or just to observe, so at first, I loved this time with teachers. As the weeks wore

on, though, being on Zoom all day without authentic interaction with other humans

started to wear on me and on the staff. Every morning I would wake up filled with

anxiety and stress. I dreaded being on the computer all day, and I spent a lot of energy

hoping that we could safely be in the school again soon. Eventually, as everyone got into

the routine of distance learning, we reduced the frequency of meetings to every other

week and by appointment, which helped to keep those meetings meaningful and

prevented too much Zoom fatigue.

We also had weekly staff meetings every Wednesday for a year and half. I always

started these meeting with five-to-ten-minute break-out rooms where staff were put into

random small groups and given a prompt, such as "share a celebration this week" or

"share something you did for yourself this week." I know some staff members really

disliked this practice at first, but it grew on everyone to have time to connect with one

another because we were no longer passing each other in the hallways to hear about someone's weekend or something funny a student did during class.

During these weekly staff meetings, we would also have a grade-level share out about a promising practice they had learned during online teaching. My staff was getting creative with online learning, and it was important for them to have a space to learn from one another and share the great work they were doing. We learned about ways to more effectively use our learning platforms, Seesaw and Nearpod, and we also learned fun and engaging ways to use the green screen on Zoom. I would often see the learning facilitated during these staff share outs being implemented later by other teachers in their virtual classrooms.

Also, at these meetings, we exchanged weekly staff awards. Our staff awards were tied to our Davis mantra: "Show respect, build relationships, and practice rigor." We had four staff awards that were exchanged each week including: Showing Respect, Building Relationships, Practice Rigor, and the Dragon Community Award. This practice allowed us to hear about the amazing work everyone was doing with each other. You might learn that a teacher worked with another staff member to teach them how to create a lesson using Nearpod or that a teacher worked with a family to provide extra tutoring with something that their student was struggling with in class. It allowed us to know what was going on in everyone's virtual classrooms without physically being in their classrooms.

These types of teacher recognition and expressions of gratitude have been important for our team at Davis. To facilitate active gratitude with my staff, I also created

a gratitude board on a website called Padlet, which is like a virtual message board. Every

week we would have a new board, where staff were encouraged to share gratitude for one

another. I used these entries to do a staff drawing at each staff meeting. One person who

received a gratitude message and the staff member who had given the gratitude would

each be mailed a $5 Starbucks gift card. The gratitude board also provided another

mechanism for learning about everything staff were doing to support our school

community.

I also found that it was important to maintain regular communication with

individual teachers. As part of my regular duties, I visited virtual classrooms to complete

teacher observations, but I also used these observations as a time to celebrate and

motivate teachers. Teachers were not trained to teach online, and we were literally

building an online school while we were doing it. I did not receive any training on best

practices for online learning, so I made sure to have conversations with teachers after I

did their observations to learn about what was going well for them and what support they

needed. Strong communication with my staff and teachers, both in group and individual

settings, has allowed me to maintain strong relationships, motivate my staff, and make

sure they feel seen and heard, and that we are working together, even though we are

physically apart.

Communication and Connection with Students

Schools should be all about their kids, and although it was important to connect

and fuel my staff with communication, it was also important to find ways to connect with

students. When schools initially closed, we had no idea how long we were going to be

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closed. During the first week of the closure, we held a virtual spirit week, where students and staff had Davis spirit from home. Parents and Davis staff submitted pictures, and we created nightly videos that we sent out so the community could see us all coming together, even though we were physically apart.

We have developed regular programming to build and maintain strong connections with and among students. Prior to the start of the school closures, we had produced a weekly newscast, and we continued the newscast into at-home learning. This newscast was, and continues to be, a way to build community for our whole school. In this newscast everyone gets the same messages from me as their principal, our counseling team, and other staff. We share out examples of what has happened in classrooms with students, and teachers nominate students for a "Dragon Drawing" to celebrate the awesome work they do in class. Another way we have maintained strong communication with students is through virtual assemblies and family nights. We began this tradition of live monthly assemblies during the 2020–2021 school year. The whole school comes together, and we celebrate the learning accomplishments of our students and hear from students and staff. We also learn about the monthly focus for our SEL program and what our character trait of the month is, such as perspective, gratitude, or empathy.

Being a principal during the school closure felt very isolating, and it was easy to get caught up in managerial tasks. At the beginning of the pandemic, I had very little interaction with students, only seeing and meeting with adults. This lack of connection with students really wore on me because I became a principal to work with kids. I had to find ways to stay connected to the students to remind myself why I was going to work. I

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made it a point to visit virtual classrooms. Sometimes it was to just drop by and see what kids were learning. Other times I visited and read the students a story. I also would access the students' learning platforms to see student work and comment on the learning that they were doing. I would also record videos for classes and post them on our learning platforms to say "hello" and celebrate their learning. It was especially important for me to stay connected with our youngest students. Many of our first graders this school year did not attend hybrid learning when they were in kindergarten, and when I met many of them in real life, they all knew me as "Mrs. Davis the principal from the videos and news." That warmed my heart, but it also made me feel sad for these students, who had not gotten the typical kindergarten experience.

Communication and Connection with Families

Family engagement has always been a big part of the Davis school culture and I believe it is very important to the students' and the school's success. We have families who speak 23 different languages at Davis, and moving online meant we had to find ways to communicate with all parents without creating barriers. Prior to the school closure, we had just gotten started with an app called Remind. Remind allows school staff to text and call families without having to use their personal phone number. It also translates messages into other languages. If parents do not have the app, the messages are directly delivered to them via text message. This tool allowed us to continue and build strong communication with families into the pandemic.

Social media has been another vehicle for communication with families because it is where most people get information now and because it is easily accessible from a cell

phone or computer. Seven years ago, when I was the instructional coach at Davis, I started a Facebook page for our school with permission from the district. We now have over 400 followers. On our Facebook page, we share information about upcoming school and community events, such as family nights or vaccine clinics, pictures from fun events at school or learning happening in classrooms, our weekly newscast, parent newsletters, and other announcements. During the pandemic this has become one of the outlets for us to engage with our community. For example, during the first few weeks of the school year, we used Facebook to introduce new and returning staff to the community with pictures and a short write up about the teachers. Facebook is also a way parents can connect with us through sending us messages. When talking with parents, teachers, and students, I often receive positive feedback about our Facebook page, and parents have expressed finding it to be a quick and easy way to get information and to reshare the awesome things going on at Davis with their own social networks.

The communication networks and resources described here provided frameworks for working effectively, sustaining relationships among staff, students, and families, and facilitating learning for our students. As useful as these communication and connection strategies were, however, I was constantly cognizant of the need for a leader to steer the functioning, outlook, and success of the school. I was always aware that this burden rested on my shoulders and that I needed not only to show up as a leader but to lead with steadfastness and servant-focused intention in order to make positive impacts on both social–emotional and academic outcomes.

Leadership

Leadership is the ability to organize a group of people to achieve the goals and objectives of an organization (Kalkan et al., 2020). In March of 2020, leaders across the world were thrown into uncharted territory with a worldwide pandemic. When I went back to school to get my administration license in 2014, I never learned how to lead during a pandemic or how to be a prosocial leader. Nonetheless, I knew from the very start of the school closures that, even from a distance, I needed to serve my community. The school closure happened in the middle of my fourth year as principal at Davis. During the prior four years I had developed a vision of how I wanted to be as a leader and how I did not want to be. I had focused on building trust, relationships, and a strong school community. I led with my heart and always put people first. I learned how to navigate my tendency to be a people pleaser with how to have boundaries and expectations for my staff. Despite the challenges I still faced, these skills and a vision of being a prosocial leader served me well as we headed into the pandemic.

Prosocial Leadership

A prosocial leader works toward a goal of positively influencing the common good of their community. "The leader's intentions, vision and goals are positive ('pro'); they create or add value. The leader is also capable of implementing – not just articulating the need for – change. The leader manages, follows through, delivers. The leader's actions attend to the needs of a broader group ('social') rather than to limited, personal interests" (Lorenzi, 2004, p. 283). Each day of the school closure led me to focus on positive goals for my school community. There was so much upheaval in the

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world due to the pandemic, social unrest, and the political climate that I had to remain steady and positive for my community. Each day, I started with the mindset that I can do this work, and my staff can too, because we have to. I also endeavored to follow through with commitments even more reliably than my already high practice. There were so many unknowns in the world that I made it a priority to lead from a place of steadiness. We had no idea when schools would reopen and we knew the guidance could change from one day to the next, but as a leader I strove to provide steadiness for my school community. My leadership style is aligned with three components of prosocial leadership: prosocial motivation, prosocial behavior, and with the goal of prosocial impacts.

Prosocial Motivation. When a leader has prosocial motivation, they recognize value in helping others. Prosocial motivation is linked with the leader's ability to care. My background has led me to have strong prosocial motivation. I am the oldest of four children and come from a large Greek family. My father was an alcoholic and passed away when I was 26. My own life experiences and trauma led me to care about others and to understand, at a deep level, how important it is to always care for other people.

Before and during the pandemic I have understood how important it was to care about everyone within my organization, from the custodial crew who keep the school clean, to the kitchen staff who prepare meals for the students each day, to the educational assistants who do everything to support students, to the noon assistants who supervise at recess, to the teachers who run classrooms to support kids, to the office staff who run the logistics of the whole building. I had to provide ample time, opportunities, and space for

each of these groups to reflect on what was happening and to make changes throughout the entire pandemic to support students, and to do so, I had to care.

I also deeply care about the families in my community. I have an open-door policy for them to reach out anytime to talk on the phone, text, or in person. During the school closure I hosted monthly Zoom meetings where I provided the latest information for families and shared our blueprints for reopening. Following these protocols meticulously created a space to build trust within the community and provide information to families. Because not all families could attend these live meetings, we also made videos in multiple languages and sent out newsletters so that everyone in the school community had access to the information.

The ultimate prosocial motivation for me is our students. In each decision I make with staff, other principals, parents, and for myself, the kids are at the center of my decision making. The students are the reason I went into leadership and what has sustained me through the pandemic.

Prosocial Behavior. As a leader I believe it is my job to support others and to have a positive impact on the lives of those in my school community. Prosocial behaviors relate to the actions a leader takes to support others and the positive effect on employees' lives (Grant, 2007). Always, but especially during the pandemic, I have had to put others' needs above my own. A prosocial leader takes positive actions to benefit the organization, which includes their employees, and because a prosocial leader cares, they communicate that care through their behavior. I found ways during the closure to meet with teachers to learn how they were doing both personally and professionally. I sent

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every staff member and student a birthday card during the school closure. I also sent staff

notes of gratitude in the mail and by email when I saw them go above and beyond their

duties or if they just needed a check in.

A leader who engages in prosocial behavior also values mentoring (Grant, 2007).

I, myself, have always enjoyed having mentors as a teacher, instructional coach, and

principal. When I became an instructional coach after teaching for six years, I learned a

lot about how to coach and mentor others. Being an effective coach and mentor means

building trusting relationships and learning to be a listener. Change and learning takes

time, and we have to meet each person we work with where they are at. The learning that

I did during this time greatly impacted how I mentor my staff now. One of my valued

mentoring relationships is with my vice principal. We had only worked together for 9

months leading up to the school closure. In a lot of ways, the closure allowed a different

type of time and space for us to learn from one another and for me to be able to mentor

him in different aspects of being a principal that we simply did not have time for when

school was session. This is now our third year working together, and this mentoring

relationship has continued as we have returned to school. I would not be who I am as a

leader without my assistant principal. Mentoring him has taught me a lot about myself,

who I am as a leader, and what I value as a principal. Working closely with another

leader meant that I had to reflect on why I was making the decisions I was making on

daily basis. I viewed this as an opportunity for personal growth as well.

Prosocial Impacts. Prosocial impact is the ability of the leader to increase the

organization's effectiveness by improving employee performance and emotional well-

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being (Grant, 2012). Everything a leader does can have a positive or negative impact on staff. I have found, over the last two years, how important it is to really understand what is going on in the lives of my staff members. If my employee's emotional wellbeing is not taken care of, then they cannot show up for students each day. It is important that I am able to understand and support them in whatever is going on in their lives each day to positively impact their ability to perform in their work and, in turn, positively impact the lives of the students.

In addition to these three overarching areas of prosocial leadership, there are several specific prosocial behaviors that I see as being critical to my success as a principal in leading for prosocial impacts: social and emotional competence, building positive relationships, and building partnerships. In all of these, I have been motivated and driven by my ethic of care: care for my staff, my students, their families, for myself, and for my school, but also by the belief that it is important to care. Caring, then, drives me to serve my community in a supportive role and to foster a supportive and caring environment. These three aspects of prosocial leadership, undergirded by an ethic of care, have served me during all periods of my principalship, but they have been specifically critical during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Social and Emotional Competence

A prosocial leader in a school community must have strong social and emotional competence in order to foster positive social–emotional and academic outcomes. According to Mahfouz et al. (2019) this manifests through effective leadership, building healthy relationships, creating family and community partnerships, implementing

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effective SEL programs, and fostering a healthy school climate. As my school

transitioned into distance learning, these components of prosocial leadership constituted

who I strove to be as a growing leader. I had not been familiar with the concept of

prosocial leadership until I was a couple of years into my career, but after diving deep

into the research about leadership styles for my dissertation, I recognized that the ideals

of prosocial leadership fit my goals and values perfectly.

In the fall of 2020, a fifth-grade student gave me a letter that put into words who I

want to be as a leader and who I continue to strive to be each day. The letter stated:

Dear Mrs. Davis, You are a great princable. You bild relaships and you are so

amazing you never put anyone donw. You insper people you insper me to make

beter choices. You have a lot of creative. You are caring, loving, and most of all

the bet princable in the world. (This letter was not edited to authentically reflect

the student's writing)

Another letter that describes my leadership aims was given to me by a community partner

in the fall of 2021, prior to leaving his position:

Ashley,

I could never express how much I appreciate you for all that you do to

support to the community. You've created something really special at Davis and

I'm happy to have been a partner in that. You are truly an amazing principal that

leads with love and compassion. The world needs more people like you! My time

at Davis has been special and I will forever be grateful, and I'll forever be a

Dragon. I'll be around, please let me know if I can do anything to support Davis. I know you will continue to do and accomplish big things.

With love and appreciation,

Community Partner (name removed for privacy)

I believe I have strong social and emotional competence. I am aware of my own emotions and how to process and understand them. I can handle high levels of stress. I can read the emotions of others by actively listening and reading their body language. I believe it is important for a leader to be able to listen to others, really hear them, and support them in whatever ways they need. Sometimes this can be challenging because of my own life and personal stresses, but I know when I go to work my own needs have to be set to the side in order for me to support, and supportively lead, others.

During Covid-19 I have always tried to be proactive instead of reactive and to keep people at the center of what I do. People's needs are more important than those of the organization, and I see my staff as people first. Davis Elementary is like a family that works together to support each other. I have also worked to foster a culture of collaboration at Davis, which allows for staff to work with each to support students, plan instructional lessons, and support one another. As a prosocial leader, building these positive, supportive relationships are a core part of what I do.

Building Positive Relationships

Six years ago, when I became the principal at Davis, our school team took the opportunity to look at the Davis vision and mission. We found that most our staff (including myself) had no idea what our Davis vision and mission statements were.

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Through discussion with our leadership team and as a whole staff, we decided that we wanted to simplify our vision and mission statements along with our school rules. Through staff discussion and visiting Marysville Elementary, a school in the Portland Public School District in Oregon, we landed on the idea of creating a Davis mantra to be all encompassing of our school's vision, mission, and school rules. Our Davis mantra became "Show Respect, Build Relationships, and Practice Rigor." All students and staff know, live, and breathe our mantra. Our mantra is how we make decisions and how we treat one another at school. Building relationships is key to what we do every day at Davis.

Building Relationships with Staff. The past two years have been challenging for the world, and we have all experienced a collective trauma. As a school leader, it is my responsibility to ensure that I am building relationships with my staff and continuing to support them. As I reflect on the last two years, there are many things I have done with the support of my assistant principal and community partners in supporting my teachers.

First is leading from the heart and putting people first. Davis teachers love and care about kids, but they also have their own families and lives outside of school. Over the past two years, I have had staff members experience loss in their families, illness, loss of jobs, Covid-19 in their homes, and many other challenges. I believe that as a leader it is my job to know my staff on both a personal and professional level and to demonstrate that I see them as people first and foremost. In May of 2020, two months after we first closed school my assistant principal and I drove around to all of our staff's homes, put Davis yard signs in their lawns, and left a gift bag for teachers. We were able to see

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several staff members in person, and it was so much fun after months of not seeing each other, even if it was from a distance. Teachers were grateful for this act of kindness during this challenging time.

Another way I build relationships with staff is through intentionally developing trust. Trust is one of the most crucial aspects of the relationships between a principal and their staff members. I work to build trust through honest and timely communication. Kukla-Acevedo (2009) found that cooperation and trust are built through relationships that support building strong school cultures and that trust influences the productivity of the school. During the Covid-19 pandemic, trust became central to everything we did at the school. There were so many unknowns around safety and school closures that trust was imperative to maintaining a positive school culture. I have always told my teachers I will tell them what they need to know as soon as I am able to have the information. Over the past two years, this has meant a lot of what we call stand-up meetings. Teachers are challenged by the constant influx of information coming at them all the time, but I always try to get ahead of the information that is coming out in order to provide teachers with the information they need to prepare themselves for their jobs and to take care of their own families. Sharing information this way also allows staff to process hard changes as quickly as possible.

Stand-Up Meetings. Since I have become a principal, I have had to do more stand-up meetings that I can count. Anytime we have a meeting about something unexpected or that has not been communicated, we call them stand-up meetings. During the school closure, this felt like we were having constant stand-up meetings about new

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information that was coming out, but these meetings were critical for maintaining trust

with my staff. When I call a stand-up meeting, I typically send an email to teachers with

the time of the meeting and the topic. We have had stand-up meetings for school

closures, Covid-19 guidance from the state, school reopening changes, school start-time

changes, and teacher cuts due to low enrollment. These meetings are always challenging,

and I am often not able to answer all of the questions that teachers have, but these

meetings establish trust and create a sense of community between us.

A stand-up meeting held on March 5, 2021 was one of the most memorable.

During this time, we had been out of school for almost a year. As a school and district,

we were planning return to school following spring break in a Limited in Person

Instruction (LIPI) model, in which we would invite students from each grade level who

had significant needs or were unable to access online learning to come to school. On

March 4th, I had paid teachers for a 3-hour planning meeting to discuss the logistics of

LIPI for Davis, such as how many students we would invite, what materials we would

need, and how many staff members we would need. Then, the next morning, I learned

that Oregon Governor, Kate Brown, was going to be making an announcement later in

the day requiring schools to open in a hybrid learning model, requiring all students access

to in-person learning and continue CDL. As soon as I heard this information, I invited my

staff to a stand-up meeting to share what I knew. At this point I had gotten no information

from our school district about what hybrid schooling would look like but thought it was

imperative to bring my staff together to hear the news from me and allow them a safe

place to ask questions about the concerns and excitement they might be feeling about returning to their classrooms.

During this meeting, my staff was visibly shaken. The meeting was extremely quiet, and I was met with a lot of blank stares. They were concerned because Covid-19 cases continued to be high in our neighborhood. They wanted to know what their workday would be like. How would they teach in person and online at the same time? What would hybrid learning look like for their own children's districts? How would they juggle all the pieces? Teaching online was requiring so much planning time, and adding hybrid learning to it seemed almost unfathomable. On that day, I wrote in my journal:

> These meetings are hard and not having the answers for people is even harder. But, at the end of the meeting staff was grateful for a safe place to come together to reflect on the most recent news of schools reopening to students after over a year. I am going to have to remain steady during this time even though I am feeling stressed and overwhelmed about the amount of work that needs to be done to reopen schools. I know getting kids back into school is the most important thing we can do, and a hybrid model will do just this. Ease everyone back to school. In a lot of ways, it is like ripping of the band aid and learning how to be together again.

The next several weeks leading up to spring break were busy with planning, waiting for approval from the state to accept our district's timeline for a delayed reopening, learning and training on all the Covid-19 protocols that had to be implemented for safety and contact tracing, and talking with staff and parents who had legitimate

concerns and questions about the safety of returning to school. It was imperative that the staff and I were not only on the same page with information but that we had a solid foundation of trust and communication so we could operate together in getting ready to return to in-person learning.

Closing Circle with Staff. Typically, at the end of a school year I do some type of closing activity with staff to help cement the relationship we have built all year and sustain it through to the next. During the 2019–2020 school year this could not be in person, but, instead, I held a virtual closing circle where teachers reflected on the school year. I asked the teachers to share one word that described the school year. Here are the answers I received: turbulent, teamwork, unforgettable, stretching, new insights, rollercoaster, community, unexpected, challenging, relationships, crazy, adaptation, unique, growth, frazzled, and unprecedented. Each of these words is powerful in describing what we experienced over the course of the year. One staff member wrote, as a year-end reflection, "I love that over the course of the year we rallied as a school community to always love and support our students, their families, and one another!"

Building Relationships with Students. Principals with strong social and emotional competence model positive relationships with both students and staff. If a leader models relationship building, this then becomes an expectation for teacher and student relationships. The Davis staff embraces building healthy relationships with students and making that a number one priority. Indeed, the culture of our school both before and during the pandemic has been to build relationships with all students.

For the past six years, we have started each day with a morning circle as a place for students and teachers to connect for the day, which builds relationships. We continued this practice virtually during the pandemic. Each morning, students would log in at 9 a.m. to start the day with their morning circle. Many teachers would use our SEL curriculum, Kimochis (Appendix), to facilitate these conversations. Kimochis, which means *feelings* in Japanese, is a program for educators that contain 36 feeling pillows. Students and staff can use these pillows, each with a different emotion depicted, to identify how they are feeling. This was a practice that many teachers continued to use virtually and creatively found was to make this practice interactive with the virtual tools we had available. Sharing feelings has been an important way to build relationships with our students. (Kimochis is described in more detail below in the section on SEL Implementation and in the Appendix.)

Another way I've facilitated relationship building with students is the "Davis Book Van." Eight summer ago, I started this practice, which brings books, lunches, and treats, such as popsicles, to students in the community. Until this year, the Davis Book Van was my car. This summer, through a grant process and partnership with the Portland Fruit Tree Project (https://www.portlandfruit.org/), we were able to actually get a book van to use. A real book van was always a dream of mine, and I am grateful that our community partners and members were willing to support our schools in this way. This is one of the benefits of being at one school for an extended amount of time. I have built relationships with the community and established goals for our programs within it. The book van visits two of the largest apartment complexes in our district. Before the

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pandemic we would visit once a week during the summer, but during the pandemic we visited twice a week. During the 2020–2021 school, while we were online, we extended our book van visits to happen during the school year as well. This expanded schedule also allowed for technology support to come to the apartments and to connect with students during the school closure. Parents would also attend book van to get support with technology and with other questions they had for Davis staff. Having been at Davis for 9 years now, I have known many young children who attended book van in the community and who have now become Davis students. They are always so excited to start school after knowing Davis staff from these events. I know we will continue the Davis Book Van for many years to come.

Building Relationships with Families. When the school closures due to Covid-19 first happened, we tried to connect with every family to see how they were doing through what we called "wellness checks." Teachers were the first person at the school to reach out to families. If teachers were unable to get a hold of a family, they would put in a referral to the support team, which included myself, our assistant principal, our social worker, my two counselors, our Schools Uniting Neighborhoods (SUN) site coordinator, and Department of Human Services (DHS) family coach. This team met twice a week throughout the school closures to discuss families and what supports were needed. This team was responsible for connecting families with rent assistance, energy assistance, food, applying for unemployment, and any other needs that emerged. Often, these connections with families would be made by phone, text, or email, but sometimes we had to do home visits in order to support or connect with families. When we make a home

visit, it was always done in groups of two and with Covid-19 precautions, such as

meeting outside and wearing masks. There were times that we would try to visit a family

but where they lived was empty. When this happened, we attempted to make contact

through phone, email, and emergency contacts. If we were unable to connect with a

family, we would make a report to Child Protective Services, but in most cases we never

found out where the family had gone.

Another way we built relationships with families was through holding bi-monthly

themed family nights. Prior to Covid-19, we hosted family nights every other month.

Over 200 people would typically attend these events, where we would serve dinner and

have a theme with fun activities. For instance, students and parents would participate in

activities for literacy night, math night, SEL night, and more. During closures, we

continued these family nights, but we moved them online. For most of our online family

nights, we had over 200 people attend. We are continuing these nights during the 2021–

2022 school year while it is not yet safe to have large groups of people together at school.

We also wanted to celebrate and acknowledge the work parents were doing with

their children. Overnight, parents were asked to become teachers in their homes for their

children with no training or time to prepare. In May 2021, during teacher appreciation

week, we held a "Parent as Teacher Appreciation Night." Each family could come by and

pick up two pizzas for their families to take a break and a night off from cooking, which

we paid for using Title 1 Family Involvement Funds. Parents and students both

appreciated this special event, which felt very authentic in celebrating all that parents did

during the school closure for their students. In turn, many parents came to the events with

their cars decorated to celebrate the Davis staff and to thank them for all their work

supporting students and families during the school closure.

The Impact of Relationship Building on School Reopening. In April of 2021 we

transitioned to hybrid learning, and we leaned on the strong relationships we had built

with families to help the transition go smoothly. Coming back to the physical school

building has been yet another challenge for families during the pandemic. Initially, when

we opened for hybrid learning, parents had to make a personal decision about what was

best for their families regarding sending their children back to school. We hosted several

parent meetings to talk to families about the safety protocols we were putting in place to

reopen schools, such as requiring masks, social distancing, contact tracing, and cohorts.

At these meetings, parents were excited to get their students back to school and social

opportunities but definitely scared about the increased risk of exposure to Covid-19. Not

all parents were available to attend our online meetings, so we also made a video in

multiple languages for the community and sent out an informational letter to families.

Our hybrid model consisted of our morning CDL class schedule, which stayed the

same so all students would get core instruction five days a week. Then students had the

option to attend school two afternoons a week for two and a half hours each day. Two

hundred, or about half of our students, attended hybrid learning. Families who chose to

send their students back to school were very happy to have their children at school,

although within a short time several students contracted Covid-19. We went through the

contact tracing process, and initially those phone calls to parents and teachers were very

challenging. We had to ask them to trust us to keep their children safe, and again, the

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relationships we had built helped us get through this new experience together. The longer we have been open, these contacts are less challenging because people understand the risks more and are familiar with the process we have to undertake when students are required to quarantine.

In the fall of 2021, we fully reopened our schools. Our school board decided not to offer an online learning option for families. This meant parents had to send their students back to Davis, find another online school option or home school their children. Initially this was very challenging for families who did not want to send their children back for their own family reasons. Several families chose to pull their students from our district and enroll in online learning, and several other families opted for homeschooling. They did not want to leave Davis but did not feel it was best for their families for their students to return to school during the pandemic. When I was having conversations with these families, it was important to remain neutral. I had not made this decision for the district, and I felt strongly that we should provide an online option for families so our students could remain in our district. I empathized with the parents, especially because they had legitimate reasons for not wanting to send their students to school, such as cancer within their family or a child with high anxiety around illness. Several of these families were active members of our parent groups and asked how they could advocate for an online school option. I encouraged them to write to the school board and to reach out to the district office. Ultimately, these families decided to enroll in online school, but since student vaccines have become available, several have chosen to return to school in person.

We are now back in the building with over 400 Davis students. Our building remains closed to the public in order to keep the exposure risk as low as possible, another challenge to the connection we strive to keep with families. The doors are locked, and parents have to wait outside for a staff member to come and help them. We are allowed to have parents come in for IEP meetings and other meetings in instances where having them online would create a barrier, but for the most part, only students and staff enter the building. Not having the open-door policy for families that we once had has been a challenge for relationship building.

We have also decided as a district that holding in-person events would promote the spread of Covid-19 and should be avoided. In September 2021 our staff decided to hold an in-person outdoor back-to-school night when the Covid-19 Delta Variant was in our communities. Our motto during the 2021–2022 school year is "Better Together," and we wanted to make sure our families knew how excited we were to reopen our school and make sure they knew their children would be safe attending in-person school again. At the event masks were required for everyone, and teachers were stationed by grade level outside on our track-and-field area. We provided a free dinner to-go and a community resource fair. Families who attended this event were able to bring back their technology from the spring, they received a $25 gift card for Fred Meyer's grocery store, met their child's teacher, and were able take home books that had been donated to the school during the pandemic.

As I write, we have been open for about 4 months. During this time parents have been empathetic to the challenges schools are experiencing, such as staffing challenges,

contact tracing, and safety protocols. They have also been our partners in supporting our students to learn how to be in school with 400 other students after a year and half of being at home. We have had a number of Covid-19 cases and have had to quarantine almost every grade level. This has been one of the most challenging parts of in-person school, and the relationships we have with families are of the utmost importance as we navigate this new normal we are living in.

Another challenging part of reopening schools has been the differing beliefs around mask requirements and vaccines. I have had a parent who is adamantly against their children wearing masks at school and believes this is against their constitutional rights. Teachers and I are both required to ensure that all students and staff wear masks, and if we did not comply, we would put our licenses in jeopardy. In situations like this, it is very challenging to provide a safe learning environment for all while also respecting individuals' rights to their own beliefs. Having solid relationships has provided a foundation for having difficult conversations with families, who know and can trust that even if we disagree or if our hands are tied by legal requirements that we all are doing our best to look out for the students and provide the safest and best learning environment we can.

Building Family and Community Partnerships

As a prosocial leader it is important in my job that I welcome both community and family partnerships into our school. At its core, school leadership is a social relationship (Louis et al., 2016). Families are essential to the academic outcomes of students, and this was especially true during the school closure when parents were put in

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the position of also serving as their children's teacher. One of the best outcomes of distance learning was the relationships that formed between classroom teachers and parents. In my career I had never seen so much parent and teacher communication. Teachers who were typically hesitant to reach out to parents had no choice but to develop relationships because learning was happening inside the home. As a school we provided many different opportunities to get feedback and to provide supports to families, such as Zoom parent meetings, surveys, informational videos and newsletters, family nights, and parent–teacher conferences. I saw our relationships with families as partners as incredibly important, and I encouraged this attitude in my teachers and staff as well.

Community partnerships allow us to provide programs and resources to our school community, and during the pandemic they have proven to be an invaluable resource to us, our students, and their families. As a principal it is my responsibility to navigate community partnerships, including partnerships with local non-profits, mental health organizations, businesses, local churches, and so on. When I was a new principal, it took a lot of time getting to know all the members of our current partnerships and reaching out to develop partnerships with new organizations to support our school. I also need to make hard decisions about what partnerships do not benefit our community any longer. Davis has a strong group of community partners we work with on a daily basis. Over the years of being a principal I have learned I need to have an active role in our partnerships, but I have also learned that I do not always have to be the point person and can lean on others to support me in this role. Over time I have been able build and establish trust by creating lasting partnerships with our community partners. I have also

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been able to transfer trust to others on my staff, such as my assistant principal, instructional coach, social worker, counselors, ELD teachers, and other staff, to take ownership over our partnerships. Allowing them to lake leadership roles in facilitating these relationships supported these staff in becoming leaders within our system, as well as took some of the pressure off of me. This shift happened over time as I was learning to become a transformational leader and moving away from micromanaging everything in the building. Transferring responsibility has also allowed me to lean into developing sustainable systems within the building that are not dependent on me as a leader.

One of our largest community partners is our Multnomah Family Service SUN (Schools Uniting Neighborhoods) Program. SUN provides after-school and summer programing for students, community connection support, financial and food support, and much more. At the beginning of the pandemic, SUN was not able to carry out their usual program functions. They were able to use their funding that was typically set aside for programming to provide financial support to families through things such as rent and utility bill assistance and food support. They created a system in partnership with our school's support team, which included me, our vice principal, our social worker, and our counselors to identity families who needed support and to ensure that we were not replicating services. Eventually, SUN was able to provide a virtual SUN program, in which they provided science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) learning kits both during the school year and in the summer. Also, after hybrid learning began in the summer of 2021, they were able to provide a six-week summer program, five full days a week, to the Davis community with over 100 students in attendance. We had never

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been able to provide a program like this, and parents and students were very excited to be able to participate.

We worked closely with all of our partners during the pandemic to support them in how they would support students and families virtually. Another partnership we have is Trillium School Based Therapy. This program provides counseling to students through Oregon Health Plan insurance. When the school makes a referral, a school-based therapist does an intake with the family and supports them with counseling services at school. The therapist works in partnership with the school and teacher to best support the mental health needs of our students. This is a very sought out program in our school, and we have a constant waitlist for services. This program used to be half time, but community demand has led to us partnering with a full-time therapist. Through grant funding, we were also able to add prevention services, which allow students without insurance to see the therapist, thus opening up the program to additional students. During the school closure our therapist began to see clients virtually, and we continued to make referrals for therapy. This mental health support for students was very important during the pandemic.

Another important partnership we have at Davis is a full-time Department of Human Services (DHS) Family Coach. This person works with families who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Families are able to handle their case management at Davis instead of going to a DHS office. The coach is able to support the school through attendance needs and to work with families on barriers they may be experiencing that are making it challenging for their students to attend school. During the

pandemic this role has been important in supporting families who are experiencing loss of income due to the pandemic, loss of housing, or other challenges. Our coach is part of our support team, so we can provide wrap-around supports to families. During the pandemic many families' life circumstances changed. Families may have lost jobs, housing, or access to food. Our DHS family coach had already-established clients and was able to reach out to families who we referred and connect them to services.

Another area where we have developed partnerships that have been valuable during the pandemic is with organizations that offer tutoring services. During the pandemic we moved all of tutoring services to be virtual. We had a liaison at school, who was an administrative intern, who worked with teachers, partners, parents, and students to establish tutoring time and support with Zoom links for tutoring. While this was a huge management task, the students who received tutoring made academic growth and had another adult connection during the school closure. One of these is a local non-profit called Reading Results, which tutors students who are reading at a level below their grade. During distance learning, Reading Results provided this service virtually. We also work with AARP Experience Corps, which is an intergenerational volunteer-based tutoring program that supports children who are not reading at grade level. We set these partnerships up as mentor relationships for students.

We also have partnerships with culturally specific non-profits. These non-profits continued to work with and support families and students during the pandemic. Having language-specific advocates to work with was important for our families. These advocates allowed families to get support with connecting to school online and access to

community resources. Our language-specific liaisons also supported our school by interpreting for us when the school needed to reach out to a family. One of these partnerships is the Centre of African Immigration and Refugees (CAIRO), who provide Davis with a full time Schools Parents ad Communities Engaged for African Success (SPACE) agent. This agent works with our African students and parents virtually and in person and with the school to support us in providing a space where students feel safe, supported, and ready to learn. SPACE agents speak multiple African languages, such as Somali and Swahili, and understand the experience of immigration and African cultural perspectives and values. CAIRO SPACE agents have been a huge support at our school with our African community. The first time one of our fourth-grade Somali students saw a Somali woman from CAIRO wearing a hijab at our school, she ran up and said "I didn't know I could be a teacher. I have never seen anyone that looks like me work at our school." Similarly, we have a partnership with Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization (IRCO), who provide advocates to support both students and families. From IRCO we have a Russian and Ukrainian advocate and a Farsi- and Dari-speaking advocate. IRCO is looking at hiring a Burmese advocate to support our students as well.

As a principal I have also worked to nurture relationships with our local churches. We have partnered with several local churches, one of which is Good Shepherd Community Church. With their support, we have been able have service days that supported our school with a total school makeover, including painting the school and improving our school garden. This church has also provided holiday gifts for students, Davis t-shirts for all students, teacher appreciation gifts, appreciation meals for teachers,

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and classroom volunteer support. We have also partnered with other local churches to support our school. During the pandemic we have continued to partner with our local churches. They have provided gift cards and other supports for families, such as furniture. They have also provided gifts, such as gift cards and cards of encouragement, for our teaching staff. In addition, they have also helped us put together more labor-intensive learning kits that were used during the school closure.

Developing strong communication networks, building strong relationships, and fostering reliable partnerships have all served me well as a leader during the Covid-19 pandemic. As a prosocial leader who operates within an ethic of care, it has been important that I acknowledge where and when I need help and to lean on my team for support. During school closures, these partnerships were already in place to step in and support our school community where they could. Without their help, there were many services that we just would not have been able to provide to families on our own. Covid-19, however, presents some challenges that are difficult to navigate, despite a strong network of partners and relationships, that I am learning to work within every day.

Leadership Challenges

Am I a Principal, Doctor, Nurse, or Contact Tracer? These are my symptoms . . . can I come to work? Someone in my household has a cough . . . what should I do? I have a runny nose . . . can I come to work? The doctor said if my child has a negative Covid-19 test following an exposure they can return to school . . . why won't you let them?

These are just a few examples of questions that I have been asked as we reopened school. In planning and preparing our blueprint for reopening school in April of 2021, I often felt like I was being asked to be an epidemiologist and safety officer to best understand, plan for, and communicate how to slow the spread of Covid-19 in our school. I started to feel as if I was being put in place to be a medical professional. Although recommendations were provided by local health experts, it was ultimately my responsibility to make decisions about how we would implement these procedures in our school. I would read the Ready Schools Safe Learners guidance and think about how this would look at my school. My vice principal and I would debate and problem solve how to implement guidance around hand washing, contact tracing, and screening students and staff for Covid-19. Then we would take our ideas to our School Improvement Team, which supported us in our blueprint planning for our reopening plans.

I am not a public health official, and it felt like I was being asked to make life-changing decisions for people. The amount of pressure and stress it put on me and other principals was apparent. I took part in many informal meetings with an elementary principal group to discuss and consider what our protocols should look like. Ultimately, we all knew reopening was going to be hard and we would do some things right the first time and other things would have to change as we learned more. The safety piece was all consuming, and what we would actually do with students almost felt like an afterthought, while the whole time I kept wanting to focus on the students.

I remember the week prior to opening I barely slept because I had a recurring dream that everyone got the virus following our first day of reopening. I reassured myself

that our leadership team and staff were trained on the safety protocols. We would make changes as we learned more, but we had safety systems in place. All students and staff would be required to wear masks. We had decals on floors to promote social distancing. We had small cohorts established to minimize the exposure of both staff and students. We also had a contact tracing system set up, such as sign-in and sign-out procedures for the school building and classrooms, that I could use to work with the Multnomah Education Service District nurses to contact trace in case of a positive case.

  Covid-19 Arrives at Davis. On April 8, 2021, the day after we reopened schools, my worst nightmare became true. We were notified that a student who had been at school the previous day had tested positive for Covid-19. This was the first case in the district, so letters for families and protocols were still being developed. I knew this would happen eventually but did not expect it to happen so quickly. I did my best to remain calm and kept in my head, "be transparent with staff and parents, and lead with care." From the experience we learned what in our contact tracing system worked well and what we needed to change. I called all the parents of students who were exposed and, while they were scared, they were grateful to get the information so quickly. I also worked with the teachers and held a class circle on Zoom so students could share how they were feeling about what had happened. Since this initial school exposure, we have had many others and continue to have them. I am writing this during December of 2021 when the Omicron variant is prevalent in all communities. I am fearful about what this will mean for school closures and staffing in January when we return to school following break.

School Operations. During the school closure, we had to design a whole new educational program, which presented challenges and high levels of stress for our staff. Since returning to in-person learning in the fall of 2021, we have struggled with staffing shortages. The past two years have been challenging on all professions, but especially teachers. As of January 2022, I had four teachers leave midyear: one left for a new job and three have retired, which was unplanned. There is a national shortage of substitute teachers. There are days when we are short over 10 people in the building. Every morning as soon as I wake up, I look at our substitute situation and text my secretary to let her know how we will provide coverage and what needs to be canceled.

Our remaining staff are exhausted, and I am continuously trying to keep up morale and be a cheerleader for the building. I am grateful for my staff, but I am tired too. When I am at work, my own stress and worry go to the side because I am determined to show up and lead with steadfastness and positivity. I have noticed and learned that I set the tone for the building. If I am stressed and overwhelmed about something, my staff will feel it and it will create stress in the building. If I am able to make a plan and hold steady, it supports the morale in the building. This puts pressure on me, as the leader, but over time I have developed self-care practices that have helped me provide stronger leadership. The need for self-care and the strategies I have learned are discussed in the next section.

Self-Care as a Leader

When I first became a principal, I was 31 years old, single, and a dog mom. At the beginning, I did not have a vice principal. Many of my evenings and weekends were

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spent at Davis. I spent this time answering emails, building partnerships with community partners, attending and hosting events for families, planning professional development for teachers, and other managerial building tasks such budget, ordering, etc. I sustained this pace for about a year and a half until I realized that something needed to change. I was not taking care of myself emotionally or physically. I was taking my work stress home and not taking care of myself. I also had a hard time letting things go, whether it was a situation with a student or their family or a conflict with staff members. Around this time, I met my now husband, which helped me find some balance between work and my personal life. I also started to prioritize exercise, eating healthy, and sleep. I quickly saw that when I was not working seven days a week, I was much more prepared to show up at work each day ready for my staff, students, and community. During my fourth year, after advocating for additional resources, we were given an assistant principal. This was a big change for both me and our building. I remember thinking, "I've only been doing this for three years. Am I ready to mentor a new principal?" But the arrival of our assistant principal, who is still in the role, proved to be not only an opportunity for me to work alongside a wonderful person but to let someone else shoulder a share of the responsibilities and allow me to take care of myself so that I could better take care of Davis.

When Covid-19 began in March 2020, I quickly returned to old patterns. I was working at home because I no longer had access to the school. There was no clear end of the workday. I created an at-home office, where my entire workday happened in one desk chair. I did not have to get home at a certain time because I was already home. My gym

shut around this time, and exercise, healthy eating, and sleeping all receded into the past.

I remember this time feeling like a pause in the world, a short break. It felt like I was a

first-year principal again, learning how to do my job again because it was, in fact, a new

job. I was now an online principal. I was also working remotely away from my teachers

and students, and I felt isolated from the rest of the world and very alone. Stress was high

for everyone, and as a leader, it was my responsibility to remotely create a culture of care

for my community, including my students, staff, and families. As a principal, in-person

human connection with my students, staff, and families filled my bucket, but I no longer

had this connection. I had a computer.

In January 2020, prior to the arrival of Covid-19 in the United States, I became

engaged to my now husband. We were planning on having a big wedding in September

2020 at a Greek Orthodox church. In May 2020, it looked like this was not going to be

possible. At this time, I was trying to remain optimistic that schools were going to reopen

in the fall, but things were not looking good. Instead of waiting until September to get

married, we decided to get married on July 4, 2020, with a small ceremony with just our

families in my mother's backyard. While the day was beautiful, it felt like something else

was taken from me. Just like the end of the 2019–2020 school year.

After our honeymoon to Whidbey Island in Washington State, I knew that Covid-

19 was not going to be over anytime soon. The devastation of people dying around the

world was continuing, there continued to be social unrest due to the killing of George

Floyd, and the unknowns of what the fall of the 2020–2021 school year would bring

made the stress unmanageable for me. I made the decision that it was time to start taking

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care of myself again. I started doing the Whole 30, which is a clean "paleo" diet with foods like lean meats, fish, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds, and got back into healthy eating and exercise habits. I am a member of Orangetheory Fitness, and during the times it was able to be open I would attend classes four or five times a week. I also had other educator friends who attended this class, which made it even more motivating to attend. I also started running twice a week with another principal, which we continued throughout the school year. Consistent exercise has definitely been crucial to managing my own stress as a principal, as well as helping me meet personal goals. This fall I was able to run Hood to Coast and the Portland Half Marathon because of my consistent exercise habits. It felt very rewarding to accomplish this amidst all of the other chaos happening at the time.

Returning to school after a year and half has had many challenges, and in addition to staffing shortages, students' lack of socialization, and ever-changing Covid-19 protocols, I have also experienced my first trimester of pregnancy. When my husband and I learned that I was pregnant with our first child, I was overjoyed and excited to be starting a family, but I also experienced hesitation about this next chapter in my life. So many fears and questions were running through my head. Was now the best time for me to be pregnant? How could I take maternity leave in May? How would I balance being a mom and being a principal? How do I keep myself and my child safe from Covid-19? To add to the stresses, my first trimester has been physically difficult. I have worked through morning sickness, exhaustion, and brain fog. I decided not to tell my staff I was pregnant until I was through my first trimester, so many days I was not feeling like myself but

trying to manage our new normal at school. Now that I have told my staff, it feels much better because they know why I am out for doctor appointments or not feeling my best.

Being a principal and a leader means constantly balancing my own self-care along with supporting my staff. Over the last nine years I have spent at Davis, I have grown in many ways personally, as an educator, and as a leader. Working during the pandemic has been a challenge because I have to balance my responsibilities as a principal with thinking about my own health and, now, what is best for the baby. I need to manage my own stress and make sure I am getting enough sleep. In addition, I have to think about the health of my child and manage the risks of Covid-19, something I have been doing for the school community during this entire pandemic and that I now am turning inward to nurture and protect this little being.

Learning to Let Things Go

As a leader, part of my own self-care and stress management process has been learning to let things go. Some things can be difficult to let go, as illustrated by the following story. Before and during the pandemic, I was working with a student who struggled with school attendance and other neglect issues. I, along with my social worker, attended many home visits with this student and their family. There were state law and policy reasons that required us to get the police and Child Protective Services involved. When things like this happen, it is fairly typical for parents to get upset with me, as the principal and someone families have an established relationship with. It is not out of the ordinary for a family to become upset with a decision or situation at school and curse at me. These experiences can be hurtful and stressful, and they can be difficult to let go.

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As a principal I have had to learn that there will be decisions and things that happen that I cannot control. People will be upset with me because of the position I hold. I have had to learn to let things go so I can enjoy my life. This means sometimes learning to have boundaries and to compartmentalize my work from my personal life. Levin et al. (2019) found that in 2017, 18% of principals had left their jobs. This rate increased to 21% in high poverty schools like mine. I expect that the pandemic will increase this number, and this is not good for the students who attend our schools; therefore, personally it is important for me to learn to let go of the things I cannot control and learn how to navigate my stress to prevent burnout and help me to remain in my position.

For me this means remembering that when people are upset with me it is likely going to be temporary. People often need time and space to think and process whatever may have happened. I have learned to be a listener in the stressful situations. Listening from a place of empathy and perspective is crucial. I always remain calm and aim to be solution based, whether it is in the moment or during a needed follow up. In my experience I have found that people respond to being listened to and often leave in a better space than when we started. When these problems do happen, I always take a deep breath, try to find a positive in the situation, and know that there will be a solution eventually, but it may not happen as soon as I would like it to.

In this job there are good days and bad days. But I show up each day with optimism, knowing there will be both celebrations and challenges. Having this attitude is helpful in making sure I can lead and serve my school community, while letting things go that I cannot control. A principal can easily work 12 or more hours a day at this job and

then continue the work in the evenings, early mornings, and weekends. I have found that at the end of each day I need to wrap up what I can and enjoy my evenings and weekend with my family, my friends, my husband, and my dog. I need to do the personal things I love and enjoy life so I can be ready professionally to serve my community each day and so that I can create a sustain a community of care within my school.

Creating and Sustaining a Culture of Care

When I became the principal at Davis six years ago, I knew we had to focus on building a culture of care, specifically in how we were addressing the social and emotional needs of both students and staff. While social and emotional learning was not a new concept, it was re-emerging in schools at that time. I know that students and staff need to feel safe in their school environment to have a successful day, which underscores a need to provide tools and spaces that promote and sustain a culture of care. This section will explore the systems of care we have developed both before and during the pandemic at Davis Elementary.

Support Team

Prior to the school closure due to Covid-19 our Davis support team was already in place, and we continued to utilize this team to provide support where it was needed during school closures and the subsequent reopening of school. The Davis support team, as described above, consists of me, my assistant principal, our counselors, our social worker, our SUN site manager, our DHS family coach, and our Trillium school-based therapist. During the closure this team met twice a week to address hardships and barriers families were experiencing. We had many parents who were experiencing loss of jobs,

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which in turn caused stress around paying bills, rent, and mortgages. We supported

families through such mechanisms as setting up a doctor's appointment, finding rent

support, locating access to food, and much more. Teachers could put in a ticket to the

support team so we would be alerted to a family with a specific need that we could then

address. We also monitored student attendance and looked at ways to support families

who were not engaging with online learning. Sometimes this meant phone calls and texts

to families. Other times it meant going on a home visit to try to reach a family, which I

did many of. Sometimes I would go to a home and find the apartment empty. Other times

the family was there but just needed support with technology or were unsure how to log

on to Zoom classes. This team was imperative to our ethic care of at Davis and making

sure each and every family had what they needed to be successful during online school.

Human Connection

Kids missed their peers. They missed recess. They missed talking to their friends

in class. Teachers would host classes and morning circles but would also hold lunch

groups where students could come just talk with each other and play games. We also held

school-wide lunches with different staff members. Sometimes I would host them, and we

would play a game or a read a book. We cared about each other and for each other by

spending time together in the same, although virtual, space.

Both kids and adults were missing that human connection, and I sought ways to

provide that authentic human connection with staff as well. This could be quick break out

rooms before starting meetings for staff to talk to a friendly face. Or calling or texting a

teacher to ask how they were doing. I spent a lot of time sending postcards to kids and

teachers just to say "hi" and celebrate a success they had at school. Every single staff member and student got at least one postcard from me during this closure. This was a lot of work, but it was one of the most rewarding things I did because it fostered a culture of care within our community. I also purchased stamps and postcards for teachers to be able to do the same for their students. When we returned to school, many kids shared that they still have the postcards that were mailed home to them, which illustrates how important these small acts of human connection were.

Supporting Families

Financial Supports. Staying connected to families and supporting them in whatever ways they need has been imperative to our school and team, especially during the early days of the pandemic. During the course of the pandemic, we have received over $50,000 in grocery gift card donations for our families. The generosity of our community still continues to amaze me. It was wonderful that when a family needed support, we actually had tangible support we could give them. We had food boxes we could provide to families, but gift cards were more culturally appropriate because it allowed families to go to the grocery store and purchase specifically what their families wanted. We received gift cards from a local church during the first two weeks of the school closures. At this point, we were still trying to figure out how school would function. I asked teachers if there were families who could use support, and my vice principal, husband, and I drove to families' houses, after connecting with them, to give

them the gift cards. At this point, pandemic benefits had yet to start, the whole world was

one big unknown, and nobody knew what to expect. It was rewarding to see families and

students and to be able to provide support as people were getting laid off from their jobs.

Online Learning Supports. As a staff we also came together to think about how

we could support families with online learning. With no time to prepare and no training,

parents were being asked to step into the role of teachers. We wanted to provide families

with enough information to be successful with CDL. During school closures, and prior to

moving to hybrid learning, we began to produce weekly parent newsletters, which built

upon a monthly newsletter we had sent prior to the pandemic. In this updated weekly

newsletter, I always wrote a message about anything big happening that week and

expressing gratitude and support for our families. Our counselors provided a "Counselor

Corner" with tips and tricks for families. Each grade level provided a weekly class and

assignment calendar, and other information was included as needed. A staff member

translated the entire newsletter into Spanish, and our lead secretary put both the English

and Spanish newsletters together. It was a lot of work upfront, but parents were very

grateful for this tool. As an example, during the week of February 8–12, 2021, I shared

some ideas of ways families can have fun indoors during the rainy season. That same

week, our counselors shared information in Counselor's Corner about report cards that

would be coming home:

> During COVID-19, teachers recognize that report cards at this time are not the
>
> same as the past. While they still let you know how your student is doing

academically, they are severely limited in how your student is doing during this

pandemic overall. (Davis Weekly Newsletter, February 8, 2021).

This message was followed by ideas of how families could talk with their children and

teachers about report cards and how to use the report card for goal setting.

We also recognized the challenging position parents were thrown into because of

school closures. Parents had to continue to provide for their families by working while

simultaneously being teachers. We knew we needed to find ways to support parents with

school schedules, so we provided both morning and afternoon classes to allow families

with different abilities, depending on work and daycare situations, to attend live classes.

We also provided asynchronous and synchronous learning opportunities so students

would have the opportunity to learn whenever worked best for their families.

We also supported families with academic activity supplies. We provided basic

learning supplies, like journals, pencils, scissors, and Crayons, to all students for the year

in plastic boxes so they could learn from home. We also scheduled monthly learning kit

pickups, where families would come and pick up learning materials for their students.

Each grade level had an educational assistant assigned to them who was there to support

with preparing the learning kids. Grade levels would include learning packets, STEAM

materials, art materials, and anything else students might need for learning that month.

Each month we would include a gift, such as a learning center for home, Davis water

bottle, Davis sticker, or Davis beanie. On the months we were also holding one of our bi-

monthly family nights, we would include a craft kit that always included a snack for

students. We also allowed families to pick up extra kits for siblings.

Technology Supports. When we closed Davis, all of us, teachers and students alike, had to adjust to using technology for learning in ways we were not used to. When we shut down, our new model of learning, CDL, for which the state provided implementation guidance, was required, and teachers were expected to move to our online learning platform, Schoology. The technology literacy among my staff varied widely. Some teachers were eager to jump in and learn different ways to connect with students using video platforms such as YouTube, but other teachers were reluctant to move online at all. Our teachers, who were used to using paper packets, suddenly had to figure out how to establish online curricula.

From March through June 2020, we did not offer live classes to students. We had the technology to do so, but teachers were not required. As time went on, several teachers tried holding live classes using a feature on Schoology called "Big Blue Button." These teachers made efforts to establish human connection between peers, such as sharing or check-in circle for the students to see each other. The teachers who hosted these live classes always shared how happy they were to check in with students in real time and to be able to interact with their classes.

Despite tackling the technology learning curve and providing online options for classes, we quickly learned many of our families did not have access to technology they needed. We had to think of all of the barriers our diverse families might experience in order to provide a more equitable experience for all students. Online learning would require all students to have access to technology to attend online classes and complete their learning activities, but we were not one-to-one with student devices. This meant

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looking at what devices we had in schools that could go to homes and putting in orders for more devices, such as computers and iPads, which were backordered for months because everyone in the world was moving education online. We also had to consider families' access to the internet. I had not known how many families did not have access to the internet at home. We worked with parents to support them in getting set up with Comcast Essentials internet, which is discounted for low-income families. The district also found ways to buy hot spots for families. We gave out over 250 hot spots.

We also found ways to offer technology support to families. When we returned to school in the fall of 2021, we provided technology support at the school from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. every day and at other times by request. Parents could sign up for an appointment at the school, call the school, or fill out a technology ticket to receive support. We also set up a "Parent Academy," which was an in-person event for parents to meet their child's new teacher and get their child's device for the year. Teachers showed parents how to access their child's computers and online classes, and for families who needed, there were interpreters available. Parents scheduled time to attend so we could contact trace if needed and to keep the number of attendees low at all times.

In the middle of this three-day event, Oregon experienced some of the worst wildfires we have ever seen in the Columbia Gorge. There were smoke and ashes all around our school. We had planned the event to be outside for safety, but we had to move the event inside because of the smoke. Then I made the decision to shut down the event, and the district delayed the start of school because we were unable to get computers out to students on time. That day felt unreal. I came back to the school to hang signs on the

windows that Parent Academy was canceled because of the wildfires. It was dark and glowing outside because of the smoke, and I was now wearing a mask because of both the fire and Covid-19.

As a principal, I am always hoping for the best and preparing for the worst. At this moment I stopped myself from thinking about what else could go wrong. This was just one of many examples where we had to regroup and think about how we could go forward with getting parents and students what they needed for a successful school year. I was able to recognize and appreciate one unintended benefit of scrambling to fill the technology gap revealed by the school closure: schools had needed to focus more on technology for a long time and they were forced into the 21st century by needing to have one-to-one devices for students, technology support, and training for teachers so we can help students move forward in the world of technology.

Emotional and Social Supports. Another way we supported families was through acknowledging the difficulties associated with the school closure and distance learning. We knew that as difficult as it was for us, as school staff, to navigate this new online system, it was even more so for our students and their families. Our counselors hosted a session on how to support students who were feeling mad or frustrated by online learning. They provided tools to families to support them in speaking with their students when the students were experiencing feelings about school closure challenges. Another tool was a reset kit, which we proved to all families along with guidance for setting up a "reset spot" in their homes for students to go take a break when they needed to disconnect from online schooling.

During the spring of 2020, we embarked on another family support program. I was asked by our superintendent if we would like to pilot a program called Academic Parent Teacher Teams (APTT) with district school-improvement funds. APTT is a project by an organization called West Ed, which is grounded in the idea that when schools and families connect, students thrive. Parents and teachers must be partners to maximize student learning, both inside and outside of school. During the spring of the 2020 school year, an APTT facilitator from West Ed attended a staff meeting and offered learning sessions about what APTT would require. Teachers were offered the option to participate because I did not want to require teachers to take on anything extra with everything else they were having to learn, even though I was confident that this program would support student learning and family engagement. In the end, eight out of my 18 classrooms chose to pilot APTT during CDL. Six additional teachers had also signed up to take part in APTT, but once it was announced that we were going to start the school year online, they withdrew from the program. Our APTT teams met with families three times throughout the school year. For each session, teachers were paid to have time with our APTT facilitator to plan for the event and were paid to host the event with families. They were also provided a budget for materials to send to families' homes for the meeting and for prizes for those who attended, such as board games or memberships to the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry.

We received positive feedback from both staff and families about APTT. At the end of our pilot, we decided that we would no longer partner with West Ed, but instead, we would use our Title 1 funds to create our own Davis APTT family night program.

During the 2021–2022 school year, teachers are hosting online parent events where they are bringing academic skills and learning to parents through Zoom. As of the writing of this paper, we have begun these nights and they are going well. As with the previous APTT program, we are receiving positive feedback, and both parents and staff are excited about the possibility of doing in-person events again when it is safe for everyone.

Supporting Students Through SEL Implementation

Social and emotional learning (SEL) implementation was essential to the culture of care at Davis before and during the pandemic. When I became the principal at Davis in 2015, I spent time with our school leadership team and staff looking at programs that would support the social–emotional and mental health needs of our students. We landed on a program called MindUP (Appendix), which is a mindfulness program based in neuroscience. MindUP teaches skills and knowledge to children to regulate stress emotions, develop positive relationships, and act with compassion and kindness. During our first year of implementation of the program, I set up training for staff and visits to a local school, Marysville Elementary in Portland Public School District, that had found success with the program.

While my teachers liked the program and the tools that it provided to their students, we found that, as a school, we a needed a program that would teach students social and emotional skills beyond mindfulness. One of my kindergarten teachers was using a program called Kimochis in her classroom. At Davis we do what we call walkabouts where a substitute teacher is provided so teachers have the opportunity to observe their colleagues. During these walkabouts teachers saw this Kimochis program

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and started asking questions about it. We had received a grant from Kaiser to promote

SEL at the school. That year, 17 out of 19 classroom teachers asked to pilot the Kimochis

program in their classroom, and by the following year, 100% of my teachers were on

board. Prior to the pandemic, we had been focusing on SEL for three and a half years,

using MindUP, Kimochis, restorative practices, and monthly character traits (Appendix).

Many schools were not in this place or were only beginning this work when the pandemic

hit. We had the benefit of being able to shift our already-developed SEL work into an

online format for at-home learning.

Throughout the pandemic, SEL has been a top priority for me and my staff. In the

early days of the school closure, the conversations I was having with my staff in our

check-in meetings were often around how to support the social and emotional needs of

students during the closure. At the beginning this included phone calls and texts home to

families to check in on them, activities, and videos for students to help them process how

they were feeling about not being in school. After the initial closure, when we started our

CDL program during the 2020–2021 school year and our leadership team was working to

develop our master schedule for online learning, the first thing we did was to focus on

providing SEL time in our schedule. Each day started out with 30 minutes of circle time

where classes would be able to build relationships and focus on social and emotional

skills. Our counselors provided teachers with a weekly MindUP PowerPoint to use in

their morning circles, a practice we had started prior to the pandemic. Teachers used the

Kimochis program and other SEL tools that came out during the pandemic to support

SEL in their classrooms. I would often pop into classrooms and hear students talking

about empathy, gratitude, and compassion. They would also be talking openly about how they felt because a family member was in the hospital with Covid-19 or the fear that one of their parents would get the virus at work. Many times, students would express how sad and hard it was for them to not be in school but that they were also afraid to come back to school after the pandemic.

When, in April of 2021, we were finally able to reopen schools for hybrid learning, our focus as a staff remained on the social and emotional wellness of our students and their mental health. We decided that in the mornings, we would continue our practices of holding the morning circle, followed by core academics, online with all students. For the students who attended hybrid learning in the afternoons, we would focus on SEL skills and supporting student in being back in school around peers again.

When students first returned to school, there was a lot of fear of being around others again. Having to wear masks was a challenge for everyone, and finding ways to set up safe learning spaces was a challenge for teachers. There was also fear from students and staff that we would have to close schools again. One second-grade student shared with me that she had to go to Afghanistan for the summer to visit her family because they had not been able to see them for so long, and she was so sad she could not attend summer school. She begged me to keep the schools open for the next year because she loved being at school and did not want to do "computer school" again because she would miss her teachers and friends too much. This student is now a third grader, and she writes me little notes every month telling me she is so happy to be back in "real school" and thanking me for making school safe and keeping it open.

Supporting Staff

Throughout the pandemic, my staff and I put a great deal of effort into creating and sustaining a culture of care to support students and families, but there was also a need for the staff to be supported in a culture of care. With no warning, staff had been locked out of the building with no time to prepare or to consider what moving to online school would mean. Many of my teachers had their own children at home who were also doing online school. My teachers wanted to do what was best for their own kids while supporting their Davis students as well. There was no clear end to the school day, which meant that without a reason to stop, teachers could work 24 hours a day. In addition, teachers were continuously working to creatively recreate their classrooms online and provide authentic learning and relationship-building opportunities for students.

The staff needed social and emotional health and wellness support. As a leader, I worked to support teachers with their jobs and their home lives by seeing them first as individuals and second as employees. It was my job to lead and motivate, but also to model self-care. At meetings and check-ins I always provided time for staff to check in about how they were doing and what they needed. And I worked to help provide human connection during a time when so many people were feeling isolated.

Throughout the pandemic I prioritized creating and sustaining the same culture of care that I had fostered at Davis prior to the pandemic. I also have a very strong team of teachers, educational assistants, and support staff who were able to keep social and emotional learning, relationship building, and student connection as key priorities as we reopened schools. In addition, my team and I have a strong focus on equity in our school,

which was already an important part of our philosophy before the pandemic and that

continued to serve us and our students throughout school closures and reopening. The

next section describes the cultural wealth at Davis, the culturally responsive leadership I

embody, including the steps I have personally taken to critically assess my own biases

and leadership style, the culturally responsive teaching we employ, how we use data to

promote equity at Davis, and how we promote a culturally responsive and inclusive

school environment for our diverse body of students and their families.

Equity

Culturally Responsive Leadership

When I began teaching at Davis, I realized the immense cultural wealth in our

school. Throughout the years, we have had upwards of 29 different languages spoken by

our student population. Every year I learn about a new language spoken by a student who

enrolls at our school. As the principal I believe that it is my responsibility to learn about

all of our students and about the cultural wealth they bring to our school. Yosso's (2005)

cultural wealth model describes six types of cultural assets: aspirational capital, linguistic

capital, social capital, navigational capital, familial capital, and resistant capital. During

the Covid-19 pandemic, our students of color and their families' cultural wealth

supported them in navigating an extremely challenging event. When looking at these

cultural assets and how they relate to the Covid-19 pandemic, I think of the social capital

and the networks of community and resources many families leaned on. Also, during the

pandemic everyone had to navigate a whole new Covid-19 world. Yosso and Burciaga

(2016) describe navigational wealth as "skills in maneuvering through social institutions.

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Historically, this implies the ability to maneuver through institutions not created with communities of color in mind" (p.2). There were many new systems, such as online school, that families had to navigate during the pandemic. Cultural wealth is valued and supported at our school each day.

During 2020 and 2021 there was racial unrest following the killing of George Floyd, protests in Oregon and across the United States in line with the Black Lives Matter movement, a rocky political climate and political tensions about the election, an insurrection at the capital, a spotlight on racism in America, and controversy in school boards across the country around critical race theory. As educators, we had to discuss and plan for how to address these current events with our students.

In 2020 the Oregon Department of Education adopted a policy called Every Student Belongs. This policy states the following:

> The Oregon Department of Education recognizes that student health and safety are the cornerstone of education and that all students are entitled to a high-quality educational experience, free from discrimination or harassment based on perceived race, color, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or national origin, and without fear or hatred, racism or violence. (ODE, n.d.)

Our district adopted this policy as well. During this time there were parents who supported the Black Lives Matter Movement in schools and others who disagreed. I spoke with parents during CDL who were upset that teachers had Black Lives Matter posters in their Zoom screens or that we were watching the inauguration of our first female and woman of color vice president during class time.

As a principal there are things that happen every day for which I had received no training. There are conversations I was often not prepared for. Many times, after I have a difficult conversation with someone, I replay the conversation over in my head wondering if I handled the conversation correctly and reflecting on what I could have said differently. In these conversations I always have to listen to the parent. I try to understand their perspective so I can respond appropriately, but I am simultaneously thinking that people do not want to change and do not want our systems to change. Every time I have one of these race- and equity-related conversations, I learn to navigate them better and get better at telling the parents that we stand by the ODE policy, that all of our students belong, and that we are supporting the social justice movement of Black Lives Matter as a school, district, and state. Typically, during these conversations, parents appreciate the time to be heard, and we end the conversation not in agreement, but in a place of understanding of what is acceptable at our school. As a white woman leader, I believe it is my responsibility to continue to have these conversations where inappropriate and racist things are often said to me, no matter how uncomfortable I may feel.

I am committed to being a culturally responsive leader and taking into account the different cultural needs and background of our students. As a white woman in my position, I had to acknowledge what was going on in the world for so many non-whites in my community, but also at times felt uncomfortable and did not want to say the wrong the thing. I had to put my personal feelings aside and not make it about me. I knew I would make mistakes, but I also knew that important conversation needed to happen to

address the systemic racism in our country if we have any hope of becoming an inclusive

society and school system.

Critical Self Awareness and Training

When I was in graduate school in 2008, I took a class about Peggy McIntosh's

theory about unpacking the invisible knapsack and white privilege (McIntosh,

1989/1998). I remember at this time that it was challenging to accept that I had white

privilege. My parents were divorced when I was 14, and my dad died of alcoholism. I am

a second-generation Greek American, as my grandparents immigrated to the United

States in their teen years. I learned very little of the Greek language, but my mother is a

fluent speaker. I grew up in a local Greek Orthodox church. I remember feeling like I did

not fit in there because I did not *speak* Greek but did not fit in at school because I *was*

Greek. I also know now, as an adult, that as a white woman I experience privilege

regardless of my own family's immigrant experience.

This was the beginning of my equity journey. It took years of work, discussions,

and reflection to come to grips with my own identity and understanding my own cultural

background, a process that will never be finished. With my upbringing and my own

family's culture, I have my own biases, assumptions, and values that I bring to my

leadership work. I have to continually be aware of these things in order to lead as an anti-

racist leader. I am very aware that my lived experiences are quite different than a

majority of the students I serve.

During the past three years, our district has had a focus on anti-racist and equity

work. Prior to the pandemic, our district leadership team, which consists of building

principals, district office administration, and our district cabinet, participated in trainings

and book studies to support each other with our own critical self-awareness. We read

White Fragility by Robin DiAngelo (2018) and had the author come speak with us. We

also read *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* by Zaretta Hammond (2014),

and all building principals made a collective agreement to bring Hammond's work to our

school buildings through our own book studies or professional development with our

staff.

During the pandemic, we also participated in trainings on equity and culturally

responsive leadership. One training, with the Center for Educational Leadership at the

University of Washington, focused on prioritizing student experience to grow collective

leadership for equitable instruction and environments for learning. We also participated

in Coaching for Educational Equity training. This training focused on white-dominant

culture in our schools and understanding and focusing on the presence of race and racism

within our school. Through the training we developed skills in engaging in conversations

to bring awareness and toward change in our schools to better support our students of

color, who, in our current school system, we are underserving. Each of these trainings

and experiences have been impactful and important in my own critical self-awareness and

being a more culturally responsive leader. The timing of these trainings was challenging

because they had to occur on Zoom. I sometimes wonder how the experience would have

been different if these trainings had happened in person. It was also challenging to

balance the crises happening around Covid-19 with this important equity work, which is

so critical for us to serve our school communities.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

In our school and district, we are committed to culturally responsive teaching. Teachers, in their professional learning communities, examine our district-provided curriculum to look at ways they can supplement and expand it to be more culturally responsive. Some ways we do this are by bringing in alternative texts or changing the focus of the lesson to be reflective of the students we teach. As a school we have also been working through our school library and classroom libraries to provide more culturally responsive texts and include more authors of color.

We have also established a school equity team that provides monthly professional development grounded in Zaretta Hammond's book *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*. We did this work on Zoom during the school closures, but since schools have reopened, we have continued this work in person monthly. Doing this equity work has led to conversations around barriers and equity issues that have been amplified because of the pandemic, which is helping to inform the way we ensure that we are continually improving our culturally responsive teaching at Davis.

Using Data to Promote Equity

Student data, such as test scores, attendance, and discipline referrals, can provide a mechanism for promoting equity in schools. At Davis Elementary, we are looking at this type of data for the whole school as well as by subgroups, such as race, language, and socio-economic status. This allows us to have conversations about how we are serving all groups of students and looking at why some groups of students may not be making growth at the same rate as other groups of students. These conversations can be

challenging for some teachers, and I have sometimes heard excuses being made about why a specific group may not be performing well. The more equity work we do as a school, the better these conversations are going. Staff are gaining more understanding and skills in being able to acknowledge the data and look at what we could do differently to serve students. More teachers are asking difficult questions of each other, and it is a more collective conversation than it was in the past.

During the pandemic we have continued to have these conversations around equitable access and barriers to accessing and succeeding in online school as a district, school, and nation. Not all students had access to technology, and although Davis was able to provide devices to all students eventually, this did not happen immediately. Also, not all families had access to reliable internet, which was another service we were able to provide. Further, parents have differing levels of technology literacy, and some have language barriers. Davis did things such as our beginning of the year "Parent Academy" where we provided families with support for technology. We also had to think and discuss the spaces students had available in their homes to do online school and why students might not feel comfortable having their cameras on. Another consideration during distance learning was parents' work schedules. Some parents worked nights and others during the day. Some students had to go to daycare during school hours and may not have been able to access school during class hours. Each of these barriers were part of equity discussions and considerations that informed making additions and changes to our educational program.

As a culturally responsive leader, I believe that we must have a culturally responsive school environment. This means all students must be accepted, there will be student voice, and students' social capital and student's cultures will be acknowledged and valued. As a school, and personally as a leader, these continue to be areas where we focus, but during the pandemic there were things we had to look at intentionally to support student voice and students engaging in learning.

Applying Autoethnographic Insights to My Research Questions

Through this autoethnography, I sought to critically evaluate and reflect on my experience as a principal at an elementary school during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through reflexive review of my journal from this time, along with other artifacts, I found that five primary themes emerged and that an ethic of care undergirded all of these themes, as well as my philosophy and actions as a leader. In this section I reflect on the seven research questions I set out to answer and apply what I found to answer those questions.

Q1.   As a principal, what were the most critical aspects of my leadership in supporting my school community?

The most critical actions I took as a leader during the pandemic were to build and maintain trust, support the staff as people first, and establish and maintain a culture of care. This culture of care meant being consistent in my leadership and in my expectations of all staff. It also meant being proactive and transparent in providing communication around what was happening through all the crises arising from Covid-19 so staff, parents, and students could be prepared. Another part of this culture of care was providing safe

places for people to ask questions and authentically experience their feelings about decisions, be they positive or negative. During this time everyone was experiencing a collective trauma and had so many feelings about lockdowns, schools reopening, Covid-19, masks, vaccines, and so many more unexpected changes. It was imperative that we had a culture where we could acknowledge our reality, but also create a plan to move forward to support our students.

Q2.   How did I promote a culture of care at my school?

Everything I do as a leader every day at Davis before and during this pandemic has been centered around creating a culture of care. I love people and I love the job that I do each day. This means remembering and reminding staff that they each have lives outside of work. Creating a culture of care has also meant listening. I believe that you have to listen to the people you serve and listen for understanding. Finally, providing outlets for staff to be acknowledged for the work they are doing and authentically practicing gratitude each day are important pieces, to me, to bringing creating and sustaining a culture of care in our school.

Q3.   How did I show up as a culturally responsive leader each day?

Each and every day, I had to show up for my students and staff. That meant continuing my work in becoming an equitable and anti-racist school leader and continuing to critically reflect on my own leadership practices. I have to understand and acknowledge my own upbringing and culture to understand the biases I bring to my leadership practice. This also means examining our practices through an inclusive lens to look at how we address all students from a position of equity in all that we do. As a

prosocial leader my focus is on serving my diverse school community and creating

positive impacts for all individuals across their wide range of cultural backgrounds and

experiences.

Q4.   What did my school do to acknowledge the cultural wealth of our diverse

community?

A culture of care is a big part of our school culture. Our school and teachers are

committed to students being represented in the lessons we are teaching and the books we

have available for students. We acknowledge the strength of our diversity by giving

students a place for student voice. We ensure that students are able to share their cultural

backgrounds and traditions and to speak from their own cultural experience. Through the

changes related to the Covid-19 pandemic, one specific way we have approached

acknowledging our school's cultural wealth is by providing language-specific meetings

for parents to get information about CDL and school reopening. These meetings became

a space where concerns could be heard about what questions and ideas were coming up in

specific cultural communities and contexts.

Q5.   How did I practice self-care during the pandemic?

During the pandemic I have had to find balance in my work and personal life. I

have to make sure I am getting sufficient sleep, eating healthy, and exercising. Becoming

pregnant this year has brought another layer to self-care. It is now imperative that I take

care of myself for my future son. For me this means having a time that I disconnect from

working. Not answering emails all night. Taking my email off my phone. Self-care also

means focusing on my personal relationships with my friends, family, and husband. I

have my own support systems outside of school, and it has been imperative for me to

have space to acknowledge how hard it has been to lead during the pandemic and space

to process these feelings. This also means connecting with other school leaders that are

experiencing the same things. No-one can understand the role of the principal, except for

other principals. For the past two years, I ran two mornings a week with a principal

colleague. I treasured these two hours we had to spend together each week because it was

a time to do something I enjoyed and get exercise while getting to spend time with a

friend and colleague. We would discuss what was going on in our buildings, share

challenges with distance learning, and problem solve. We would both bring issues to each

other and talk through them together. Self-care actions like these have helped me find

balance and to be a better principal.

     Q6.   What did I learn about myself as a leader during the pandemic?

     I learned that I am a caring, compassionate, competent, connected leader. During

the past two years, I have found my confidence in leadership and feel much more

prepared to support my school community. There are many times, as a principal, when I

have had to improvise and do my best to make the decisions in a timely manner. As a

leader, there was no manual telling me exactly how to lead. During the past two years,

there have been many days I have had to have enough confidence in my leadership skills

to listen to the community I serve and make decisions that I believed would best meet the

needs of our students. Through these experiences I learned that I am an effective leader

and that so much of what we are doing at Davis is good for the community. I also learned

that it is okay to not have answers right away. Being a listener is one of the biggest parts of the job.

> Q7.   What are the best practices I learned during the pandemic that are useful for continued application?

I will continue to lead with confidence. I will continue to be a leader who listens to all stakeholders within my organization. I will continue to lead from the heart and make it a non-negotiable to have a healthy school community that puts humans first. In this business, crises and stress are inevitable and look like they are here to stay for some time. I will continue to make it a priority to care for myself and my staff so that we are all able to show up for our students and community each day. I have also learned that technology implementation is an area where we are growing, and I believe in the years to come we will continue to improve as educators with it. Finally, culturally responsive leadership and teaching need to remain at the focus at our school, along with acknowledging and providing a safe space for the cultural wealth of our students to be seen, heard, and listened to.

Conclusion

Every day in this position I had to remind myself that I was making an impact on students and staff. There were many days that I wanted to give up and do something that did not require me to be "on" all the time and to have answers that, in fact, nobody had. I knew I was making an impact when I asked a teacher how a lesson went. Or asked a kid how Zoom classes were going during a learning kit distribution. I remained focused on the kids and the fact that I had wanted to become a principal for students and for the

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community and that I was being given the chance to contribute in ways I had never visualized.

There is no one quality or specific set of qualities that makes an effective principal. There are two parts to being a principal: a principal is both a manager of the business aspects of a school and a leader of the people. A principal's personality makes them who they are as a leader and how they will handle the stress of the job and support their communities. As a school principal I am committed to building trust in my community. This has meant relationship building and listening to the needs of all stakeholders in the community. I have also needed to be patient as there are experiences each day that can lead to frustration. Regardless, it has been important to be a steady leader and think about what is best for the kids in every decision I make. I have needed to have empathy and compassion for everyone I serve: my students, my families, and my staff. I deal with tragedy in my community, experience struggles in my personal life, and support others in dealing with their struggles. I need to have strength and resilience in each of these situations to get through the day while keeping calm and being a professional in the role of principal. I must do this for the students I serve because they are our future and everything I do as a principal impacts them.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

I have been serving as principal at Davis Elementary School in Portland, Oregon since 2016, and in my fourth year in this role, the Covid-19 pandemic changed the landscape of education across the world. This autoethnography is a reflective account of my leadership experiences during Covid-19 school closures and reopening. Within the theoretical frameworks of (a) culture of care informed by the constructs of ethic of care, cultural wealth in critical race theory, and culturally responsive leadership; and (b) prosocial leadership, this autoethnography used self-reflection and thematic analysis to explore my experiences, which parallel the experiences of many educational professionals, during a global pandemic. Through exploring my leadership philosophy and the challenges and successes I and my school community faced during the Covid-19 pandemic, I hope I have documented some of the ways that prosocial leadership and dedication to creating a culture of care can help sustain educational organizations during times of uncertainty and rapid change.

Research Problem

When schools closed in March of 2020, school districts and leaders had to scramble to move entire school programs online. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, many K–12 schools already struggled to manage student behavior in meaningful and effective ways because of children and adolescents' mental health needs, which is a nationwide problem (Cook et al., 2015). Students come to school needing social and emotional and mental health support, and the pandemic has only exacerbated these needs. The

enrollment at Davis Elementary has increased, as has the cultural diversity of our school community. Cultural considerations are crucial to student success and must be deliberated by school leaders to guide decisions for supporting student learning. In uncertain times, it is even more critical that the cultural wealth of schools be recognized, celebrated, and supported, that leadership and teaching be culturally responsive, and that a culture of care be fostered and sustained. Individual narratives and documentation of specific experiences of academic leaders operating through the Covid-19 pandemic are needed to understand the experience of leading diverse school communities with many differing needs during such uncertain times.

Research Purpose

This study endeavored to examine the problems and complexities I experienced during school closures and reopening schools during the Covid-19 pandemic. I explored the body of literature that makes up the conceptual framework for the study grounded in leadership theory, cultural wealth, care ethical, prosocial and culturally responsive leadership styles and within this conceptual framework, I reflected on my personal narrative of experience through autoethnography. This linking of self-reflection with formal leadership and social emotional learning theories allow meaning to emerge from a personal narrative that can facilitate understanding for others who may apply it in their own lives and careers when dealing with experiences that are similar. I shared experiences that I had as a leader during the Covid-19 pandemic and what I found to be the most effective in leading a community of students, families, and staff through unpredictable times of stress and unknowns. I experienced innumerable challenges that

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strengthened my leadership practice as an elementary school principal. My hope is that this reflection will provide insight to other school leaders who also navigated the Covid-19 pandemic.

Research Questions

This research project asked:

Q1.   As a principal, what were the most critical aspects of my leadership in supporting my school community?

Q2.   How did I promote a culture of care at my school?

Q3.   How did I show up as a culturally responsive leader each day?

Q4.   What did my school do to acknowledge the cultural wealth of our diverse community?

Q5.   How did I practice self-care during the pandemic?

Q6.   What did I learn about myself as a leader during the pandemic?

Q7.   What are the best practices I learned during the pandemic that are useful for continued application?

Research Design and Methods

This study used the qualitative method of autoethnography, which I chose because it supports self-reflection. During the pandemic, I was deeply entangled in the work of being a principal and school leader. This method allowed me to understand and interpret my thoughts, behaviors, ideas, and feelings by telling my story from my own perspective. I had a very uncommon experience of being a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic and hold intimate knowledge and experiences from that journey. The method of

autoethnography allowed me to formally and qualitatively examine information that is both personal and relatable to others.

For this autoethnography, I collected data in the form of a reflective journal. My journal had notes about daily happenings and included reflections of my learning over the days and weeks. I then coded and reviewed the journal, along with other artifacts. These artifacts included my daily calendar, meeting agendas, weekly newsletters to staff, parent newsletters, social media posts, emails, and letters and notes collected from students, parents, and staff. These artifacts were used to remember what happened, how problems were resolved, and to recreate and remember the timelines of events and fill in details that otherwise may have been lost. Finally, I used thematic analysis to identify emergent themes, which provided a structural frame within which to understand patterns in the way I approached leadership during the pandemic, how I grew and learned throughout the process, and how my experiences and outlook fit within a conceptual framework defined by an ethic of care and prosocial leadership.

Limitations and Delimitations

The purpose of this study was to provide a unique perspective of what it was like to be a principal during the Covid-19 pandemic so other leaders can learn from my experiences and relate my experiences to their own. I hope that my reflections can provide insight to other leaders who navigated the Covid-19 pandemic. This study was delimitated by its scope and generalizability. This research was not intended to evaluate how a given school or district dealt with the pandemic. It was also not intended to generalize about experiences, decisions, or approaches taken by school districts across

the country and the globe, because schools had to make decisions that were best for their

unique school communities and had their own unique experiences of getting through the

pandemic. This study is limited by its methodological approach. As an autoethnography,

there is only one viewpoint as I was on the only subject. My experience may be different

than others based on my own cultural lens and could be difficult to generalize among

other administrators in other states and districts or from different backgrounds. I know

and acknowledge that I do not have all the answers to being a leader, but I am hopeful

that my experiences will provide useful insights to other leaders who either found

themselves leading during the Covid-19 pandemic or who experience unexpected

challenges as they lead in the future.

Synthesis of Findings

Principals do not learn everything they need to know to be effective leaders in

their administration classes, and they especially do not learn skills for how to lead during

a pandemic. Nobody was prepared for the entire world to shut down because of Covid-

19. Being a principal is a job that requires a leader to wear many hats every day. A

principal must be a manager of a building through managing a budget, employee

relations, and the daily operations of the building. A principal must also be a leader of

people, and those who lead with empathy, patience, problem-solving skills, and the

ability to remain calm, regardless of the situation, are the principals who succeed at their

jobs. Being a principal is a stressful job. Many teachers who have the skills to be

effective principals stay away from pursuing a principal job because of the responsibility

they see principals taking on each day. Effective teachers also sometimes leave the

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profession because of overwork and a lack of support. As a society, we have to find better ways to support all educators. through increased school funding, salaries, training, and mentoring opportunities.

Recruiting and retaining principals is a matter of great concern. Coaching and mentoring opportunities in schools is crucial for inspiring talented and caring educators to become principals and to stay in their positions. The pandemic is far from over, and the impacts of the pandemic will be felt in schools for many years to come. Schools will continue to experience staffing shortages, staff burn out, mental health and behavioral challenges for students, and much more.

My findings suggest that the most influential factors in sustaining my school community during the pandemic have been communication and connection practices, a prosocial leadership philosophy that drove me to build strong relationships and community partnerships, a determination to build and maintain healthy self-care habits so that I could show up for my school community each day, dedication to serving and supporting my staff, students, and families through a culture of care, and a focus on equity and culturally responsive leadership and teaching. These practices were in place before the pandemic, and strengthening them during the pandemic helped my school community make it through.

Communication and Connection

As a leader, both before and during the pandemic, I have found communication to be one the most important part of being a successful leader. Communication supports leaders in building trusting and strong relationships within their school, which leads to

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building positive school culture. Positive school culture, in turn, is directly tied to student success. Further, schools benefit when their principal takes on a caring role as part of their leadership and management responsibilities (Habegger, 2008; van der Vyver et al., 2014). For this caring role to benefit the school community, communication must happen with all stakeholders, including staff, families, students, and community partners through email, social media, newsletters, meetings, authentic conversations, and community events. During the Covid-19 strong communication with my staff and teachers have allowed me to maintain strong relationships, motivate my staff, and make sure they have felt seen and heard. Frequent, authentic communication has let them know that we are working together, even though we are physically apart.

Having a positive school culture is built not only upon communication, but also upon trust and connection with the community. The concept of trust includes five commonly recognized concepts: benevolence, predictability, competence, honesty, and openness (Hoy, 2003). During the pandemic this trust has been built between leaders, staff, students, and families by instilling the belief that every decision made was in the best interest of the entire group.

Prosocial Leadership

Being a prosocial leader has served both me and my community during the pandemic. Prosocial behaviors relate to the actions a leader takes to support others and the resulting positive effects on employee's lives (Grant, 2007). I have focused on building relationships with all stakeholders within my school. Also, I have served and supported the community by treating everyone within my organization as a human first

and by approaching each situation with compassion, empathy, and optimism. Going into all situations as a listener first serves leaders well at all times, but especially during a period of collective trauma, such as Covid-19.

Mahfouz et al. (2019) found that prosocial leaders must have strong social and emotional competency and the ability to handle stress. A prosocial leader is aware of themselves and others' emotions, which leads to effective and positive leadership. An effective prosocial leader proactively supports their community, is people centered, and keeps people's needs above those of an organization, while also creating a culture of collaboration (Harris, 2002). I have found all of these components of prosocial leadership to be beneficial for leading during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Self-Care

A leader must practice self-care in order to be ready to show up for their school community each day. Maintaining a self-care routine was especially challenging during the pandemic. Noddings (2005) explores the themes of care. To take care of others, we must take care of ourselves.. During the pandemic this challenge has applied to leaders, teachers, parents, and students. The demands on everyone to navigate a new world have been unprecedented, especially during the school closure period. Parents were working and acting as teachers. Teachers were teaching their own children at home and teaching their classes. Many children were serving dual roles of student and helping with household responsibilities they were not used to, while navigating the new world of online school. Self-care is about caring for ourselves through work, exercise, health

management, humor, play, hobbies, and spiritual life, and never has it been more important to maintain these habits than during the pandemic.

A Culture of Care

Creating and sustaining a culture of care has been a focus of mine since I became a principal six years ago, which started with our work around social and emotional learning with students. During the pandemic we continued this work. With all of the unknowns students were experiencing, care and connection was very important. All children face dual demands of family and school, and navigating these social demands can be challenging for some children (Garner et al., 2014). During the pandemic these demands became even more impactful. Students were facing things no group of children in modern society have experience before: a pandemic. Social and emotional learning for students was at the center of what we did to create a culture of care within our school. van der Vyver et al. (2014) found that a principal must act in a caring role with one's staff, which becomes a part of one's management style. Modeling this culture of care for the staff, then, influences the entire organization's culture. Caring for students was also at the center of the work done at Davis during the pandemic. Our ethic of care is reflected in this quote from Cavanagh et al. (2012): "Schools and teachers take ownership and responsibility for students' holistic well-being (adopting an ethic of care), for building trusting and respectful relationships and for repairing those relationships that have been harmed through wrongdoing" (p. 444).

Equity

Equity has been at the center of all decision we have made during the pandemic. Every decision made at the state, district, and school level has required a lens of equity to be used to look at barriers students and families have been experiencing and to create solutions to these barriers. Culturally responsive leaders have been, and continue to be, essential during the pandemic for creating equitable schools and school access for communities. Culturally responsive leaders must develop, support, and promote a welcoming climate in which the school is inclusive and welcoming to minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016), who are defined as "individuals from racially oppressed communities that have been marginalized—both legally and discursively—because of their non-dominant race, ethnicity, religion, language or citizenship" (p. 1275).

Broader Implications and Future Research

The Covid-19 pandemic threw the entire world, not least of all the educational system, into a sudden and unexpected crisis that necessitated ingenuity, creativity, steadfast dedication, and strong leadership. In the educational realm, the pandemic has shown us that a whole generation of educators could move school online without any time to prepare and without any training. However, we have also learned through this pandemic that our system is lacking in some key areas. We need policy changes that will better support the educational system through the ongoing pandemic, the aftermath once it is finally over, and through future unforeseen crises. Experts expect there will be more pandemics in our lifetimes, and if this happens again, we need to be more prepared than we were this time. Preparation for future pandemics must be done through a lens of

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equity, as well thinking about the barriers that families are facing and how our systems can support all students through equitable access to school.

Through telling my story of leading an elementary school through the Covid-19 pandemic, I observed and recorded several areas where I suggest that policy changes are needed to better serve our students and the educators who support them. First, perhaps it is worth taking a hard look at our current full-day, in-person educational model. Through the pandemic we have observed that hybrid learning has some unforeseen benefits. With a shorter day and fewer students at school, many students thrived in this model. Currently, our school system is active five days a week and functions as daycare for many families to be able to work. I propose that it is worth looking into the creation of policy that would still provide daycare for students but create a hybrid learning model, where teachers have smaller classes for shorter amounts of time. The other parts of the day could be spent in extracurricular activities, doing online learning, or other community activities. The options are endless, but policy must be established to fund schools properly and to allow them the flexibility to think outside of the box.

In addition to reconsidering the standard for student in-person learning schedules, we are just starting to understand the impacts on students of schools being closed for over a year. The social and emotional and mental health needs of our students are real. Behavioral issues, which were already a concern prior to the pandemic, have re-emerged upon school reopening and may even be amplified. Policy needs to be established to appropriately staff our schools with counselors, social workers, behavior specialists, and other mental health specialists to support our students. There has also been immense

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learning loss of students over the past two years, and staffing needs to be established in schools to provide interventions to students to address this loss. Supporting students also means empowering school leaders and teachers to think outside the box about how to address learning loss. For example, some forward-thinking approaches could be changing school schedules or looking at how we currently serve students within grade-level bands. Schools are constantly trying to survive because of the lack of staffing and funding. Schools should be staffed to thrive, not to survive, and policy is the mechanism by which these changes could come about.

Further, the pandemic has shined a light on inequitable access to healthcare, food, technology, and community supports. Schools are the hubs of many of our communities. Policy and funding must be established for schools to have appropriate staffing, access to technology, and supports to provide services to the community, such as healthcare, counseling services, food services, and daycare support. The pandemic has shown us how important our schools are because when schools cannot stay open the rest of society struggles. We must create policy now in case we are ever in this situation again. We also must take what we have learned over the past two years and reimagine our schools. Schools, and all industries, are struggling with the recruitment and retention of employees. We need to take a close look at why people are leaving the education field and look at how we pay teachers, how we create positive working environments, how we support teachers throughout their careers, and how we reward teachers both tangibly and intangibly so that we can recruit the best teachers for our students. If we do not make big changes now, our schools will continue to suffer.

The Covid-19 pandemic and its impacts are far from over. As of this writing, the world is now experiencing the Omicron variant, which is spreading quickly. Only 63.3% of the United States population is fully vaccinated, with less than 20% of kids between the ages of 5 and 11, the students I serve, in that category (Mayo Clinic, n.d.). My story and the themes I identified through autoethnographic methods, provide just one piece in a large puzzle that needs to be solved in order to position schools for success throughout the ongoing pandemic and future crises. There is much more research to be considered around the topic of leadership during the pandemic, including during periods of school closure, hybrid learning, and in-person school while a pandemic is still ongoing. Some potential research questions to consider include: How could districts have supported school leaders during the pandemic? How do schools look different post pandemic? How many principals stayed in their positions after the pandemic? For those principals who stayed, what factors contributed to their retention? How can we support new principals as they start their careers with consideration of the pandemic? How can we promote self-care for school leaders? Further exploration of these questions and the experiences of school leaders during the Covid-19 pandemic will help our educational system be better prepared to support school leaders in the continuing aftermath of the pandemic and for future crises.

Confidentiality and Telling the Story

When I first decided on the topic for my dissertation, I remember wanting to write an autoethnography about being a principal during Covid-19 because it was taking over my whole life and I did not have the mental space for anything else. When I began

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writing about my experience, it was more challenging than I had expected to tell the story of what it was like to be in education during this time. There is so much more to being a principal and teacher than you are taught in school, and I wanted to accurately portray what it was like in the day to day of being a principal during the pandemic. One of the challenges I encountered was to relate the kind of detailed stories needed to paint an accurate picture without compromising the privacy and confidentiality of the other individuals and families involved.

Safeguarding the confidentiality of my students, staff, parents, and community was very important to me because we have an understanding of trust. As a leader, if we do not have trust, we will not be able to effectively lead an organization. I, therefore, have been vague in some details of my story and have avoided sharing personal and confidential information about individuals and their experiences.

Summary

When one becomes a principal, there is an expectation that they have all the answers, the skills, and the tools they need to be successful. In fact, principals learn on the job every day. It is crucial to have supervisors and mentors to support principals with this work. Being a leader can be all consuming. Self-care is important. It is imperative that we prepare new leaders and support veteran leaders with mentoring and sustenance. The world and the educational system have years of rebuilding as the pandemic continues and even after it is over. Our school leaders need to be supported to continue to do their jobs.

As I have grown as a leader at Davis, I have experienced my own evolution in leadership. Growing as a leader has been a humbling experience. Throughout my six years as principal, I have progressed from a focus on managing technical issues within the school to a more adaptive leadership model (Heifetz, 1994). Covid-19 and all of its related challenges created a steep learning curve that ultimately enhanced my ability to lead adaptively. At the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic school closures, my personal and professional life were literally connected, and I had to learn how to create boundaries between the two because the amount I was working was unsustainable and I was burning myself out. I had to learn to adapt to the fluidly changing situation, to nimbly change directions and strategies when needed, and to make time to take care of myself so that I could truly show up for my school community. Perhaps most importantly, I learned to let go of some of the burden of leadership and creatively solve problems as the leader of a team rather than simply as an individual.

Learning to be a more adaptive leader taught me to bring my staff along with me and to share in ownership of systems at Davis because it was impossible and unsustainable to do it alone. In fact, Covid-19 led to the empowerment of the collective within my staff. As a collective we can create sustainable systems that are not dependent on one person. Through this experience I have learned that I gain strength within my leadership by sharing power with others within the framework of my expectations and vision for the school. Because we have built a strong foundation of trust and clear communication, my staff is familiar with how I think and how I would address a situation, and in turn, I know that I can trust them to make appropriate decisions.

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Empowering my staff became important to me even before my pregnancy because, as a

leader, you must grow a system that can run with or without your presence. With my

maternity leave coming up this May, this reciprocal trust and sharing of responsibility is

even more crucial for ensuring that the school can continue to run without me there.

Through being given this empowerment, I have seen my staff's capacity and confidence

for dealing with issues grow. Watching and fostering this growth has been incredibly

gratifying to me and I am proud to have played a role in helping develop this strong and

effective community.

      We have learned over the last two years of the Covid-19 pandemic that schools

are central to keeping our society functional. Families, students, and employers depend

on our schools to be open so students can learn and have a safe and supportive place to be

during the school day. Our schools educate, feed, and support many families. Our schools

need to be places that the community trusts. Academics in our schools are important, of

course, but a culture of care is needed within our schools to allow for learning to flourish

within an environment of trust and support. When the shutdown began, I was so grateful

to have been at my school for four years as the principal and as a teacher for three years

prior. I had established relationships and trust with my community, which served me as I

navigated the pandemic. During the pandemic, people often thought that I, as the

principal, got information about the school reopening, safety protocols, mask

requirements, vaccines, etc. prior to the general public. This was not true. I was often

getting the information from the news and social media like everyone else but needing to

quickly process what new information would mean for our school and translate it into

actions and communications for the school community. There was no roadmap to making the decisions that I was faced with, but with the support, and the trust, of my school community, I was able to lead as both a prosocial and culturally responsive leader.

I am grateful for my school community over the last two years. Every member of the community and staff came together to support our students through something really hard that no one was prepared for. We did it with each other and for each other, and ultimately for our kids. Writing this autoethnography allowed me to reflect on the amazing work that we did together. Our school is strong, and we are truly stronger together. As Helen Keller said, "alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." (as quoted by DiFeliciantonio, 2014)

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Appendix

SEL Programs and Practices

MindUP

MindUP (https://mindup.org/) is a social and emotional learning program that is grounded in neuroscience that teaches students about parts of their brains and how they work together. In this program students learn about mindfulness and how to regulate their emotions. The MindUP program teaches students skills and knowledge they need to self-regulate and to develop and maintain positive and healthy relationships.

Monthly Character Traits

Each month, Davis Elementary focuses on a monthly character trait connected to the MindUP curriculum. The character traits we teach at Davis include compassion, empathy, perspective, kindness, gratitude, joy/happiness, and mindfulness.

Kimochis

Kimochis (https://www.kimochis.com/) is a tier 1 universal social and emotional learning program. Kimochis means "feelings" in Japanese. This program contains Kimochis (feeling pillows), characters, and Kotowazas (wise wisdoms) that support the weekly 30-minute lessons in the curriculum. The lessons in the program teach relationship-building skills, emotional awareness, self-regulation, communication skills, empathy, and problem solving. This program teaches students tools to communicate how they are feeling and what to do when they are having big feelings. This program supports students in building connections with each other and in making room for everyone at school.

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Restorative Practices

Restorative practices (https://www.iirp.edu/restorative-practices/what-is-restorative-practices) are used in schools to improve and repair harm done in the school community. The purpose of restorative practices is to support students in building relationships, repairing relationships, and promoting a healthy school culture. Within the restorative program we have at Davis, teachers start each day with a 20-minute soft start, which includes a morning circle. A morning circle is used to proactively build relationships and build classroom community. These circles give each student the opportunity to speak and learn about one another. Teachers also hold another circle after recess or at the end of the day in order to reflect on the day or problem solve as a classroom community. If harm is done at our school, a restorative conference is held. In these conferences there is a facilitator who has a list of questions that provide the students involved a chance to talk about the harm that was done, how it made them feel, and how the harm can be repaired.