ABSTRACT

Lihi Rosenthal, FITS AND STARTS: ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY TOWARD TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP (Under the direction of Dr. Matthew Militello). Department of Educational Leadership, March 2019.

Across the country, passionate educators strive to meet the needs of diverse students within welcoming and inclusive community schools. It is no easy feat. For schools disproportionately impacted by the disenfranchising forces of community and interpersonal trauma, institutional racism and poverty, the challenge is even greater. So too is the moral imperative: students facing complex barriers to success are too often failed by public schools ill-equipped to meet their needs. This qualitative, participatory action research project examines an inquiry process at one such impacted elementary school in Tacoma, Washington. By utilizing 360° feedback and empowering staff and families to co-create their pathway to change, Rise Academy set out to improve its school culture and climate while eliminating exclusionary discipline practices, including suspension and expulsion. Driving the change were a transdisciplinary team of co-researchers, including school leaders, faculty and staff, and family representatives. To match the group's diversity and ensure equity of voice amongst them, data came through various channels, from direct research to interview participation, image-based reflections, one-minute essays, and normative surveys. The work progressed in fits and starts, challenged by unexpected variables and the need to adjust course multiple times. Lessons emerged both about the school's planned trajectory and what happened in practice. The power of incorporating the authentic voice of all members of a school community stood out as a finding, as did the need for intentional, trauma-informed leadership and the important protective factors it brings: strong relationships, mission alignment, and meaningful work. While far from a complete journey to date, the transformation story of Rise Academy offers insights about leading change

within trauma-impacted schools, leaving one clear implication for future practice and policy: schools and students get healthier, together.

FITS AND STARTS: ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY TOWARD

TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP

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FITS AND STARTS: ONE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL'S JOURNEY

TOWARD TRAUMA-INFORMED LEADERSHIP

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Prelude

Much of what I believe about the public education system comes from the years I spent working at its edges. Bright-eyed and bushytailed, I began my career as a teacher in an elementary school on Chicago's Southside. By the end of my second year of teaching, at the ripe old age of 23, I was one of the most veteran members of the school staff. The Whitney Houston lyrics that had driven me from my bed each morning, vowing to "teach them well and let them lead the way" (Masser & Creed, 1977) had faded into the background as the daily grind of teaching in an underserved public school infiltrated my psyche. I knew then that it was time for a change. I realized that in order to remain in education, I had to find a way to collaborate closely with like-minded individuals, working with a team to effect change in the lives of children deeply impacted by circumstances outside of their control: their race, their zip code, the trauma they had encountered, and the varying abilities or disabilities that were a condition of their birth or environment. I transitioned from classroom teaching to special education so that I could serve on a transdisciplinary team to meet the holistic needs of students with tremendous needs. I found a position at Sequoia Family of Services, a large California-based nonprofit that operated a series of nonpublic schools. Nonpublic schools, or NPSs, are publicly-funded institutions on contract with local districts to provide day treatment services to youth with significant mental health disabilities that make it difficult to serve them on a comprehensive public-school campus.

On my first day as a special education teacher at one of Sequoia's nonpublic schools south of Oakland, California, I saw countless pillars of effective educational practices that had been all but missing in my previous experience. I saw a bright, well-appointed building that communicated pride and caring to those who walked its halls. I saw adults working together to

provide a predictable, consistent and coherent routine for children. I saw those same adults

taking responsibility for providing the supports each child needed in order to find success. And I

saw the overwhelming power of positive student-teacher relationships built on respect, curiosity,

and trust. As I drove home, humming Whitney wholeheartedly again for the first time in years, I

vowed that I would learn as much as I could in this unique setting, and then take another leap

into the public-school pool, taking with me the elements for success I was already beginning to

internalize. That day was almost fifteen years ago.

Introduction: Zeroing in on a Focus of Practice

Before students are referred to a school like the one described above, they must first fail

repeatedly within earlier educational settings, including publicly in front of their classmates.

They must participate in (or endure) a myriad of early intervention efforts and the ensuing

special education referral and evaluation process, only then to be placed in increasingly

restrictive special education settings. Indeed, the average student at one of Sequoia's nonpublic

schools (NPSs) has been served in no less than nine distinct educational settings prior to their

enrollment at the NPS (Retrieved from internal demographic data).

Yet, the earliest forms of such widely acceptable sorting and segregation practices within

public schools are not through special education. Instead, they are through our discipline

practices, which quite effectively teach even the youngest children that they can be classified as

good or bad and that this classification system is at least partially based on immutable

characteristics, such as their race, sex, or zip code (Collier, 2014). If we cannot successfully

disrupt this cycle for those students most vulnerable to this crude classification system, far too

many will continue to be sorted into increasingly restrictive settings, including restrictive special

education placements, prisons or institutions. To move the dial on their behalf, we are wise to

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consider their earliest experiences with school authority figures, particularly in the primary grades (Hernandez, 2012).

Not unlike one of Sequoia's therapeutic nonpublic schools, the public Rise Academy in Tacoma, Washington announced its pride to its community with its vibrant colors, energetic staff members and active partnerships with families and other student supporters. Also like Sequoia's NPSs, Rise committed powerfully to interrupting the cycle of revolving school doors that meets too many struggling children in this country. This happens regularly despite the fact that of all the children served in our schools, they are likely among those who most need connection and belonging, only to instead be displaced from their schools, homes and communities of origin.

As a public school, Rise supported children and families who had been identified for special education services (approximately 17% of the total school population), those not yet identified, and those without disabilities. Committed to its identity as a school with diverse learners, Rise embraced Sequoia's holistic student support model, a promising practice intent on creating an inclusive experience steeped in trauma sensitivity and enriched through community partnerships. To signal the shift away from "business as usual" schooling, Rise began the school year with a bold commitment: the school would neither suspend nor expel any student, regardless of the intensity of their behavior. It would instead take on the challenge of working alongside them through even their most difficult moments.

Building excitement among the school's young and mission-aligned team to accept this challenge was the easy part. While a young urban school challenged by a myriad of complex issues, the school enjoyed close relationships among staff, who all eagerly wanted to work at a school where an alternative path was possible for students who might otherwise seem predestined toward failure. Between enthusiasm and success, a clear implementation gap

appeared, presenting the opportunity for this focus of practice. The school had identified a noble goal, backed by research and powered by a hunger for social justice. Yet, it had not identified with clarity the strategies that would enable this change to take root, nor done the work to engage parents as partners in this change effort.

This action research project provided a platform to envision a new path toward implementation and improvement, one that relied on authentic, 360º feedback, and participation from diverse constituents, including school staff, families, and students in grades three or above. And, while focusing inward to do so, this project simultaneously faced externally too, focusing on an organizational leader's actionable space in understanding and remedying systems-level challenges that stand in the way of providing approaches that work for youth in need.

Evidence of Assets and Challenges

At this outset of this research project, most of the evidence in support of this focus of practice came through direct feedback from constituents at Rise Academy. Much of the feedback was anecdotal but nonetheless provided a diagnostic look at Rise's assets and challenges, as explored further in Chapter 3. For instance, the Rise leadership team, which I facilitated for the duration of this project, had encouraged parents to create a for-parents, by-parents Facebook page, which was neither monitored nor censored by school staff. Yet, reports had come to us as leaders regarding several parents' Facebook posts sharing dissatisfaction with the current culture and climate at Rise, and specifically its hard line against suspension and expulsion, which parents had reported in conversations could lead to a culture that seems too "permissive," "unsafe," or "disorderly." These observations were matched by teacher and staff reports, as well as by more formal walkthroughs done by the school's leadership team, in which I include myself.

In addition, Rise Academy's partnership with Sequoia Family of Services – a designation more fully explored in Chapter 3 – translated into comprehensive semiannual culture and climate assessments commencing in the fall of 2016. These instruments, further outlined in a discussion of methodology in Chapter 4, provided a wealth of information regarding existing assets and needs that would prove helpful in structuring an approach toward school transformation at Rise.

Even beyond Rise's walls, there was no longer debate over evidence that early exposure to trauma has deleterious effects on child development and adult outcomes alike (Anda, Felitti, Bremner, Walker, Whitfield, Perry, Dube, & Giles, 2006; Ford, 2009). There was equally little doubt that comprehensive approaches for addressing childhood trauma can be effective (Bruns, Walrath, Siegel, & Weist, 2004; Ford, 2009; Masten, 2003; Sprinson & Berrick, 2010; Walter, Gouze, Cicchetti, Arend, Mehta, Schmidt, & Skvarla, 2011; Weist, Sander, Axelrod Lowie, & Christodolu, 2002), or that locating these efforts within schools is expedient (Armbruster & Lichtman, 1999; Blodget & Lanigan, 2015; Dorado, 2016; Durlak, 1997; Ford, 2009; Masten, 2003). When speaking of childhood trauma throughout this dissertation, I am referring to the experience of emotionally painful or distressful events or circumstances that may result in lasting mental and physical effects. Childhood trauma can occur when a child witnesses or endures overwhelming negative experiences in childhood. This can happen interpersonally through relationships e.g. abuse, neglect, violence. Likewise, children can also experience traumatic circumstances or events, such as undergoing medical procedures, living through a war or civil unrest, or separation from a family member. A fuller review of research follows in Chapter 2 and supported my selection of this focus of practice.

To map these emerging assets and needs, I used the fishbone tool espoused by Bryk, Bender Sebring, Allensworth, Luppesescu, Easton, 2010) to conduct a needs analysis. Mintrop

(2016) improved upon this model by adding assets to the tool, and I translated what I had read about systems theory, and specifically the need to consider the micro (school), meso (organizational), and macro (broader context) ecologies influencing life within any system or organization, into this adapted fishbone. Identified factors are documented in Figure 1, the fishbone diagram, on the following page. In looking at the reasons that often result in disproportionate and/or ineffective disciplinary practices, the fishbone considered macro, meso, and micro assets and challenges in hopes of identifying available levers for installing meaningful change at Rise.

Improvement Goal

After examining these assets and challenges, I identified a lofty goal for this inquiry: to maintain the school's commitment to eliminating exclusionary discipline practices while ensuring a healthy school culture and climate were upheld. I knew doing so would require building the internal systems, supports, and collective investment needed to manage change successfully, including through meaningful family partnership. As a systems-level leader for Rise Academy, my role by design was rarely through direct action, revealing another layer to the research by seeking to understand my optimal actionable space as a leader. As such, my initial plans for the action research encompassed three overarching strategies:

1. To successfully empower a culture and climate committee (the C3) as co-researchers in this project. The C3 is composed of teachers, leaders, transdisciplinary experts (mental health therapists, non-instructional staff, etc.), and family representatives. Together and with my support, they would co-construct the path forward for the school's culture.

MACRO	MESO	MICRO

MACRO

ASSETS:
Renewed attention on school bullying following US election outcomes

Medicaid Mental Health parity

USDOE: *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*

2012 Washington Appleseed and Team Child report

NEEDS:
History of [rightful] mistrust with formal education systems

The School-to-Prison Pipeline/Police Brutality/Disproportionate Rates

Implicit Bias…. Generational cycles of disenfranchisement and abuse

School funding inequities/lack of accountability for other systems of care (child welfare, MH, juvenile justice, etc.)

MESO

ASSETS:
Strong relationships with other schools in the sector

Sequoia infrastructure and transdisciplinary expertise

Mission-aligned Board and authorizer relationships

Aligned with other local and state initiatives

NEEDS:
Repair from previous year principal/team

The Washington State charter landscape

Pressure for "order"

WA State school funding inequities and all out lack of MH funding

Intention vs Impact: An implementation gap in action

MICRO

ASSETS:
Bold, young, dedicated staff

Diversity of student body

High levels of engagement from many families

Current year investment in resources (through Sequoia allocable)

NEEDS:
Disproportionate #s of trauma

Limitations of current facility

Lack of institutional history

Limited communication strategies/leadership sharing strategies employed by school to date

Cultural mismatch b/w staff: families

Disproportionate and/or ineffective discipline practices

Misalignment between parents and staff

Figure 1. Fishbone diagram.

2. Simultaneously, through clinical supervision, coaching and co-research, to support the school's principal in shaping and ultimately leading this change effort. Even prior to this research, I was spending time weekly engaged in collaboration with Jennifer, collecting data regarding our interactions and during co-observations of the school. My goal was to gradually release more responsibility to the principal, who I hoped to promote to Executive Director as my own position hopefully shifted at the end of the school year.

3. To collect and analyze, as a community, data related to behavior, culture and climate metrics, social-emotional needs, and family satisfaction. These regular data reviews were built into the C3 structure and supported the team in determining short cycles of intervention with frequent opportunities for reflection in response to newly available data.

As the fishbone's asset map revealed, several enabling factors supported the successful conceptualization of this project. The fact that the school enjoyed high levels of alignment among staff when culture and climate efforts were discussed was among the strongest. Rise's staff members were recruited, hired, and on-boarded with a clear orientation toward the school's trauma-sensitive mission, including its commitment to continuing to welcome young people into their school daily, regardless of the intensity of their behavioral challenges. Families, meanwhile, were not necessarily oriented toward the same goal and many expressed, either verbally or by pulling their children out of the school, that their primary focus was the safety of children and the orderly nature of the school as a whole, goals which seemingly threatened our commitment to eliminate suspension and expulsion. Secondary barriers that needed to be addressed are further described in Figure 2, the Driver Diagram. The diagram portrays the relationship between the

PROBLEMS:
- Lack of effective alternatives to exclusionary discipline
- Misalignment between staff and families re: school culture priorities
- Multiple students challenged with unsafe and/or disruptive behaviors

Empowerment of School Team, Co-Researchers, and Principal

Reflection and Action by Co-Researchers (including self)

Short Cycles of Intervention Punctured by Data Analysis

GOAL: A healthy and functional school culture and climate: one that is free of exclusionary discipline practices, that aligns with larger community values (esp. those of families), and that is capable of serving as a demonstration site for the wider education community

Figure 2. Driver diagram.

problems on the ground at the onset of this project and the goal for their successful resolution by its end, with the action steps aimed at getting from problem to goal state located in between. In pursuit of this goal, I intended to work in concert with those most deeply involved in the school's cultural transformation efforts. To do so, I relied on existing structures and relationships, primarily the new C3, and my supervisory relationship with the school's principal. The school's culture and climate efforts benefited from existing data cycles, such as the semiannual administration of the School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) and its related assessments, and the more regular intervals of data reviewed by the school's Coordination of Services Team (COST), which tracked the efficacy of tiered interventions and examined available data from both academic and social-emotional universal screeners and office discipline referrals. These short cycles of data review and subsequent actions aligned with existing research on educational transformation and change theory (hunter & Martin, 2013; Schmoker, 2004). By attending to episodic moments indicative of wider change, or 'sightings,' I hoped these short cycles would lead to deep, sustaining change (MacDonald, 1996).

Frameworks that Influenced the Theory of Action

The development of my personal research identity as a leader for equity was a cornerstone of this work. I had spent the past dozen years focused on providing access to high quality educational options for students historically marginalized from precisely such opportunities, first at Sequoia's nonpublic schools and then hard at work on a holistic, early intervention model designed precisely to dismantle such schools (spoiler alert!). More specifically, my work had centered around supporting young people facing complex barriers to success, resulting from their personal trauma histories, mental health needs, and/or disabilities. From the equity framework that supported my thinking and work, I had come to believe that the

single most important test of a society's public schools was their ability to meet the needs of the most disenfranchised among its members.

While many factors may stand in the way of young people's ability to succeed in our public schools, discipline issues are among the most significant, with research showing that a single suspension cuts a young person's likelihood of attaining a rigorous post-secondary degree by more than half (The Education Trust -West, 2015). Moreover, evidence has shown a reliable pattern of disproportionate discipline – the so-called "Discipline Gap" – which holds that students of colors, primarily Black boys, are disciplined at a pace that far exceeds that of their counterparts (The Education Trust - West, 2015). It does not take a sophisticated research methodology to draw the line between this sobering gap and another – the fact that one in three Black men will spend time in jail in today's America (Adams, Robelen, & Shah, 2012; The Education Trust - West, 2015).

Sadly, it did not take all of those dozen of years to translate these statistics into the very real names and faces of my students and of their families. In designing this project, I could not look away from this injustice. It stood in opposition to the work I had dedicated myself to doing, the person I was committed to becoming and the society I was inspired to fight for. It contributed to larger societal problems, including resource-strapped public systems, generational cycles of poverty, violence and abuse, and the school-to-prison pipeline far too many of our nation's young people find themselves navigating. The following graphic, Figure 3, further evidenced the influence various frames had on the conceptualization of my focus of practice. Three key frameworks contributed to my thinking most significantly: the psychological, economic, and socio-cultural. The psychological framework helped orient me toward effective practices of adult engagement, and specifically to isolate strategies to facilitate learning during a change effort.

Psychological: Much of the work involved in ensuring the success of this project is rooted in the ability to bring individuals and groups together in an examination of deeply held, often unconcious beliefs and patterns of engagement.

Economic: Our current system privileges costly, intensive interventions over cost-effective prevention or early intervention efforts. My FoP attempts to place resources at the most opportune point for intervention: *before* the crisis.

Socio-Cultural: This FoP attends to the ecological realm by inviting diverse school constituents to participate as full members. At the same time, the project is explicit and unapologetic about its focus on increasing access for historically disenfranchised subgroups.

FoP

Figure 3. Frameworks contributing to my FoP.

Since change is psychologically difficult, the need for high levels of attunement to the needs of participants and a constant focus to the attitudinal and affective realms were deemed paramount to the project's success. The second framework, economic, helped support the goals of this project by shifting systems towards prevention and early intervention, which while cost effective in the long run, would require an investment – ideally by multiple systems including education, mental health and child welfare – that would need to be accounted for in the design of the project. This so-called investment model asks public systems to think long-range, recognizing that cost savings as a whole are often realized only by looking at the wider societal impact of improving long-term outcomes for youth, which include higher income levels, increased health, and reduced reliance on costly interventions, including specialized educational settings, institutions, hospitals and prisons (Collier, 2014). Lastly, the socio-cultural frame attended to the contextual, ecological needs of Rise Academy as its own microcosm, in which constituents needed to be provided with voice and agency, signaling the need for action on my and my co-researchers' parts to examine places where lack of access or inequity silenced members of the community. Although discussed more completely in the literature review in Chapter 2, an overview here suggests how they in turn influenced the theory of action for this research project.

Theory of Action (ToA)

It was my belief that *if I provided meaningful structures* for collective learning among co-researcher participants, with special attention to the principal and family representatives, embedded in real-time data about the school's current culture and climate health, *then it would be possible to continue the school's goal of eliminating the use of exclusionary discipline practices while simultaneously maintaining an organized and orderly learning environment*. In

the more immediate term, this improvement in the school's culture and climate would be measured through hopeful increases on the school's existing, semiannual SCAI assessment.

Significance of the FoP

Significance for Practice

"Trauma-informed education" has become a popular new notion within the educational community. However, there are still far too few examples of its successful implementation. Even less available are studies of these approaches' efforts to reduce the reliance on exclusionary discipline. Even more complex, reducing the number of exclusionary incidents can be as easy as mandating they stop; the real "meat" in this research project was the examination of how to do so with the backing and support of the community at large and without creating a permissive or unsafe school culture – or perhaps even more dangerously, one of low expectations. I was inspired to demonstrate that structured opportunities for shared learning, coupled with rigorous reviews of available data, could help build a school's capacity to serve all students well, regardless of the intensity of their presenting needs. I hoped that doing so would create a model for other schools undertaking similar work and carried the potential to help inform larger-scale change within districts, charter management organizations and other child serving systems.

Significance for Policy

In the document *Guiding Principles: A Resource Guide for Improving School Climate and Discipline*, the U.S. Department of Education reflects, "attempting to maintain order by unnecessarily relying on suspensions…may undermine a school's ability to help students improve behavior, fail to improve the safety or productivity of the school's learning environment, and seriously and negatively impact individual and school-wide academic outcomes" (ED, 2014, p. 14). Yet, supporting trauma-informed school models where behavioral

norms and expectations are maintained without the reliance on exclusionary practices requires a fundamental reshaping of how schools do business. Doing this work at scale will necessitate large, cross-system collaboration, so that child-serving agencies such as social welfare, juvenile justice and the public health system work in tandem with public schools to meet the varied needs of children, particularly those most impacted by poverty, institutional racism, personal or community trauma, and disabilities. This study was designed to help illustrate, albeit at an exceptionally small scale, what might be possible when resources were shaped by student need and not public silo. Similarly, I hoped to illustrate the importance of prioritizing prevention and early intervention efforts as critical components, realizing a move away from more intensive "fail first" interventions such as restrictive special education, suspension and expulsion.

In terms of contributions to research, restorative justice, as a lever for reducing exclusionary school discipline, had created a powerful name for itself, yet there remained a need for additional research into its efficacy. Similarly, much of the research in this field has focused on populations of older students, whereas this project sought to disrupt discipline patterns at their earliest school-based appearance: in Kindergarten and the primary grades.

Research Questions and Design Overview

The main question I attempted to address in this this study was: *"How can administrators, parents and teachers work together to create and implement a healthy and equitable school culture?"*

In addition, the following sub questions were examined:

1. How do family and staff views of school culture and climate change as they work together toward a common goal?

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2. To what extent does overall family and staff alignment with the school's mission and vision change as the school culture and climate do?

3. What can the positioning of staff and families as co-researchers reveal about their own practices, as well as their views and attitudes during the change process?

4. In what ways does engagement in this work inform my identity as a leader for equity?

Although for the duration of this project I formally served as the Executive Director of Rise Academy, responsible to its Board of Directors and in charge of supervising and coaching its principal, for this project, I intended to play a primarily facilitative role, working alongside the team at Rise to enact changes in their school culture and climate. In this role, one of my earliest priorities was to help enact the school's inaugural C3, composed of representative school leaders, teachers, non-instructional staff, and families. This group met monthly, with what I envisioned would at first be a strong lead from me until a gradual release of responsibility could help settle most of the leadership of the group's work onto its members, key among them the school principal.

Simultaneously, I designed my research to allow me to spend additional time with the principal through our weekly clinical supervision meetings. Through this process, I aimed to transfer additional responsibility to her in order to sustain the level of work needed over multiple years to achieve the school's goals. Since stepping into the Executive Director role at Rise in July of 2016 to help provide leadership at a critical juncture of the school's history (as explored further in Chapter 3), I had been planning for my exit from this role. Having recently onboarded a new principal at the onset of this project, I was hoping to prepare her to become the school's next Executive Director, so that I may return my focus to my myriad of other responsibilities.

Spending additional time investing in deep co-research with the principal would, I hoped, facilitate a smooth transition and protect the work in years to come.

The full methodology for this project is described in Chapter 4. To support the data-driven action inquiry cycles on which this project relied, I planned to support the administration of existing semi-annual school culture and climate assessments, including the SCAI, as well as host opportunities to debrief these results with the C3, both through the creation and execution of an annual implementation plan and through more regular reviews of other school-wide, class-wide and student-level data, such as office discipline referral data, progress measures, the results of various universal screeners, the efficacy of tiered interventions and more.

Perhaps most importantly, a great deal of the work that constituted the backbone of this project was focused on cultivating my own voice and the voices of others within the school community as experts and witnesses to this change. Through rigorous, frequent, and equitable engagement processes, I intended to gather input at regular intervals and engage co-practitioner researcher participants and the team in a whole in documenting evidence, and engaging in reflective practices.

Summary

The term "Discipline Gap" may be fairly new. Sadly, the phenomenon it describes is anything but. Across the nation, youth of color and those living in poverty – chief among them Black boys – are disciplined at alarming rates. Like the students I met at Sequoia, with whom our chapter began, many find themselves referred to continuously restrictive settings in response to their behavioral challenges – and they are the lucky ones. Far too many other children do not receive additional support and many are pushed out of public education altogether. The crisis is clear. The steps to resolve it are less so. Simply eliminating oft-used strategies, including

exclusionary discipline practices such as suspension and expulsion, is insufficient. In my own history, it also results in schools that have seemingly, "thrown the baby out with the bath water," removing one intervention without replacing it with another, equally or more successful alternative.

As the following chapters demonstrate, the process to significantly alter current discipline processes is a complex one involving multiple constituents. Of note, family voice was essential to this study and in the field more generally, particularly in light of ongoing national concerns regarding safety in schools. In the following chapter, I examine existing literature in the field both in the areas of critical content, such as trauma-informed education and mental health integration patterns, and essential leadership moves, such as facilitating adult learning and leading for change.

CHAPTER 2: PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE BASE FOR FOCUS OF PRACTICE

Prelude

After the first day I spent at Sequoia, I left convinced I would one day take the model I saw working for students there back into the public schools of the San Francisco Bay Area. On the second day, I met Troy. Troy was a fifth grader at the school, and a resident at one of Sequoia's residential homes, a beautiful home in the hills of Oakland which, nonetheless, was a tragic place for any child to grow up. Troy had been removed from his family's care repeatedly in his early life. Parental rights were permanently terminated at age 4 when he suffered second and third degree burns on the lower part of his body after being slowly submerged in boiling water. Until the age of seven, Troy had been placed in various foster homes, yet had been removed from each when the usually-well-intentioned family realized that his needs were too great for their homes. In those early years, Troy would seethe, scream, hit, kick, and bite. He slept little, angered easily, and became what his court-appointed social worker referred to as "a Seven-Day King," meaning he was an expert at quickly alienating would-be families so they would issue the state child welfare agency a seven-day notice to remove him and find a new placement.

By age seven, Troy graduated from being kicked out of foster homes to be placed, and subsequently removed, from a number of community group homes, where his behaviors again made him a child whose needs were "too much" for others to care for him. His last placement before finding his way to Sequoia was at a psychiatric hospital, where he spent over two months at the age of eight after attempting to steer a car one of his social workers was driving off the road, landing in a ditch.

By the time I met Troy, he had spent two years at Sequoia's residential home, longer than he had ever stayed anywhere. The child I met was not the child described in the paperwork. Troy was an exceptional student, an eager and enthusiastic learner who held information better than most adults. What's more, he was a model for school and home appropriate behavior, frequently called on as a leader within the community.

There is no doubt that Troy benefited from Sequoia's approach. Day and night, he was surrounded by predictable adults, who worked together to design and implement consistent plans with him. These adults were well-trained in principles of trauma and, unbeknownst to him perhaps, spent time together each week reflecting on the care they were providing, refining their practice, and recommitting to a plan. Troy received individualized mental health treatment at Sequoia, provided by an expert therapist who interacted with him for much more than their 50-minute weekly session. She shared dinner with the boys living in his home at least once per week, ran group therapy within his classroom and a restorative circle in the home, and supervised the direct care staff who spent most of their time with Troy, coaching them on his personalized plan, providing psychoeducation into his needs, and processing the difficult emotions that arise when caring for highly traumatized children. This integrated, trauma-informed, team-based approach was hugely successful for Troy. But it was not the game changer. The interventions used at Sequoia worked for Troy, and they work for children like him to this day. Yet, the single most important factor in his success was far simpler. On his first day at Sequoia, Troy received a rare promise: that no matter what he did, the team at Sequoia would not push him away. He could – and did! – test the bounds of staff's patience and the limits of their skills. He could – and did! – engage in every maladaptive behavior he had perfected over his relatively short lifespan. Yet, the one thing he could not do was implore us to reject him. Soon enough, he learned something

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remarkable. He did not need to test any longer, because the answers were always the same. Troy was one of ours now; he belonged. He was a wanted and cared for child, and that – more than any theory or practice – changed the course of his young life.

Introduction

Troy may be an extreme example, but across the nation, twenty percent of school-aged children live with diagnosable mental health disorders. Only a fraction of them receive sufficient intervention (Merikangas, Brody, Bourdon, & Koretz, 2010; Powers, Clarke, Mazzuca, & Krain, 2005). In contrast, student suspension and expulsion rates continue to tick up, and disproportionately so for students of color or those coming from low-income backgrounds. For this subset of students, the impact is even greater (Orfield, Kucsera, & Siegal-Hawly, 2012).

Children raised in poverty experience greater exposure to risk factors. They are more likely to live in communities affected by compounding and intersecting challenges such as community and domestic violence, lack of resources, police brutality, multi-generational incarceration, high unemployment, and instability due to homelessness and/or immigration status (American Psychological Association, 2008; Stevens, 2013). Childhood exposure to traumatic events or situations, most commonly referred to as "Adverse Childhood Experiences" (ACEs), is directly connected to diminished outcomes at school (Blodgett & Harrington, 2012). Students with significant trauma histories often fall behind in schools that fail to meet their specialized needs, while finding themselves disproportionately subjected to exclusionary practices (Detterman, Ventura, & Rosenthal, 2019). Poor students of color have the most to gain when inclusive and restorative school communities are designed. Without these, a substantial body of research has reliably indicated that students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience higher rates of suspensions, expulsions, and office disciplinary referrals,

and that they are more likely to be referred to special education and the criminal justice system as a result (Simmons-Reed & Cartledge, 2014).

I turned to literature for help understanding this landscape in hopes of answering my primary research question: *How can administrators, parents and teachers work together to create and implement a healthy and equitable school culture?* In order to carve a successful path forward, I needed both technical answers and adaptive strategies (Heifetz, 1994). I identified the need for content knowledge in two specific domains of equity and inclusion, seeking out information on best practices in trauma-informed education and mental health integration. Yet, no amount of technical expertise in these areas alone would suffice; sustainable change at Rise Academy had to come from within its community (Dewey, 1938; Freire, 1970). To do this, I needed not only to hone my expertise, but to study leadership practices for effectively leading adult learners through the change process.

These four research queries are conceptualized graphically in Figure 4 and examined in further detail in the remainder of this chapter. They also represent something else. They were the essential components I had come to recognize from Sequoia's own nonpublic schools, the same components I saw work for students like Troy. At Sequoia, a common grounding in trauma-informed, mental health integrated practices met the dedication of a team that would come together to reflect on action and act based upon their reflection. It was this synthesis between practices geared toward equity and inclusion and finely-crafted leadership moves that generated meaningful exchanges among staff and positive outcomes for kids like Troy.

Trauma-Informed Education

Much of the fanfare around understanding and addressing the impact of trauma can be traced to one of the most prominent studies on trauma in childhood done to date, the Adverse

Figure 4. Main literature themes.

Childhood Experiences (ACE) study conducted by the Department of Preventative Medicine and the Centers for Disease Control (Felitti et al., 1998). This fourteen-year study included over 17,000 adult members of Kaiser Permanente, a Healthcare Management Organization. The volunteer participants completed a medical questionnaire about ten types of trauma or adverse childhood experiences: physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, exposure to mental illness, violence toward a mother, criminal behavior and exposure to substance abuse, and physical and emotional neglect (Detterman et al., 2019). The study uncovered an undeniable link between ACEs, physical or mental illness, and premature mortality. In addition to diminished physical and mental health outcomes later in life, early exposure to trauma was found to have significant impacts on childhood and adolescence. For children who experience high levels of exposure to adverse experiences, these incidents "expectedly produce anxiety, anger, and depression" (Felitti et al., 1998, p. 253). The ACEs study confirmed the need to provide spaces for healing and nurturing for children still undergoing or who have had recent exposure to trauma.

Before looking at the effects of trauma in children in more detail, we must lay an important stake in the ground. In this country, the intersectionality between institutional racism and intergenerational trauma is palpable. As such, no discussion of childhood trauma can be called comprehensive without noting its preponderance among children of color, who face the additional burden of enduring community trauma due to the historical conditions resulting from what Mills (1997) dubs the racial contract: "the tacit and sometimes explicit agreement among members of the tribes of Europe to assert, promote, and maintain the ideal of white supremacy as against all other tribes of the world" (p. 122). In unpacking the impact of trauma and the role of educators in confronting it, it is thus impossible to ignore the racial trauma inherent in today's society, both as a condition of its history and as a response to ongoing assaults on the personhood

of people of color within White-dominant, American society (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Comas-Díaz, 2016; DeGruy, 2005).

In other words, not only are students of color more likely to experience trauma due to the interrelation between racism and poverty, racism itself is a traumatizing force in their lives. Multiple studies have shown the continued impact of historical trauma on Native American groups (Brave Heart, 2003; Brave Heart, 2004; Duran, Duran, Brave Heart, & Yellow Horse-Davis, 1998). Studies have also focused on the impact of police brutality and other forms of violent institutional racism on African-American youth, pointing to the need for their educators to not only understand and respond effectively to other forms of trauma, but remain attuned to racial trauma and their relation to it by acknowledging, connecting and integrating it into the classroom landscape (El Amin, 2016). Further, educators for social justice are charged with doing the continuous self-work required to address their own biases, or otherwise risk re-traumatizing students either through overt racism or through subtler microaggressions or stereotypes (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; EOGOAC, 2017; Steele, 2010).

To benefit from the wisdom collected on trauma-informed practices in the design of my research project, I looked more closely at the impacts of trauma on child development and on proposed community and school responses to these effects. My major learnings are synthesized below.

Impacts of Trauma on Child Development

The ACEs study paved the way for further research on the long-term impact of trauma on a child's physical health and social-emotional well-being. Psychiatrist Gordon R. Hodas (2006) collaborated with the National Technical Assistance Center for Mental Health Planning (NTAC) and the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD) to author

"Responding to Childhood Trauma: The Promise and Practice of Trauma-Informed Care" to increase practitioners' understandings of childhood trauma. This article identifies factors, including type, severity, duration, and chronicity of trauma – in association with the child's age, prior vulnerability, and the response of primary caregivers that help predict why "child maltreatment and traumatic exposure may result in vastly different outcomes" for children with histories of trauma (Hodas, 2006, p. 5). In addition to physical health outcomes later in life, there are several, well-documented physical manifestations of childhood trauma that occur during infancy and the latency years, most significantly in the case of children who are classified with faltering weight (previously known as "failure to thrive"). Yet, for the purposes of this research, I focus not on physical manifestations of early trauma but on the psychological, behavioral and academic repercussions which accompany far too many of our nation's children to school.

Psychological impacts. Understandings of the psychological impacts of trauma largely stem from awareness of attachment theory. The theory, wildly accepted by child development specialists, mental health professionals and psychologists, holds that the way we grow to understand our world – what psychologist John Bowlby (1973) referred to as our "internal working model" – is built upon our earliest experiences with adult caregivers. If, as infants, we learn that when we cry a caring adult predictably comes to assess and address our needs, be they physical or emotional, we develop a belief that, "Adults can help and protect me," a belief that in turn fuels a pattern of situationally appropriate behaviors (Sprinson & Berrick, 2010). If, on the other hand, the affect or response of that adult varies significantly from instance to instance, or perhaps if an adult sometimes does not respond at all, a different set of behaviors is likely to occur, and very young children may begin to exhibit anxiety, emotional dysregulation, or aggression. Instead of learning that the world around them is generally benign, these children

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may form different stories about their surroundings – coming to believe, for example, that "No one can be trusted," or, "I only get attention when I exhibit significant distress." Our beliefs become our actions, and children with early exposure to trauma will act in ways that reinforce their worldviews (Bowlby, 1973). This enacts a wicked cycle; the child behaves in a way that fits with a belief that "no one loves me," for example, which in turn is likely to invite others to confirm that belief, further engraining it in the child's psyche.

By the time children with trauma histories come to school, many have developed well-crafted sets of behaviors (Dorado, 2016). A student with preverbal trauma like Troy, for example, may have spent years acting on the belief that "no one can keep me safe." This presents a sizeable challenge for schools, and also a noteworthy opportunity for intervention. For, children's day-to-day interactions with family, friends, teachers, and other individuals can affirm or disconfirm an individual's internal working model (Sprinson & Berrick, 2010). A teacher who calls out and punishes a student for not being engaged in the work may unknowingly affirm that child's internal belief that people are judgmental, humiliating, and blaming. Untrained in childhood trauma, as are most practitioners, this teacher may not even recognize the tug-of-war s/he has been invited to play. On the other hand, a teacher who has been provided with psychoeducation on the impact of trauma may be better positioned to recognize potential triggers in students. Not only may this teacher effectively avoid a trauma landmine, s/he may actually serve as a positive force for re-programming children's worldviews, helping them on their path to healing (Dorado, 2016).

In the long run, the psychological impacts of trauma affect not only emotional regulation, but also executive functioning and overall cognition (Blodgett & Harrington, 2012). Because of the cyclical nature between our beliefs and our practices, a child who comes to believe that,

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"School isn't for kids like me," or, "If anyone knew how much I really struggled, I'd be ridiculed and rejected," will in time grow to exhibit that belief through a pattern of repeated behavior. Furthermore, the toxic stress that children facing trauma endure changes the very makeup of their brains, altering their motivation centers, decreasing their brain's grey matter, and impacting the wiring of synapses (Dannlowski et al., 2012; Ford, 2009). In other words, not only can a child sitting in class worrying that her mother's life is at danger at home not concentrate because she is distracted, a cognitive burden develops as the neurobiological load of said trauma takes hold on the development of the brain (Anda et al., 2006).

Behavioral impacts. The psychological implications of trauma are expressed clearly through children's behaviors, whether these present as externalizing (aggression, disruption, impulsivity) or internalizing (social withdrawal, somatization, self-harm). Key target behaviors identified by professionals tend to focus on the externalizing and are generally classified as "aggressive," "immature," "disorganized," or "sexualized" (Sprinson & Berrick, 2010). Internalizing behaviors may not neatly fall into these categories, but offer possible signals of trauma exposure nonetheless. For example, some children become withdrawn and isolate themselves after a traumatic event (Hodas, 2006). Depression, self-injury, and suicide ideation are further observed behaviors (Flannery, Singer, & Wester, 2001). Of course, these kinds of behaviors in the classroom setting are strong predictors of academic and/or learning issues. Few schools' honor rolls are made up of students who regularly disrupt the daily activities of the school, or who are too depressed to attend class in the first place.

Academic impacts. After a traumatic event or the continual occurrence of neglect or abuse, the emotional distress and pessimistic possibilities of a child's internal working model do, in fact affect academic performance (NCTSN, 2014; Putnam, 2006). When trauma is complex –

meaning an ongoing series of conditions affecting the development of the young person (the incarceration or illness of a loved one, ongoing domestic violence or abuse, etc.), rather than a single traumatic event (a natural disaster, a freak accident that resulted in an injury, etc.) – the outcomes are even more significant. Children who experience complex trauma are three times more likely to drop out of school than their peers. They have a greater tendency to be misclassified with developmental delays or referred for special education services (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014).

Because children's psychological and behavioral functions are altered by early exposure to trauma, they tend to struggle in school. Furthermore, previous patterns of inappropriate interactions with adults often predict the interactions children will have with their teachers, particularly when little to no training in trauma has been offered to the school community. Although oversimplified, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs can offer a useful frame by which to understand this from a motivational standpoint. Simply, when children are urgently concerned with ensuring their survival and meeting their basic needs, they are less likely to tap into a deep inquiry into the good, the beauty and the truth that education ought to provide (Gardner, 2000).

Motivation aside, cognition dips as emotional regulation does. In other words, children who are experiencing crisis are not learning, they are surviving. Another oversimplification, the fight-or-flight response, helps visualize this phenomenon. Once again, with more resources devoted to survival, the child has fewer remaining for abstraction and construct. Luckily, the past few decades have revealed significantly more lessons about what educators and communities can do in response to these impacts, and today students like Troy and schools like Sequoia's NPSs have demonstrated their ability to rise to the challenge. For more information on community and school responses to trauma, we turn our attention to policy, tools and best practices.

Responses: Policy, Tools, and Best Practices

In 2000, Congress established the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) to raise the standard of response and care for traumatized children, and in 2008, the NCTSN assembled its "Child Trauma Toolkit for Educators" (NCTSN, 2008). This toolkit was designed as a resource for those educators committed to increasing awareness of the impact of trauma on school performance and promoting best practices for children who have endured maltreatment. The toolkit did not parse words when describing the various impacts of trauma, mirroring much of what we have already discussed. Specifically, the toolkit walked educators through the reality of trauma survival, and how a single exposure to a highly stressful event could "cause jumpiness, intrusive thoughts…and moodiness…which can interfere with concentration and memory" (NCTSN, 2008, p. 4). From there, the stakes were even higher. Continuous exposure to traumatic events can "adversely affect attention, memory, and cognition; reduce a child's ability to focus, organize, and process information; interfere with problem solving and /or planning; [and] result in overwhelming feelings of frustration and anxiety" (NCTSN, 2008, p. 4). Many children who are survivors of trauma "act out" in school and engage in actions which, to the untrained eye, may express a disinterest in succeeding academically. Furthermore, trauma inhibitors can increase the number of school absences, decrease GPA, lower reading skills, and increase suspensions, expulsions, and dropouts (NCTSN, 2008, p. 4). Several studies indicate the need for more professional development for educators to identify students with possible trauma histories and how to meet their academic and social-emotional needs (Oehilberg 2006, 2008; Solomon & Siegel, 2003).

From this early body of work, efforts to install trauma-informed practices in schools have only intensified. Today, we know that there are several important investments schools can make

to be responsive to students who may be coming from traumatic backgrounds, including creating safe and predictable learning environments, focusing on teacher-student relationships, and forming cross-sector partnerships with other youth-serving systems and organizations.

Safe and predictable learning environments. Children who have experienced trauma walk into situations expecting to need to be alert. A stressed brain, though, is not one primed for deep and engaged learning (Dorado, 2016). One of the most important things schools and educators can do to address the needs of traumatized children is to create a sense of safety and predictability, so that they learn that they are in a benign environment and their cognitive load can be directed away from efforts at survival and toward learning and self-actualization. Everything from uncluttered classrooms to preferential seating in a room can assist a traumatized child in benefitting from instruction, and Hobfoll and colleagues' (2007) five basic principles can help outline a plan for schools to implement, calling on them to:

1. Promote a sense of safety, which may include establishing clear expectations;

2. Promote calmness, with particular attention to verbal and nonverbal communication cues;

3. Promote a sense of personal and community efficacy;

4. Promote connectedness; and,

5. Instill hope.

Teacher-student relationships. Too many students walk into schools with internal working models, shaped by trauma, that tell them that, "Adults don't care about me/can't be trusted/can't keep me safe/will only take advantage of me and my body." They walk into our classrooms expecting to be rejected, abused, or otherwise dehumanized. Well-being is directly tied to personal relationships (Landsford, Antonucci, Akiyama, & Takashi, 2005), and so

teachers who take time to build positive relationships with students, particularly those who expect it the least, stand the best chance at influencing learning positively. As McEwan (2002) puts it, "Effective teachers appear to be those who are… 'human' in the fullest sense of the word" (p. 30).

As Sprinson and Berrick (2010) contend, for many children who have endured abuse and neglect, inconsistent attachment patterns with early caregivers meant that sometimes they received caring responses from adults while at others they were either pushed away (neglected) or harmed physically, sexually, or emotionally (abused). Student-teacher relationships matter. They matter most during difficult moments, when children may be 'testing' adults (either consciously or not) to provoke a certain response in order to confirm a pre-existing belief, "It's better to hurt than be hurt; adults are inconsistent but given the right opportunity, they will do me harm." Troy's behavior upon entering a new setting was an example of this testing behavior. Given that acting out had previously confirmed his internal working model that, "Adults will ultimately give up on me," Troy would immediately act in as disruptive a way as he could, prodding adults to do just that. His success at Sequoia, then, was largely predicated upon the staff's unwillingness to confirm this belief. Eventually, realizing that he truly could not test his way out of being cared for at Sequoia, Troy began to invest in his relationships there, and in so doing, began to heal.

Cross-sector partnerships. Trauma is not a siloed issue, and neither is its effective treatment (Lawson, 2004). Instead, responding to complex trauma requires a systematic, coordinated effort among youth-serving systems and organizations. No one entity is equipped to meet the interrelated needs resulting from profound stress in the life of a child. As such, places where various efforts are seamlessly interwoven to provide supports for the whole child are best

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equipped at meeting the far-ranging needs of vulnerable youth. Take for example Troy's NPS, where every member of his transdisciplinary team was bound together by a single, organizing structure, or a school such as this study's Rise Academy, where an intentional partnership between the school and Sequoia attempted to ensure a holistic response to complicated trauma. For more on such partnerships, I reviewed available leadership on school-based mental health integration.

School-Based Mental Health Integration

Fundamentally changing the way in which schools function – in this case with respect to service delivery and exclusionary discipline practices – without undermining their cultural health required my co-researcher practitioners and I to fully understand how to integrate new types of expertise into our thinking and work. Given the desire to focus on new strategies to meet the mental health needs of youth without resorting to exclusionary practices, I devoted my research to uncovering practices for successfully integrating best practices in school-based mental health.

Of the over 50 million young people who attend public schools in this country, a growing number qualify for additional funds or services due to their classification as youth with disabilities, low-income youth or English Language Learners, and/or through their involvement in the child welfare or juvenile justice systems. Funding specifically reserved for these groups has been essential in the protection of civil rights and as a means to maximize opportunities for our most vulnerable students.

The availability of these restricted funding sources for traditionally underserved students is vitally important. It is also quite problematic. For example, one major hurdle on the path toward an inclusive approach to special education stems from the desire to protect each funding stream from crossing into the next. Historically, students with disabilities were taught in more

segregated settings, and as a result, "Special education became an increasingly separate institution, with its own practices, regulations, certifications, and staff" (Connor & Ferri, 2007, p. 63). A similar set of silos exists between and among the schools and mental health providers, who often find it difficult to recognize their shared goals. Too often, "administrators and staff see their mission of education as completely separate from the community agencies' mission of child mental health, and vice versa" (Stiffman, Stelk, Horowitz, Evans, Outlaw, & Atkins, 2010, p. 120). Despite funding issues and the macro context of civil rights legislation that has both helped and hindered integrated service delivery, there are paths to integrated services that both include mental health services and support inclusion. The next section discusses these approaches, the challenges in installing them successfully, and the types of collaboration needed to sustain them.

Integrating and Aligning Multiple Systems for Student Support

Our most vulnerable students and families often have multiple needs and require support from multiple systems, necessitating cross-sector resources and expertise, not rigid silos governed by restricted funding guidelines. The needs of a child with a disability, for example, are often addressed through the combined efforts of general and special educators at the public school, the county's mental health or vocational rehabilitation programs, medical insurance or Medicaid, and other public benefits. The support available from these multiple systems is usually highly siloed by the nature of each funding mechanism. This division among services and service providers inhibits coherence and forces an unnatural division of priorities and services, at the expense of a holistic whole child approach.

More troubling still, since each silo has its own accountability system, there is often a diffusion of responsibilities, whereby no one actor assumes ownership of the overall wellness or

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success of a child. Borrowing an example from Wiggins and McTighe (2007), Detterman et al.

liken it to a poorly organized design challenge:

> "it is as though a group of individual architects were commissioned, each to build a different room in a house. Yet, with no project manager, no blueprint for the finished project, and no centralized accountability structure, the house could end up with three kitchens and no bathrooms, to say nothing of systems that most homeowners would agree should ideally cross rooms, such as plumbing or ventilation" (p. 42).

As Detterman et al. (2019) further discuss, another consequence of dividing related

priorities into silos is the competition this fuels for resources or control.

> "We see this in school buildings when conversations center on whether something is 'special ed's problem' or 'admin's responsibility.' We see it in the 'us versus them' talk at many district offices, where political lines are drawn and redrawn around new initiatives and additional funding requests. And, most significantly, we see it in the disproportionately low outcomes for historically underperforming subgroups of students, who are often caught in these cycles of competition among adults, rather than experiencing them as coordinated members in a 'coalition of child-serving champions' (Lawson, 2004, p. 225)." (Detterman et al., 2019, pp. 42-43)

Recommendations: Possibilities and Issues

Attempts to provide mental health services at school have often been piecemeal and

uncoordinated, leading to a system full of inefficiencies and producing limited results (Masten,

2003). However, some recommendations regarding co-location of services and changing pull-out

services to push-in supports may provide guidance for those trying to integrate services. A group

of specialists brought together to examine these issues more closely released a *Final Report for*

the President's New Freedom Commission on Mental Health, published in 2003, in hopes of

providing a series of recommendations for the integration of mental health within schools. These

recommendations set forth an inspiring vision:

> We envision a future when everyone with a mental illness will recover, a future when mental illnesses can be prevented or cured, a future when mental illnesses are detected early, and a future when everyone with a mental illness at any stage of life has access to effective treatment and supports — essentials for living, working, learning, and participating fully in the community. (Hogan, 2003, retrieved online).

The recommendations included normative statements about the need for improved access and accountability to mental health services, including early mental health screening, assessment and referral to service. For children and youth, the Commission urged the improvement and expansion of school-based mental health programs. Since this time, some progress has been made in co-locating mental health services on school campuses so that multi-stressed youth and families need not travel to community-based clinics for treatment. The general community schools' efforts with school-based health services have aided these efforts of co-location. While a laudable first step, there is also an increasing awareness of the limitations of simple co-location of services, including the fact that most clinicians rely on an outpatient model, where only a handful of students, most often those whose services are required by their Individualized Education Program (IEP), receive intensive, individual therapy. Even for those students, however, these services too often look like a 50-minute individual session once a week, rather than a service that is formally integrated with their daily, educational program (Weist, Ambrose, & Lewis, 2006).

The "pull-out" model of mental health intervention is ineffective. It rests on the faulty assumption that children's mental health needs can be remedied in isolation of their day-to-day experiences when, in fact, "[n]o single discipline or individual has all the tools to understand or alter the course of development that arises from complex interactions among systems at multiple levels" (Masten, 2003, p. 172). Instead, Masten (2003) argues that "[d]ynamic multisystem models of human learning, development, and psychopathology [can transform] sciences, practices, and policies concerned with the health, success, and well-being of children and the adult citizens of society they will become" (p. 173). Of particular note, Masten's research found that schools should be thought of as central to innovative programs and interventions, given they

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play host to many of the interactions that influence the course of child development. This conclusion is echoed by others who have demonstrated time and again that schools are well-positioned to serve as service hubs capable of helping youth heal from the effects of trauma and thrive (Armbruster & Lichtman, 1999; Blodget & Lanigan, 2015; Dorado, 2016; Durlak, 1997; Ford, 2009).

Complications with cross-sector integration. Yet, despite agreement in the field regarding the importance of collaboration and integration, this is harder in practice than theory. To put it more bluntly, Bryson et al. (2006) caution us: "To say that cross-sector collaborations are complex entities that defy easy generalization is an understatement" (p. 52). Of particular challenge, the authors note, are collaborations that are borne from anything other than a desire for more integration or coherence, which, of course, is true of almost all collaborations, including:

- *Fail First Collaboration* in which players only collaborate because everything else has failed;
- *Forced Collaboration* such as that required by government or as part of terms of grants;
- *Forced Isolated Impact* which describes situations in which players are forced to work in isolation due to rigid funding or reporting mechanisms;
- *Competition and Power Struggles* in which players perceive they are pitted against the other, instead of enhanced by joining with a peer;
- *Cultural/Professional Obstacles* which arise when different professional beliefs, stereotypes or mismatched levels of qualification and experience are not thoughtfully accounted for in the design process. These can best be mitigated by practitioners who

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learn to view collaborative work as a learning process replete not only with insights

and innovations but with expected tensions and difficulties as well; and,

- *Commitment Obstacles* where by managers and individuals do not experience

    integration working or see it as a key part of their work due to conflicting priorities or

    other tensions.

Understanding these factors as they inhibit interdisciplinary collaboration in schools is important. Weist et al. (2013) seek to understand the specific collaboration challenges involved in designing school-based mental health approaches, as well as some strategies for overcoming these. The authors identify factors that lead to discipline-specific challenges in creating the sort of integrated mental health efforts capable of changing the ways in which schools address difficult student behaviors. These include:

- *Marginalization of the school mental health agenda* through reduced resources,

    higher academic expectations, and the perception of mental health as an extra service.

    Specific note is also given to the documentation requirements in place on mental

    health staff who, "in the context of decreasing resources…are also pressured to meet

    stringent productivity standards—collaboration is often not reimbursable and as a

    result often limits the prioritization of collaboration with school professionals" (Weist

    et al., 2013, p. 99) as a condition of obtaining Medicaid or insurance-based funding;

- *Limited interdisciplinary teamwork*, which can result in "different professionals,

    representing diverse disciplines [displaying] a sense of territoriality. This may stem

    from different goals for and approaches to the program, varying responsibilities,

    and/or concerns about job security" (Weist et al., 2013, p. 99). Another relevant

dimension is the importance of cross-training so that would-be collaborators share a

common language and base of training on which to build collaborative efforts;

- *Restricted coordination mechanisms* that create inefficiencies and inhibit coherence.

Beyond consequence: Risks and barriers. There are real risks when school-based

mental health services continue to exist in relative isolation of other related staff and services in

the building, reflecting a fragmented, inefficient approach. If mental health providers within a

school are not aware of who else may be working with a student, the same student may continue

to get referred to different providers and may receive crisis-oriented care with no appreciation of

the bigger picture of the student's behavior and social-emotional functioning. Coordinating

mechanisms for mental health services usually exist in schools, such as Individualized

Educational Program (IEP) meetings for students eligible for special education and Student

Support Team (SST) meetings for those exhibiting earlier signs of struggle. These teams,

however, commonly contend with many challenges, including poor support, rotating leadership,

inconsistent scheduling, and limited resources, resulting in perfunctory versus real coordination

of services for students (Masten, 2003). Organizational support for interdisciplinary teams is

critical to the success of any collaboration. Philosophical support from administrators, time, and

resources can affect the ability of professionals to effectively coordinate services. Preexisting

responsibilities and demanding schedules, along with a lack of professionals with the necessary

specializations and appropriate technology, represent just some of the barriers to real

coordination of services" (Masten, 2003, p. 100):

- *Confidentiality concerns are* present when mental health professionals are bound by

    different confidentiality policies; these policies can limit the ability to collaborate as

they are not always allowed to participate in meetings or get access to student records;

- *Resource and funding issues* are multiple and have the potential of negatively influencing collaboration in several ways, including:
    - Limited resources can create tension and competition among providers and directly mitigate real collaboration;
    - Work spaces can be limited and do not always provide the necessary conditions for effective collaboration: "It is not uncommon for a clinician (school-employed or community) to struggle for office space, computer access, telephone and fax use, a secure place for confidential documents, and overall privacy for their clients" (Masten, 2003, p. 100);
    - Therapeutic toys, assessment guides, office supplies, and other materials are often not provided to clinicians because of limited funding;
    - Programs are usually funded by cobbling together resources from various places or they are forced to rely on Medicaid or other insurance-based funding sources, which are difficult to access because of bureaucratic restraints;
    - Limited administrative support for clinicians, leaving them with the responsibility of dealing with fee-for-service reimbursement, etc.

The Weist et al. (2013) study does not leave off with challenges, risks and barriers alone, but begins to consider factors for fostering better mental health integration on school campuses. These factors include:

- *Addressing marginalization* by reframing services as central to the school's mission, rather than peripheral to academic achievement. This can be enabled by "recruiting and hiring the right staff and providing great training" (Masten, 2003, p. 101);

- *Promoting Relationship Development across Interdisciplinary Teams* by investing in "early relationship development across the school workforce" (Masten, 2003, p. 101) through multiple forms including one-to-one meetings, group discussions, join participation at interdisciplinary training events, and more.

- *Building effective teams and coordination mechanisms* who can meet regularly to address challenges that may arise is an important step in helping reduce turf issues that may impede effective collaboration" (Masten, 2003, p. 101). Teams should be heterogenous, including a mix of disciplinary experts and family members or parent advocates and should develop concrete goals;

- *Protecting student and family confidentiality* while acknowledging that, "Most who work in schools have experienced someone using 'confidentiality' as a barrier to collaboration. Instead, efforts to protect student and family confidentiality…should emanate out of genuine and diverse collaborative relationships" (Masten, 2003, p. 102);

- *Promoting policy change and resource enhancements* that allow for braided services and funding to exist, so that youth's needs, rather than bureaucratic convenience, increasingly drive intervention efforts.

When a group of school professionals undertakes some of these recommendations and operates in unison, rather than as isolated players across the school, each individual becomes capable of doing meaningful work within their own area of expertise while ensuring no needs are

left unattended to because of a lack of coordination amongst busy school professionals. Both resource gaps and overlaps are reduced, and youth and family experience less confusion, shorter wait times, and more responsive services (Robinson, Atkinson, & Downing, 2008).

From Policy to Practice

To learn about the application of these principles in practice and understand how I might incorporate policy considerations on this project, I reviewed the Spezza and Borbely (2013) study of cross-sector mental health implementation projects in California. The researchers began by looking at examples in various counties of community-powered efforts to "[i]mprove the health and quality of life for individuals, families, and communities by moving the nation from a focus on sickness and disease to one based on prevention and wellness" (Spezza & Borbely, 2013, p. 3). The first case study came from Placer County, California where a goal of integration was set forth in the 1980s and grew organically, one willing adopter at a time. Today, the program helps sustain the county's "priority shift away from self-preservation and perpetuation, to efficiently serving families in ways families can understand and appreciate" (Spezza & Borbely, 2013, p. 3). Another geographical region studied in their research was Marin County, California where local government began to formally implement cross-sector collaboration in 2008 in order to allow community members access to services at multiple entry points and maximize efficient use of funds during major budget cuts. The Marin County Health and Human Services team co-located various child-serving organizations on existing campuses to facilitate communication and streamline resources. They held coordinated trainings to build common language, conducted skills inventories to understand individual strengths among providers, and shared networks, strategies and resources. Meeting once a month and collaborating on an

ongoing basis, leaders used this information collectively to develop programs, support media campaigns, and write grants and contracts.

In the Marin program, a mantra formed among practitioners: *"It will be inconvenient for us, in order to be convenient for families"* (Spezza & Borbely, 2013, p. 4). Reflecting on the two case studies presenters, the authors optimistically report,

> In recent interviews, representatives from Placer and Marin counties express there is no going back to working in silos that isolate services based on funding and fields of expertise. Cross-sector collaboration is dynamically more effective and efficient. Monies saved and outcomes illuminated create political buy-in, as well as increased funding opportunities" (Spezza & Borbely, 2013, p. 4).

The study further lays out several tools and recommendations for practitioner consideration, including:

- *Methods and tools for success*: Strategic planning, shared goals and agendas, continuous communication, utilization of expertise, shared funding;

- *Obstacles to overcome:* Opposition to change from members, fragmented funding;

- *Recommendations:* Strategic review of current resources, complete a comprehensive cross-check.

Together, these lessons regarding both the challenges and the opportunities inherent in integrating mental health expertise onto public school campuses had direct implications for the success of this study, which aimed to embed mental health expertise into the very fiber of the school, from its overall culture and climate, to the specific interventions offered youth in order to meet their needs within an inclusive milieu. To enable these changes to take root though, we must examine the leadership practices that allow for such sweeping transformational efforts to succeed. For this, we turn our attention to the conditions of adult learning.

<center>**Conditions for Adult Learning**</center>

Within our schools, adult learning affects practitioner practice, which predicts the actions and reactions displayed in classrooms. As such, these practices precede and undergird any collaboration for the benefit of students who are experiencing difficulties in classrooms. The importance of how adults learn and how they come to agree about a set of coherent practices is a nonnegotiable component of shifting schools' cultures to better meet the needs of their students. The first step toward enabling meaningful professional learning is the building and maintaining of relational trust.

Building and Maintaining Relational Trust

A growing body of research states that relational trust among site leadership, teachers, and parents is essential to meaningful school improvement (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010; Bryk, 2015; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Csaperalta, 2015; Grubb, 2009; Grubb & Tredway, 2010). As Bryk and Schneider (2002) explain, "[r]egardless of how much formal power any given role has in a school community, all participants remain dependent on others to achieve desired outcomes and feel empowered by their efforts" (p. 41). Their evidence suggests that a school community which possesses a high level of relational trust is one that fosters the following four relational qualities:

1. *Respect:* respectful exchanges are promoted and people feel their opinions are valued;

2. *Personal Regard:* leaders and staff are willing to extend themselves beyond the formal requirements of their job and "do whatever it takes" to promote the community's success;

3. *Competence:* all members have the skills and supports necessary to carry out their responsibilities to collectively, produce the desired outcomes; and,

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4. *Integrity:* a moral and professional commitment to supporting a whole-child approach to student achievement.

Relational trust promotes several crucial ingredients for sustainable school reform. It supports collective decision-making and broader teacher investment in the success of the school, and bolsters staff confidence to reflect on and experiment with new practices, without shame. Likewise, relational trust affords teams the ability to have difficult conversations about challenges that impede learning and progress, such as racial bias and the impact of trauma on development – conversations that are necessary to shift deeply entrenched systemic issues. Doing so helps create a moral imperative to work together as a team to take on difficult work.

School leaders play a central role in developing and maintaining a culture that prioritizes relational trust within their school community (Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Leverett, 2002). By actively listening to staff and demonstrating an openness to engaging with both successes and vulnerabilities, principals cultivate a sense of respect and personal regard. By pairing their school vision with behaviors that clearly support the advancement of that vision, leaders promote integrity. And by continuing to successfully manage the day-to-day details and routines that keep the school running smoothly, while at the same time attending to the larger organizational shifts in practice, principals convey a sense of competence. School leaders enable relational trust within their community through their own actions and interactions with its members. Only then can an ethos of relational trust be built between and amongst all stakeholders (Bryk & Schneider, 2013).

Developing and Demonstrating Essential Leadership Responsibilities

A large-scale transformation process inevitably requires significant shifts in policies, systems, practices, and/or philosophical approaches. The literature refers to this magnitude of

change as second-order, and research has revealed a specific set of leadership practices that are essential to successfully steering a school community through this process (Waters & Grubb, 2004). School leaders in this position must be able to embody the transformational perspective on leadership, defined as the "ability to empower others" with the purpose of bringing about a major change in form, nature, and function of some phenomenon (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). Empowering others not only requires a foundation of relational trust, but infrastructure in which the school leader can thoughtfully and effectively distribute leadership responsibilities among both formal and informal leaders in the community (Spillane et al., 2001). This concept of distributed leadership is a key component of any successful organization, and particularly crucial in bolstering a sense of purpose and stability during a significant, second-order change process. Table 1 outlines the core components of second-order change, and how it differs from less significant (first-order) change processes.

Of the many responsibilities that are essential ingredients for successful leadership (a McRel study as introduced in Waters & Grubb, 2004), seven of these key responsibilities have been positively linked with initiating, leading, and sustaining second- order change within a school community. While the concept of distributed leadership supports the notion that it is impossible for site administrators to be solely responsible for organizational change, Waters and Grubb's research has demonstrated that it is essential for these seven core competencies to be demonstrated by the leader herself. Therefore, it is even more essential that school leaders are able to effectively distribute some of the other leadership responsibilities, so that they can emphasize the seven responsibilities that are positively associated with leading change with second-order implications.

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Table 1

First-Order vs Second-Order Change

A change is 1st order when it is perceived as:	A change is 2nd order when it is perceived as:
An extension of the past	A break with the past
Within existing paradigms	Outside of existing paradigms
Consistent with prevailing values and norms	Conflicted with prevailing values and norms
Incremental	Complex
Implemented with existing knowledge and skills	Requires new knowledge and skills to implement
Implemented by experts	Implemented by stakeholders

Note. (Waters & Grubb, 2004).

According to Waters and Grubb (2004) this begins with leaders' ability to present and frame their guiding principles, *ideals and beliefs* about an equitable approach to teaching and learning. This foundational set of ideals and beliefs must include the notion that *all* students can accelerate their learning when given the appropriate level of support, and that the school community is responsible for doing whatever it takes to ensure that these supports are accessible to *all* students and families. The importance of a transparent vision for equity delivered directly by the school leader has been articulated by various researchers (Leithwood, 1992; Leithwood, Harris, & Strauss, 2010; Theoharis, 2010).

Leaders leading successful school transformation embrace their roles as *change agents* and are willing to actively challenge the status quo, explicitly demonstrating the gaps between what is and what could be. Principals must create support and investment from the larger school community, which relies heavily on the leader's ability to articulate the expectations and roles of various stakeholders, and how these align with the underlying vision and mission of the school community (Waters & Grubb, 2004). Simultaneously, the principal must act as the chief cheerleader and *optimizer* on campus. Leaders must use their in-depth knowledge of staff to match each individual's strengths with tasks that will ensure that these strengths are utilized and valued.

As part of developing the collective identity of staff to work together towards meaningful change, a leader must actively demonstrate *flexibility* by responding to the issues and concerns raised by staff in a direct, open and transparent manner, and investing in mechanisms that support all staff to be successful in their particular roles. Such flexibility is of particular importance given that, as Knowles (1977) summarizes, "[a]dults have a deep psychological need

to be generally self-directing, although they may be dependent in particular temporary situations" (p. 43).

Clearly, school leaders are responsible for influencing the hearts of their community by continuously building understanding of and support for the vision and mission of the work. It is equally important that they simultaneously influence the mind by providing *intellectual stimulation* that fuels inquiry and reflection on the research that supports the changes taking place, both in process and practice. While Waters and Grubb leave this responsibility relatively unnuanced, other scholars argue that the act of intellectual stimulation by leaders is most effective when it includes tapping into critical equity issues, including processing implicit bias and making dominant White culture visible so that its assumptions and blind spots are exposed and able to be challenged (Boske, 2015; Douglass Horsford, 2014; Gooden & O'Doherty, 2015; Rimmer, 2016).

And finally, the school leader continues to *monitor and evaluate* the effectiveness of school practices and their impact on the organizational culture and climate, teacher effectiveness, and student learning through the use of reflection (Freire, 1970; Sammons, 1999). Practically speaking, the leader ensures that progress monitoring systems are in place and provides accessible feedback to all stakeholders involved in the change process, so that practices can be continuously refined and improved overtime.

Developing a Team to Support Distributed Leadership Responsibilities

With such a lofty list of demands and priorities, successful school leaders fashion a team to embark on the change process with them. According to the McRel study (2004), community members often associate second-order change with a decline in the use of four essential leadership responsibilities by the principal: *Culture, Communication, Order,* and *Input.* These

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particular leadership practices demonstrate the fundamental importance of maintaining stability, a sense that is often lost during significant shifts from traditional practice. This research highlights how essential it is that leadership be even more attuned to these responsibilities and the need to fulfill them during change initiatives with second-order implications" (Waters & Grubb, 2004, p. 5). Demonstrating competence in these four responsibilities could and should include the leader effectively distributing them amongst capable members of the community. To support the practice of distributed leadership, principals should develop an implementation team that includes a diverse array of formal and informal leaders, including representation from administration, general education, special education, support and classified staff, and parents. One of the main charges of this team is to help maintain a sense of stability by fostering and supporting these four leadership responsibilities:

- *Culture:* Each school community is unique, with its own history, culture, and aspirations. The transformational process should be framed as an opportunity to thoroughly explore the school culture and to foster shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation.

- *Input:* Multiple stakeholders should be involved in the design and implementation of important decisions and practices related to the transformation process, including students, parents, administrators, general education staff, special duration staff, classified staff, behavioral and mental health support providers, and out-of-school time staff. Efforts to promote a 360º perspective will not only ensure a comprehensive understanding of the strengths and needs across the school community, but also recognizes the valuable perspective from stakeholders, eliciting increased investment and support from all participants.

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- *Order:* While transformation often requires significant changes in practice, the implementation team should strive, to the extent possible, to honor established operating procedures and routines while identifying ways to improve their effectiveness and utility.

- *Communication:* Throughout the transformation process, strong lines of communication should be created and maintained, providing ample opportunity for school leadership to share results from assessments and progress on goals with staff and parents within the context of a safe and professional learning environment. Ample opportunities for feedback on the development of the goals, and strategies should be provided to all stakeholders within the community, leveraging any points of tension to demonstrate constructive disagreement and problem solving.

In summary, successfully initiating and executing second-order change requires a foundation of relational trust and an understanding of the essential leadership responsibilities that support a thriving and effective school community. That understanding must be accompanied by a strong infrastructure that supports the practice of distributed leadership, so that the leader can emphasize and focus on the core responsibilities that are associated with successful transformation. However, applying these normative considerations is futile in the absence of thoughtful adult learning strategies capable of raising the team's capacity and readiness for change. To better understand what went into successful learning for adult teams, I examined the concept of andragogy more explicitly.

Principles of Andragogy

Creating a safe environment in which practitioners are encouraged, implicitly or explicitly, to take a risk on second-order change paves the way for meaningful transformation.

Attending deeply to principles of adult learning, also known as andragogy, translates this opportunity into action. The needs of adult learners compel the creation of a learning culture in which adults feel comfortable to embrace risk and change, an enabler for learning (Knowles, 1977). Additionally, the adult learner thrives when "engaged in a process of self-diagnosis of needs for learning" (Knowles, 1977, p. 47). In 1984, Knowles further distilled this process into four elements of effective andragogy that can contribute to successful change efforts:

1. Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction;

2. Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities;

3. Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevant and impact to their job or personal life; and,

4. Adult learning is problem-centered rather than content-oriented.

A solid footing in these practices can assist in designing change efforts such as the participatory action research I intended to embark on (Freire, 1970; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). By considering the specific needs of the adult learners who were to be engaged as co-researcher participants in this study, I could best plan for their successful engagement in this research, ultimately increasing the likelihood of the project's success, as was the case in practice at Sanger Unified School District in California.

Success in Practice

To view these strategies in practice, I reviewed David and Talbert's 2013 study about a remarkable change story at Sanger Unified School District. This multi-year study about a high-poverty, low performing California district's turnaround sought to understand how the district successfully outpaced California's statewide Academic Performance Index improvement in multiple years. One of the first lessons in the study is that the model that worked in Sanger

cannot be directly replicated because it is based on context, "depending more on human qualities than policy, procedure or technology" (David & Talbert, 2013, p. 8). For Sanger, the three guiding principles of the transformation process were to: (1) take a developmental approach to change; (2) ground decisions in evidence; and, (3) build shared commitments and relationships to sustain change (David & Talbert, 2013, pp. 11-12). David and Talbert (2013) determined that "[s]hifting the district professional culture from isolation and protected turf took several years and went hand in hand with other strategic improvement efforts" (p. 13). Whereas early strategies focused on creating structures, such as professional learning communities, to increase coherence and prioritizing these as a non-negotiable, the focus expanded quickly to include principals and school leaders "[who themselves] participate in teams of three or four schools that serve similar student populations and grade levels and are facilitated by one of four district academic administrators" (David & Talbert, 2013, p. 15).

In suggesting lessons for other leaders and practitioners, David and Talbert encourage the following:

- High level leaders need to take on the whole system with a long-term view;
- There is a power to easy-to-remember principles, mantras or other "sticky messages" that can and should be harnessed;
- Effort leaders must understand the developmental nature of desired changes whether asked of teachers or administrators and must be prepared to offer resources and support for unanticipated challenges.

Optimizing the conditions for adult learning can help other school systems prepare for the sort of transformative work happening in places like Sanger. With respect to this particular action research project, careful attunement to the conditions of optimal adult learning would be

of paramount importance in effectively leveraging the shared expertise of the various members of Rise's Culture and Climate Committee (C3) as they worked together to install trauma-informed, inclusive practices into the school's existing culture and climate. Given the intensity of the second-order change that would be required of them and the school, further attention to the specific considerations when leading through change provides additional insights which will enable the success of the project. A summary of the research is presented below.

Leading through Change

"The work of changing schools requires us to acknowledge that we are, in fact, changing systems" (Detterman et al., 2019, p. 4). These are often long-established systems shored up by constituents deeply invested in their preservation. A failure to recognize the necessary link between education reform and foundational systems work has resulted in many educational transformation efforts, including the vast majority of those I have admittedly found myself enamored with over the years, falling short of their aspirational goals. These types of reforms rarely produce the sort of disruptive transformation we are talking about here: the sort of transformation required to ensure our schools work for all of their students, particularly those facing complex and interrelated stressors such as poverty, institutional racism, trauma, and disability (Lawson, 2004).

In response to the shortcomings associated with singularly focused attempts at reform, many wander down the opposite road to failure, choosing to implement various reform efforts simultaneously (Lawson, 2004). What often results is reform that is a mile wide and an inch deep, leaving already overtaxed schools and leaders with the challenge of running multiple reforms at once, without likely having the time to implement any one of them successfully (Cuban, 1990).

The alternative approach is one of directly tackling the system that needs reforming, rather than addressing any of its individual composite parts in isolation. This approach is rooted in systems theory: the belief that meaningful change requires a high level of systemic overhaul, and that such systemic overhaul is best negotiated by those constituents most closely affected by the current system (Bronfenbrenner, 1981). To be successful, this overhaul must occur by attending deeply to the unique ecology of each school, and to its location within other nested ecologies at the local, state and federal levels (Elmore, 2005). Understanding this complex ecology and putting forth strategies to transform it at a highly foundational level is difficult work. It is also the necessary path toward reshaping schools to ensure the success of all of their students.

To make the magnitude of change more manageable, Schmoker (2004) offers that leaders may "instead of trying to 'reform' a school or system, [create] the conditions for teams…to continuously achieve short-term wins" (p. 427). For further guidance regarding how schools and organizations organize for this level of transformational change, I turned where many before me have, to the seminal work of Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), in which the author outlines an organizational practice that places learning at the center of all activity, asserting that the process of analysis, dialogue, and reflection is the lever for organizational change and long-term success. In such an organization, learning becomes embedded within the very structure of operational behavior.

The structure of each of Senge's five disciplines pivots around learning, despite each functioning independently of the next. The first of the disciplines, *systems thinking,* requires the organizational member to rise above the basic components they interact with and view the organization through all the external and internal factors that impact it (Senge, 1990). In such a

system, no central figure can serve as the holder of knowledge or power, and the need for shared learning and distributed leadership becomes paramount. The implication is clear: leaders are first and foremost learners, and successful leaders thoughtfully model this within their teams.

Senge (1990) integrated the next three disciplines as individual growth models. The discipline of *personal mastery* emphasizes the need to re-generate a new personal proficiency that includes internal growth alongside practical skills. *Mental models* invite individuals and teams to examine foundational assumptions that color the way decisions are made. *Shared vision*, the fourth discipline, asks individuals to shape their personal visions to encompass shared goals and new perspectives. In each, personal change is a critical ingredient to leading organizations through change efforts.

The final discipline, *team learning*, serves as the cornerstone of the learning organization. Through team learning, Senge (1990) envisioned groups working collectively to attain outcomes that could not be mastered individually.

While Senge's work lays a foundation for undertaking systems-level change, particularly the sort of second-order change described by Waters and Grubb (2004), he cautions that undertaking large change does not mean ignoring what we know about human motivation, and the importance of measuring and celebrating change at close intervals. I found echoes of the five disciplines in change efforts undertaken by school leaders and in research that spoke to the importance of their reliance on strong vision, thoughtful action and purposeful reflection to enable meaningful change (Carter, 1996; Lightfoot, 1984; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993; Sammons, 1999; Teddlie & Stringfield, 1993). Supporting this notion, Schmoker (1996) notes that while many schools are working on massive system-wide plans to implement the sort of systemic change this project describes, most of these plans never move beyond philosophical

discussions. Instead, Schmoker (1996) calls for immediate responsiveness to issues that have

been formally identified and supports the call for incremental change analysis, even if it is seen

as baby steps or "small wins". Recent work within action research would also support the notion

that incremental steps are a valid measure to examine the influence of an initiative's impact

within a school setting (Firestone & Riehl, 2005).

This concept of taking change as an incremental process, rather than a large, logical

process that can be predicted ahead of time is widely discussed in recent literature. Michael

Fullan (1993) argues that schools and leaders must prepare to "Ready, Fire, Aim," calling this a

> [m]ore fruitful sequence if we want to take a linear snapshot of an organization
> undergoing major reform. Ready is important; there has to be some notion of direction,
> but it is killing to bog down the process with vision, mission, and strategic planning
> before you know enough about dynamic reality. Fire is action and inquiry where skills,
> clarity, and learning are fostered. Aim is crystallizing new beliefs, formulating mission
> and vision statements, and focusing strategic planning. Vision and strategic planning
> come later. (pp. 31-32).

To do the work of action and inquiry successfully within the busy life cycle of a school,

Fullan (1993) insists that change requires "deep engagement with other colleagues and with

mentors in exploring, refining, and improving their practice as well as setting up an environment

in which this can not only happen but is encouraged, rewarded, and pressed to happen" (p. 33).

This 'deep engagement' is required because, as Fullan (1993) reminds us:

> New ideas of any worth require in-depth understanding and the development of skill and
> commitment to make them work. You cannot mandate … the only alternative that works
> is creating conditions that enable people to create personal and shared visions and skill
> development through practice overtime" (p. 33).

These conditions create the sorts of small wins Schmoker (1996): "Reaching short-term

goals provides joy, which once experienced, makes us want more" (p. 60). Yet, rather than

requiring school teams to spend undue time painstakingly analyzing each decision they make,

Schmoker also emphasizes the importance of simply taking time to enjoy the camaraderie that

comes with instituting high-level change, reminding us that "[d]ata can be empowering or disabling, - it can either give the sense that 'we are watched too closely, not trusted, or about to be judged,' or it can a useful, even vital means for understanding and improving performance" (Schmoker , 1996, p. 60). To aid in the change process, in other words, data must be presented and analyzed in such a way that it is made painstakingly clear that its use is strictly to support us in our ability to explore, refine, and improve our practice.

These insights about leading through change connected closely with the work I proposed embarking upon with my fellow co-researchers. To successfully orient the work, it would be important to consider the mechanisms available for engaging diverse stakeholders throughout the change process, including by creating what Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) describe as low-risk environments in which new ideas and out-of-the-box thinking are encouraged, and by creating an open and supportive space for safe reflection (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Kruse, Seashore Louis, & Bryk, 1994; Speck & Knipe, 2005).

Summary

The statistics presented in this chapter paint an undeniable picture of an education system that is failing its most vulnerable children and families. The sheer gravity of this reality has generated a sense of urgency and commitment across multiple sectors, resulting in a comprehensive call to action from experts in the field of education, mental health, and the U.S. Department of Justice. The policy landscape that exists today reflects an openness toward a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to educating students. Yet, while many agree that such an approach is necessary, as McIntosh and Goodman (2016) note, "[t]here remains little research in this area to guide implementers and even fewer resources available for those interested in integrating approaches. This gap can lead to spotty implementation, in which the logic and intent

are strong, but the actual implementation lacks guidance and sufficient articulation" (McIntosh & Goodman, 2016, p. 17).

It is clear that more research is needed on school-wide transformative approaches. To help achieve this, at the conclusion of my literature review I revamped Figure 4, presented earlier in this chapter when identifying literature buckets into a new emerging framework, as illustrated in Figure 5. Using best practices from trauma-informed education and school-based mental health integration, enabled through leadership practices that incorporate successful elements of andragogy and change theory, my hope for this project was to begin to address these identified gaps and offer a compelling demonstration of these principles in action at the school level. The next chapter examines the contextual factors affecting the proposed research within the selected school site, Rise Academy, an elementary school in Tacoma, Washington.
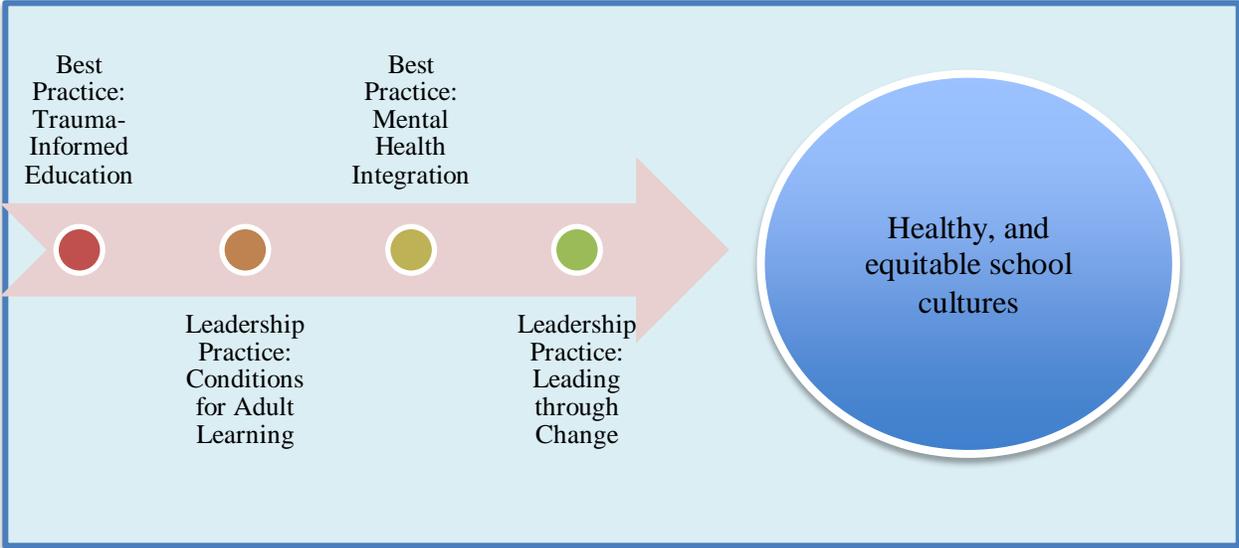
Figure 5. Emerging framework.

CHAPTER 3: STUDY CONTEXT

Prelude

Troy, the charming fifth grader I met soon after starting my work with Sequoia, was an agency success story. Within a few months of my arrival at the school, we were celebrating a milestone in his life – Troy was ready to enroll in a general education school, the desired outcome for any child attending a segregated, special education placement such as Sequoia. Troy had never made a change of this magnitude on his own terms before; he was far more used to being forcibly removed when his needs outnumbered the skills of the adults who were responsible for his care. This move was all his. He had made progress. He had achieved his goals. And now, he was ready to write his own destiny.

It would be great if the story ended there, but it doesn't. Despite his undeniable successes at Sequoia, Troy felt incredibly disoriented by the sudden lack of structure in the general education setting. After all, he was coming from a school where carefully trained staff members monitored his every move within a small, contained, trauma-informed environment. Lacking the skills he needed to successfully negotiate this new setting, he returned to old behaviors - fighting, barricading himself in classrooms, and bringing weapons to school. To some, Troy's outbursts communicated his fear of being out of control and his desire to return to the safe familiarity of the nonpublic school, but instead, after multiple suspensions, he was ultimately arrested when his public school staff called the police in response to his behaviors.

What happened to Troy wasn't an anomaly. A couple more years and several more transitions later, I witnessed firsthand the revolving door of "successful" Sequoia graduates. Their school districts had invested mightily in their education and well-being: a seat at one of Sequoia's nonpublic schools was expensive, even before factoring in the educational budget

crises of the early 2000s. Yet, in the long run, far too many ended up in settings just as restrictive as Sequoia's, if not far worse. While the seat at Sequoia fit many students' needs, allowing them to heal and make impressive academic gains while occupying it, what was missing was an investment in a bridge between students' needs and the district's current ability to address these. When Troy was sent to Sequoia's school, so were the resources for his intensive mental health programming. And thus, rather than these resources enhancing the local district school and helping to develop district staff's abilities to understand Troy's mental health needs and respond to these, the financial investment trained Sequoia's nonpublic school staff instead. As these staff became more specialized and better trained, sadly, the gap between what Troy grew accustomed to and the reality of his public school campus grew even larger.

It took several failed transitions for me to connect the dots. When I did, I returned to something that had occurred to me on my very first day at Sequoia. Simply put, the things that work for vulnerable children in specialized settings work for vulnerable children in generalized ones too, and far more efficiently. What's more, they work equally well for all children, creating learning environments where students receive the support they need precisely when they need it, not only after they have experienced a certain, designated threshold of failure. They work to create public schools that can prevent students like Troy from being referred off-campus to an alternative education setting, and they work to create public schools that can successfully welcome them back if they have been. They work to create truly inclusive and exhaustingly positive environments where students, families, and staff feel safe and deeply connected to their community, laying the necessary foundation for academic success. Rise Academy, the central site for this study, was one public school willing to give this approach, and with it students like Troy, a shot.

Introduction

As Dewey (1938) points out, all learning is essentially contextual. To understand this research study then was to locate it within the multiple, nested ecologies in which it lived. For, while the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 offered the ingredients to lead for change, only in their interaction with the local context could these hope to take hold. This inquiry began with looking deeply at Rise's physical, historical and political conditions, and proceeded through an examination of the individuals selected to participate in this research.

Place

To gain a contextual understanding of this participatory action research project, it was important to consider the location of two organizations involved in its design: Sequoia Family of Services, the large, nonprofit, community-based organization for which I work, and Rise Academy, the charter public school where the research took place. In addition, an introduction to Sequoia's trauma-informed intervention model, which had been implemented at Rise Academy, is provided.

Meet Sequoia Family of Services

Sequoia was founded in 1985 based on a belief that all youth are capable of success when provided supports responsive to their unique needs and experiences. By the mid-1980s, Oakland, California was a notoriously difficult place for many of its young people. When yet another local group home shut its doors after failing to adequately respond to the growing needs of its clients, a small group of staff gathered to develop a new option. Unable to make peace with the idea of saying goodbye to the group home's residents, knowing they were sure to face ongoing obstacles and a lack of stability, Sequoia's founders established a small residential program and welcomed them in, regardless of the behaviors which made their previous placement feel untenable.

Seneca's founders had seen the failure of public systems to provide adequately for the needs of youth who had experienced profound trauma and loss. Now in charge of their own organization, they made a commitment to their new residents that many had never heard before: the promise of unconditional care, a guarantee that they would never be rejected or expelled from Sequoia for the behaviors that brought them here. This founding commitment of unconditional care – doing whatever it takes to support youth's success without the option to give up – drove the agency's early efforts and stands at the core of our work to this day, messaging to students like Troy that they, too, belong.

In a program built around unconditional care, where the option to reject a young person was forever off the table, the creativity of adult caregivers was celebrated. As they shifted their approach to meet the new challenges in front of them, the teens in their care grew to understand that even through their hardest moments, the adults in their lives would stick by their sides, with boundless new tools or strategies to help them heal and thrive. Many youth stopped "testing" the adults to see where their breaking point was, instead beginning to believe that adults could be trusted at their word. Their behaviors improved and soon, many, like Troy, were ready to step down to a lower level of care, including foster homes or living with extended family members.

This is where the trouble began. While youth were in residential care, the agency's staff could manage every element of their day, ensuring unconditional care from morning through night. Yet, no matter how much progress young people made while in Sequoia's care, once they left the program they returned to a world that had not been designed with their very needs in mind. Providing support at a single point in the trajectory of youth and family's lives proved simply insufficient. Realizing this, Sequoia's founders began to envision seamless services delivered across a continuum of care, so that youth and their families could receive ongoing

support regardless of fluctuations in their level of need. Rather than focus only on high-end residential beds, the agency began to build out programming in the education arena to support clients in their schools. Juvenile justice programs were created so that a trauma-informed approach met youth should they encounter the court system, and intensive treatment foster homes and wraparound care were designed to support young people in staying in their home placements and communities of origin. In time, this continuum of care made transitions out of higher-level services easier, while simultaneously preventing the need for those higher-level services by future youth.

Over the years, Sequoia has tested and refined the agency's core beliefs about how to intervene with youth and families in need. These beliefs have since been developed into a highly articulated treatment approach presented in Sprinson and Berrick's 2010 book, *Unconditional Care: Relationship-based Behavioral Intervention for Vulnerable Children and Families*. As a treatment model, Unconditional Care integrates attachment, learning, and systems theories to provide tools to assess and address youth's complex relational, behavioral, and ecological needs. What is unique about the approach is that it rests not only on operationalizing these three theories, but also on capitalizing on their intersection. Unconditional Care conveys an implicit set of beliefs that youth whose experiences are shaped by chronic stress and trauma are capable of healing when they: (1) Experience secure relationships that promote a sense of safety and belonging, (2) are systematically taught new skills and mindsets, and (3) are surrounded by a strong network of supports embedded in their natural environments.

Meet Sequoia's Model

For students like Troy, the existing Sequoia continuum which included residential programs, intensive-treatment foster care, nonpublic schools and behavior coaching translated

into meaningful success. Yet, it still was not far-reaching enough. He and others like him became the engine behind Sequoia's new approach, a new model founded on the belief that public schools are responsible for supporting *all* students to thrive, period. This may seem like a foregone conclusion, traceable all the way back to Horace Mann's "great equalizer" in 1848. The concept of this sort of "unconditional education" is not new. It does, however, take the commitment to support all students one step further, challenging us to consider how we might build the capacity of public educators to support even the most extraordinary student needs within the walls of a community school (Detterman et al., 2019).

Sequoia's model seeks to disrupt the cycle of poor achievement and exclusion experienced by students like Troy by transforming schools into communities in which all students are welcomed and can thrive. The model is a holistic, multi-tiered system of supports that pairs evidence-based academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions with an intentional focus on overall culture and climate. It promotes systematic coordination and integration of funding and services, which increase the efficient allocation of available resources so that gaps are identified and redundancies eliminated. Sequoia's approach emphasizes early intervention by utilizing data to identify student needs and then providing services to address those needs *before* students fail, thereby reducing the need for more intensive and costly remediation in the future.

The model exists because of a deep belief in the promise of public education in this country, which serves as the basis of our democratic ideal as a nation. Our schools were designed to be the great equalizers: to prepare future citizens for a thriving democracy, a democracy in which we co-exist in similar spaces, where even our differences do not separate us from our common identity. Sequoia's framework strives to actualize this vision by neutralizing the factors

that lead to disparate outcomes for far too many of our young people, divided clearly along lines of race, class, family experience, and ability. The primary goal of the Sequoia framework is *to increase the academic performance and social emotional well-being of the most struggling students*. And, when we talk here about students who are "most struggling," we mean something very specific – students who due to circumstances outside of their control, face additional barriers to accessing a quality education, including:

- Students in poverty: By age 2, low-income children—regardless of race—are already six months behind their higher income peers in language development, and by age 5 they are more than two years behind (The Education Trust - West, 2015).

- Students who experience chronic stress and trauma: Children who experience complex trauma are three times more likely to drop out of school than their peers and have a greater tendency to be misclassified with developmental delays or referred for special education services (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2014).

- Black students: Black students in California are most likely to be suspended or expelled, be taught by ineffective teachers, be identified for special education; and take remedial, non-credit bearing coursework as college students (The Education Trust - West, 2015).

- Foster youth: Youth in foster care graduate at relatively low rates and are less likely to complete high school than their non-foster care peers. For example, in California during the 2009-2010 school year, the graduation rate for all grade-12 students statewide was 84%, but for students in foster care, it was just 58%—the lowest rate among the at-risk student groups (Barrat & Berliner, 2013).

- English Language Learners: As of the 2013-14 school year, only 62.6% of students

classified with limited English proficiency graduated from High School. This is a trend that has become increasingly alarming given English Language Learners are the fastest growing subgroup in American schools (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

- Students with disabilities: Across the country, 37% of children with disabilities do not graduate high school. This is over twice the rate of students without disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015).

- Students who are already behind: Students who do not read proficiently by third grade are four times more likely to leave school without a diploma when compared to proficient readers. This number rises when those children's families live in poverty (Hernandez, 2012).

Attempts to narrow gaps in opportunity and achievement are rarely systematic, leading to a system full of inefficiencies and producing limited results (Masten, 2003). This reality leads us to Sequoia's second goal: *To increase the efficiency of schools in delivering effective interventions to all students through implementation of a transdisciplinary, multi-tiered framework.* The first goal addresses the immediate needs of students like Troy, but it does not build the capacity of our public systems to intervene with future students who present similar levels of needs. Instead, by establishing meaningful cross-sector partnerships that weave a continuum of services together, schools increase their capacity to serve not only the handful of students with the greatest needs at any given time, but to benefit all members of the school community through intentional school-wide design and targeted interventions.

Meet Rise Academy

Rise Academy, a Sequoia partner school since its inception, is a charter public school located in the Hilltop neighborhood of Tacoma, Washington, a vibrant neighborhood that has for years served as the heart of the city's large African-American community. Yet, years of high poverty, high crime, gang warfare and substance use had taken their toll on the Hilltop. Today, 15.5% of Rise's students face homelessness and, like Troy, many live with a primary caregiver other than a biological parent. The school's closest neighbors are two churches, several empty lots, boarded up buildings – including a now-closed food shelter – and a series of halfway houses and small, multi-family residential units. While Rise is near the city's medical hub and its associated services, the closest full-service supermarket is 1.5 miles away. The school enjoys much of the diversity for which greater Tacoma is known, including in the racial and religious profiles of its student body. Its closest elementary school counterpart is Monroe Elementary, only a few blocks away. This Tacoma public school has served the community since 1925 and in 1969 was designated the nation's first magnet school, a move that was hoped to voluntarily reduce school segregation in the city's schools (Retrieved from http://www.magnet.edu/resources/msa-history). This proud history has given way to continued challenges over the ensuing years, and today Monroe serves the city's poorest students, including its largest homeless population, despite a robust housing assistance program run in partnership with the Tacoma Housing Authority (Retrieved from https://www.tacomaschools.org/schools/performance/Pages/2015-2016.aspx). While boasting of recent academic gains, the school remains the lowest performing in the district, and has for the past 20 years. In the spring prior to the launch of this study, only 27% of Monroe's third graders ranked proficient on the state's English Language Arts assessment, with 26% ranking proficient

in Math. Sixteen percent of the school's third graders and fifteen percent of its fifth graders were suspended during the 2015-2106 school year.

On a more personal level, at Rise, Monroe is known as the former elementary school of a member of the current Board of Directors. Her own experience of low academic expectations and rampant school bullying informed a career as a civil rights attorney, County Judge and champion for public education. Monroe is also known as the original school for many of Rise's students, at least four of whom enrolled at Rise during the 2016-2017 school year after Monroe placed them on emergency expulsion during their kindergarten year. Table 2 provides a demographic comparison of Rise, Monroe, and the larger Tacoma Public Schools district.

History and Politics

Rise opened its doors in fall of 2015, welcoming in 100 kindergarten and first grade students as its founding class. The school was one of the first handful of charters to open in Washington State, the 42nd American state to allow their operation. By the fall of 2015, the founding team had spent two years preparing for its ribbon cutting. The team had been busy recruiting students and staff, refining the academic model, purchasing curriculum, and scrubbing the walls and floors of the former Christian school which had agreed to lease to a charter, unlike so many other facilities in the city.

Even in the earliest days, the school's success rested on winning the hearts and minds of members within its community. The charter school law that had launched Rise into existence had narrowly passed as a voter referendum in 2012. That was the law's third attempt, evidence of an effort by charter champions that began in the state a full ten years prior. While the vote ultimately swayed in Rise's favor, it did so by garnering support in Washington's rural regions, whereas in urban centers such as Tacoma and nearby Seattle the referendum was defeated.

Table 2

Demographic Comparisons

	Rise (K-2)	Monroe (K-5)	Tacoma Public Schools (K-12)
Free and Reduced Lunch	83.1%	90.6%	60.6%
Racial Breakdown	Latinx: 10% American Indian: 1% African-American or Black: 66% White: 13% Asian: 3% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 2% 2+ Races: 5%	Latinx: 13% American Indian: 1% African-American or Black: 39% White: 13% Asian: 7% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 2% 2+ Races: 15%	Latinx: 19% American Indian: 1% African-American or Black: 18% White: 41% Asian: 3% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander: 2% 2+ Races: 8%
Special Education	13.2 (K-2)	18.2 (K-5)	14.1 (K-12)
Teachers of Color	43%	33%	18%

While there is national public scrutiny about charter public schools and their contributions to a neoliberal agenda (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016), the school had engendered local support for its goal of demonstrating the power of the inclusive school because it paid attention to the original intent of charter schools – innovation (Boyd, Hare, & Nathan, 2002). Between the law's passage in 2012 and the first schools' opening in 2015, a buzz of activity had ensued. It was early in this period that my organization, Sequoia Family of Services, the largest children's mental health agency in California, was asked to join the effort of designing the schools that would be first to open. By the fall of 2013, when I first stepped off a plane in Washington, Sequoia had been providing specialized mental health services within schools in California for almost 30 years. I had spent the past five years designing and implementing Sequoia's innovative approach to school-wide inclusion, mental health integration, and trauma-informed culture and climate work that we would in subsequent years introduce into the model at Rise.

Sequoia specifically came to Washington State to assist aspiring school founders draft the special populations sections of their charter applications. Once approved, Sequoia was to play a role in ensuring that schools could actualize the vision of equity for students with the greatest barriers to success that they had, with our support, articulated in their initial application. The organization provided training, technical assistance, and sample processes and structures. As the schools neared their opening, direct service staff members (school psychologists, mental health specialists, special educators, speech and language pathologists, and more) to provide services in each of the schools.

The charter law in Washington State limited the number of schools that could open to only 40, enough to introduce innovations in public education and iterate on experimental processes that could lend lessons to the larger system, but not so many as to displace the role of

existing public schools within the communities they aimed to serve (Boyd et al., 2002). As such, ours was the challenge of ensuring that each and every school that opened its doors held true to its commitment to students with disabilities, mental health and behavioral challenges, trauma backgrounds and other factors that made them uniquely vulnerable to being pushed out of their new schools.

Within days of Rise's opening, and that of its other seven charter collaborators in the state, the expected turmoil of operating a new school within a new and untested state system was overshadowed by a far less expected challenge. On the Friday afternoon before Labor Day, as Rise marked the end of its third week of operation, the state's Supreme Court ruled charter schools unconstitutional due to their governance structure.

A whirlwind of activity followed. On Tuesday morning after the long weekend, children and parents gathered in the school's multipurpose room to hear an announcement from the school's founder. They were greeted by local and national press. There was good news – over the weekend, the state's charter school association had secured enough philanthropic dollars to keep the school doors open at least through the end of the current school year. Yet, the palpable feeling in the building that day was one of dread and defeat.

Over the coming weeks, these feelings translated into various actions. Many parents became vocal advocates for their school (see Figures 6 and 7 for sample parent testimonials), some traveling daily to the state capitol to encourage legislators to find a fix that would allow the charters to stay open. Still others felt the uncertainty was too much to weather. Although on the last day of the state legislative session a fix was indeed written into the law, the school would end its year with only 68 of its original 100 students still enrolled. Perhaps even more concerning, three of the four founding classroom teachers and one of its administrators turned

"This is my son Gabriel. He has Sensory Processing Disorder. Last year in school he was not getting the help he needed to better his education. He gets overwhelmed with large groups and learning, he needs head phones when testing, and he doesn't like to be touched. Many times I tried to get help for him at his previous school but because he didn't have three things needing special help with, nothing happened. He cried everyday and had anxiety. At ▮▮▮ he is in small groups, gets one on one attention, and has a great resource teacher that can help him to calm down, do heavy lifting and help with reading. If my child can't continue to go to his charter school he will have to start all over again which will be extra hard for him to process with his SPD.To change his routine is cruel and heart wrenching for a child like mine." ▮▮▮ Parent Cricket.

Figure 6. Parent testimonial 1.

"My twins started Kindergarten at ███ Academy this year. One has special needs and has an IEP. Although we were proactive and enrolled him at the public school last year, we were told by his special ed teacher that she didn't think he would fare well in a traditional classroom, but that she didn't know what to suggest as the special ed classes were more geared for children more severely affected by disabilities. When we asked the school what provision was made for highly capable students and how we could ensure our other son was appropriately challenged, we were told that there were no adjustments in course work, etc until they had an official assessment in the second grade. That would be three years of wasted potential during some of the most teachable years a child has! Since starting at ███ the special needs team has been quick to respond to our son's needs. They create plans based on what is observed at school rather than what he "qualifies" for based on brief observations in an office assessment. He is already demonstrating more positive behavior and has learned more in the past three weeks than he did last year. Our other son can't stop talking about how much he loves school and shows off all the math he can now do in his head. Without their charter school BOTH of my sons would fall between the cracks.#saveWAcharterschools #███Academy" ███ parent Crystal

Figure 7. Parent testimonial 2.

over in the middle of that first, eventful schoolyear. By the end of the year, every single remaining teacher – including all those who began midyear – and its only remaining administrator, the school founder, stepped down as well. A myriad of factors, from the stress of the lawsuit to the pressures of running a first-year school, and from external political pressure to micropolitical strife within the team itself had led to the massive turnover. Alone stood 68 students and their families, whose tenacious advocacy had kept the doors open on the school's most challenging days and who now, in July, awaited word that the school would successfully launch its second year.

Of all those who had left, only a handful committed to returning. The only youth-facing who resolved to stay on were the Sequoia staff who I had personally placed at the school one year earlier in order to meet the high demands of the student body for integrated mental health and academic intervention services. And so it happened that in July of 2016, less than two months before the start of the school year, I was asked to step into Rise's open Executive Director position as an extension of my work with Sequoia. The list of reasons not to do so was long: besides the overflowing plate my work at Sequoia had helped me fill, there were also school-specific factors, including the fact that Rise was short over 80 of the 150 students required to open a second grade for matriculating first graders to enter into, that no furniture or curriculum had been ordered for said second grade, that not a single certificated teacher (of the seven needed) had been hired, and that the school's operational affairs had largely languished since the midyear vacancy left by its departing Director of Operations. Yet, for the parents who had spent an entire year fighting for the opportunity to have a next year, and for the students for whom Rise – with all of its shortcomings and tumult – still represented the best chance at educational excellence, I said yes. This research project was born.

Contextual Support for the Focus of Practice (FoP)

To appropriately assign a baseline for intervention, I relied on existing structures at the school, which – through its designation as a partner in Sequoia's intervention model – had already begun a process of ongoing formative and summative assessment into its culture and climate. These data were not collected as part of a study; they flowed from my ongoing job responsibilities. The schoolwide culture and climate assessment conducted at Rise and Sequoia's other partnering schools involves a comprehensive review of Tier One systems and practices in order to more fully understand the level at which families, staff, and students in grades 3 and above feel supported and engaged in the learning environment. The design of this assessment rests on the belief that there is no way to accurately measure the health of a school's culture and climate without input from those who experience it every day. Because this process requires the participation of all stakeholders within the community, it can simultaneously be viewed as an opportunity to build relationship and reaffirm a unified vision for the school, a necessary component in facilitating adult learning (Knowles, 1977).

The semiannual suite of assessments were last conducted at Rise Academy by a Sequoia evaluation project manager in October of 2016. They included focus group interviews with all of the school's staff, the administration of a research-validated survey – the School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) – and the completion of two rubrics, the School-wide Positive Behavioral Supports Tiered Fidelity Index (SWPBS TFI) and the Sequoia-generated Trauma-Informed Matrix (TIM). Further information regarding each of these instruments can be found in Chapter 4. The significant data points from each of these is summarized below.

October 2016 Staff Focus Group Results

In reviewing the data culled through this process to ascertain the school's baseline in the eyes of these stakeholders, I was unsurprised to find many familiar themes, ones that had begun showing up in my own research memos following anecdotal conversations with individual members of the staff.

October 2016 School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI)

In reviewing the school's latest SCAI data, from October of 2016, I noted many areas of alignment between families and staff, such as similar scores on dimensions such as 'Learning and Assessment' (average score of 4.10 on a scale of 1-5), 'Community Relations' (average score of 4.05), and 'Leadership and Decisions' (average score 4.25). In contrast, other areas revealed a greater misalignment between staff and parent perceptions, most notably on the 'Student Interactions' dimensions. On the subcategories of this dimension, parents rated the school lower in the areas of 'Management of Student Autonomy' and 'Sense of Safety.'

October 2016 SWPBS Tiered Fidelity Index (TFI)

As a relatively new school early into SWPBS implementation, the October 2016 TFI completed by the team at Rise unsurprisingly had many scores in the 0 and 1 range (of a range of 0-2, where 0 means 'not implemented', 1 means 'partially implemented', and 2 means 'fully implemented'). Focusing on the outliers, several areas did score a 2, the highest potential score for each subcategory. These areas of relative strength include:

- "Tier Two team is composed of coordinator and individuals with all 4 areas of expertise (applied behavioral expertise, administrative authority, knowledge of students, knowledge about operation of school across grade level and programs) AND attendance of these members is at or above 80%."

- "Tier Two supports are explicitly linked to Tier One supports, and students receiving Tier Two interventions have full access to all Tier One supports."

- "All plans document strengths and quality of life needs and related goals defined by student/family."

- "All plans include medical, mental health information, and complete academic data where appropriate."

- "Tier Three supports include full access to any appropriate Tier One and Tier Two supports and document how access will occur."

- "All students requiring Tier Three supports (and at least 1% of students) have plans."

- "Written documentation of an annual review of Tier Three supports, with specific decisions related to action planning."

These bright spots revealed several intrinsic assets that could be leveraged for the benefit of this project. For instance, the school's existing commitment to interdisciplinary teamwork and the dedication and passion of existing staff assisted in the further definition of the C3 team. Likewise, the clear expertise around delivering high-end, holistic supports for students with the largest of needs had already demonstrated an expertise in the delivery of Tier Three services within inclusive settings, one that was indispensable to the success of this inquiry.

October 2016 Trauma-Informed Matrix (TIM)

Of the TIM Key Domains assessed at Rise in October of 2016, all but two areas fell into the 'Somewhat in Place' or 'In Place' categories. The two outliers that fell into the 'Not In Place' range were:

- "Clear policies for violence and bullying are understood by students and staff."

- "Children and families have input into school rules, policies, practices and programs."

These findings evidenced the need for more family voice in decision-making, which the inclusion of parent representatives on the C3 was designed to help with, as well as clear alternatives to exclusionary discipline that could be implemented consistently and lead to increased feelings of safety and orderliness on the school campus. Though still early on, the data available told me a lot about my starting point for leading a cultural change effort at Rise. Still, critical to that success would be the people who would walk alongside me through the process, to whom I turn my attention next.

People

The direct collaborators in this project were my seven co-researcher participants, the volunteer members of Rise Academy's newly minted Culture and Climate Committee (C3), led at the onset of the project by its principal, Jennifer. The school opened the 2017-2018 school year with Jennifer as its third in its three years of operation. Yet, the principal was anything but new to me. I first met Jennifer twelve years ago when she started as a Bachelor's level paraprofessional a nonpublic Sequoia school like the one where I met Troy, the fifth grader who helped open this chapter. From there, Jennifer became a certified special education teacher and building administrator at Sequoia before joining my public school partnerships team to supervise school partnerships across ten charter schools in San Jose, California. Despite never completing an administrative credential program, Jennifer then returned to the Sequoia NPS where I first met her years ago as its principal, before agreeing to move to Tacoma to join our regional team here. Jennifer is a White, single, bisexual woman in her mid-thirties, and was a personal friend. She did not have roots in the Tacoma community, but moved to the area in April when called upon by Sequoia's CEO. Jennifer was joined on the C3 by representative members of the Rise

community, including its dean of students, a general education teacher, special education teacher, mental health therapist, other non-instructional ("classified") staff, and family representatives.

In addition to ongoing work with my co-researchers, less direct contact was none the less necessary with other important constituents at the school, including the broader school team, the wider family community, the school's Board of Directors and its various partners, including the state charter association, our authorizer, our philanthropic partners, the wider Sequoia community, and the residents of the Hilltop.

Role of Researcher

For the purposes of this project, I planned to serve in a facilitative role, guiding the work of the culture and climate team quietly and from as far on the side as possible. Inspired by Dewey (1938), I saw it as my role to set parameters – including the non-negotiables surrounding student safety and acceptable consequences – and then facilitate deep thinking to help the co-researcher participants fill these parameters in with a vision and the action to match it. Aspiring to be alike Dewey's prototypical teacher, I saw myself "not in the school to impose certain ideas or to form certain habits…but there as a member of the community to select the influences which shall affect [others] and assist them in properly responding to these" (Dewey, 1897, p. 80).

This was not the most natural role for me, particularly when it comes to the implementation of elements of Sequoia's partnership model, a model which I helped create and have recently worked to articulate as a research-based framework for organizing schools around equity. Yet, the key to this project was not a theoretical framework, but its practical implementation within a singular school. For such a project to be successful, it could not be led by me, someone far too removed from students, teachers and families. It must instead be negotiated on the school campus itself. As such, one of the big learnings this project aimed to

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bring about was through my own adjustment to serving in the role of guide, rather than driver for change. I took to heart the Dewey (1938) admonition that I could not throw away what I know; yet ,I intentionally set up conditions for the reciprocal and interactive experiences of the Culture and Climate Committee. At the same time, I remained committed to being aware of the importance of embracing the pedagogy of change and listening to wisdom of the persons closest to the situation (Guajardo, Guajardo, & Casaperalta, 2008) and maintaining the space for action and reflection (Freire, 1970) so that the themes they generated could become the focus of their action.

Though always important, a complicating factor made my ability to stay in this lane even more mission-critical. At the start of this project, my intention was to transition out of the school's Executive Director role so I could give my regional responsibilities the attention they needed. It was only through shifting my priorities that I hoped to make use of the most effective actionable space afforded to me in the school's transformation effort: engaging in the external-facing work required to shift larger policy and funding levers that can create sustainable patterns for the sorts of changes Rise is seeking to make.

Summary

Understanding the landscape surrounding Rise Academy was a necessary ingredient for successfully negotiating change on its campus. Only through careful attunement to its history, political positioning, history of intervention, and staff demographics could a theory of action begin to be formulated for transforming it into the sort of community where a student like Troy would flourish. In the following chapter, I introduce the methodology used in this project, outlining the steps that were taken in an attempt to create a just school capable of meeting the needs of – truly – each and every one of its students.

CHAPTER 4: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH DESIGN

Prelude

Watching students like Troy flourish within Sequoia's therapeutic milieu only to experience rejection and failure so quickly upon their transition into their neighborhood schools lit a match under me. Where my earlier fascination with bringing those elements I saw effect change for youth in Sequoia to the broader landscape of public schools was largely academic in nature, I now felt urgently compelled to create precisely such pathways. By this juncture, I had spent five years in Sequoia's nonpublic schools and I was proud of the work we had been doing. I also realized that despite the successes I knew were possible, I could justify not one more story like Troy's. With him and countless others as my driving force, I iterated with Sequoia's CEO, known for his ability to accept risk and his innovative streak, on a new idea: bringing supports to students' schools, rather than bringing students to our schools for support.

It was only a few months later, at Ford Elementary – the pilot site for this new partnership model, a large, public school in Oakland, California – that I met Joseph. Joseph was a new fourth grader at school. He shined in his first few days at school, captivating students with his humor, energy, and lack of inhibition. He also struggled early on, finding his way to the front office during class time, and recess, and lunch, and sometimes after school.

The school's principal and I learned a lot about Joseph in those early days, since he spent most of his time in the office with us. We learned that he had previously qualified for special education as a student with an emotional disability, a factor his mother chose not to share upon his enrollment. We learned that he had been retained in a previous grade, suspended numerous times, and considered for expulsion more than once. We learned that Joseph had been enrolled in an intensive, specialized classroom for students with mental health disorders. And,

we learned that the team there had recommended a placement in an even more restrictive setting, not unlike the Sequoia school Troy had attended. Unconvinced by the team's decision, his mother chose to enroll him at the family's neighborhood school, Ford Elementary.

Joseph's arrival at Ford Elementary coincided with the start of the school's new relationship with Sequoia. With children like Troy as its inspiration, Sequoia held tight to the notion that schools belong to their students, and that students belong in their community's schools. As follows, the model operates on the belief that students with disabilities are best served alongside their non-disabled peers, not in segregated settings, regardless of the strength of those settings. There is no "Separate but Equal" in the Sequoia approach, not so long as students like Troy can experience success only within the confines of an inherently inequitable system.

Joseph's mother's desire for him to be served at a public school felt like an obvious point of alignment. Yet the lack of voice she had experienced at previous schools left the burden of thoughtful engagement to repair previous harm on the team's shoulders. While we attempted to build trust with his caregiver, Joseph's behavior continued to escalate. School staff became increasingly concerned as their "go-to" tools failed, and failed again. Murmurs around campus questioned the sanity of the school's new commitment to "this 'all means all' business." It sounded great in theory – the idea that schools belonged to their students, all of them, and that not continuing to welcome a child, any child, was simply not an option. But what about in practice? Did we have the resources we needed to truly make this a reality? Behind closed doors, everyone involved started asking similar questions, from the principal to my Sequoia colleagues and me – the designers of the model itself.

It would have been easy to throw our hands up and make an exception, recommending Joseph for a segregated program to ensure the continued investment of the staff. But we knew the stakes were too high. We had a mission-aligned team and a parent who was just beginning to feel heard and valued, and they all wanted the best for Joseph. Try as we might to talk ourselves out of the challenge, the charismatic child in front of us defied us to keep going. The process of inquiry started at that moment. With the option to give up off the table, the team began to trial a series of strategies and interventions aimed at stabilizing Joseph's behaviors. Long before I enrolled in graduate school or learned the terms "co-researcher participants" or "participatory action research." Our first test of fidelity began.

Introduction

Like Joseph's Ford Elementary, this research project was conducted at a charter public elementary school. Rise Academy was a school in its third year of operation that partnered closely with Sequoia Family of Services, the large nonprofit for which I work. Sequoia brings over 30 years of experience working with the most marginalized youth and families within our public systems, including extensive experience with foster youth, youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and youth with significant mental health needs. As such, the context in which the project took place was one where trauma-informed practices and integrated mental health services were core to the school's identity. The project was supported through this existing relationship, which included two mental health therapists, several Bachelor's-level student support counselors with training in mental health and behavioral intervention, a principal with a background working in Sequoia's nonpublic schools, and a team that was built around their mindsets for this work and who came to the school with the expectation that all students would be supported to thrive at the school, with no young person displaced due to the intensity of their

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needs. Within this context, universal screeners and regular assessments of student- and school-level metrics related to school culture, social-emotional wellness, and behavioral incidents and associated contexts were already in place.

For these reasons, this research project made use of these existing structures and resources while looking to increase the intentionality and reflective practice of practitioners, who were enabled as co-researchers. My theory of action held that if I used these meaningful structures for collective learning among co-researcher participants, with special attention to the school principal and family representatives, embedded in real-time data about the school's current culture and climate health, then it would be possible to eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline practices while similarly maintaining an organized and orderly learning environment. To this end, I focused my action and research on working closely with the school's principal, my direct supervisee, and the newly enacted Culture and Climate Committee (C3) to incorporate regular data reviews and short-term action research cycles. My goal was to build a comprehensive approach to student needs (and their resulting behaviors) that appropriately mitigates challenges without resorting to exclusionary practices.

Research Design

I selected participatory action research methodology for this study due to the immense importance of helping practitioners learn through doing as a lever for installing long-lasting change (hunter, emerald, & Martin, 2013; Knowles, 1977). Participatory action research is the second generation of action research, incorporating the principles of Dewey's criteria of experience (1938) and Freire's (1970) generative themes. As such, I felt it would not only increase the likelihood of successful change implementation, but by itself serve an intervention in that change effort, providing a forum by which individuals would be empowered as change

agents, thus fundamentally altering their awareness, regardless of the ultimate outcome of the specific initiative (Freire, 1970; Stringer, 2013).

The attached logic model, Figure 8, outlines the theory of action for this project, as introduced in Chapter 1. In the long term, beyond the scope of the proposed study, the hoped-for impacts of such work would include an increase in the overall wellness of students, their likelihood to succeed in and through high school, and the increased capacity of youth-serving systems to meet the complex and interrelated needs of youth. In the more immediate term, this improvement in the school's culture and climate was the goal and was measured through increases on the school's semiannual SCAI assessment.

Study Population and Participants

The most direct group whose current experiences this study hoped to improve were the Troys and Josephs of Rise Academy, a K-3 charter public school in Tacoma, Washington. As described in more detail in Chapter 3, Rise's students are mostly youth of color living in low-income homes or currently experiencing homelessness. Despite their young age, many have experienced extreme trauma, and the effects of this early exposure have contributed to the development of multiple school-related problems, including emotional dysregulation, impulsivity, hypervigilance, and aggression (Blodgett & Lanigan, 2015). Rise was identified as the site for this study due to the saturation of need within the community, as well as the school leadership's decision to partner with Sequoia in hopes of identifying innovative solutions for the complex problems facing the school's students. The Institutional Review Board approved this study, and a letter to this effect is included in Appendix A.

GOALS

1. Beginning immediately, Rise Academy will welcome all scholars through its doors, eliminating the use of out-of-school suspension or expulsion unless as required by state code.
2. By June, 2018, Rise Academy will ensure the presence of active parent voice (inclusive of the multitude of parent voices at the school) in formal decision-making processes related to school culture, vision or mission. Parents will be empowered as the experts on their children.

INPUTS

Existing Resources:
•Implementing a model currently under study at over 30 schools, incl. through a Federal grant
•Existing project has an Advisory Board w experts in mental health, SWPBS, and special education
•Strong leadership and committed staff
•Experienced academic and nonacademic specialists providing research-based interventions
•Commitment of all staff to eliminate suspension/ expulsion and serve EVERY child

Gaps:
• Uncoordinated , and fragmented services and systems
• Disconnect between families and school staff re: culture and climate goals
• Ongoing, disruptive behaviors interfering with the learning environment

STRATEGIES

Strategy 1.1 Work collaboratively with school and parent leadership to assess the current system of student supports and to create an intervention plan that builds on the particular strengths, challenges, and aspirations of the school community (SCAI assessment, etc.)

Strategy 1.2 Assist in the facilitation and support of the culture and climate committee, empowering this team as co-research participants

Strategy 1.3 Provide group with regular opportunities for reflection and analysis of steps taken to date

Strategy 2 Provide consistent supervision within the context of collaboration and co-research with the school's principal

Strategy 3 Engage in continuous feedback loops, memo-ing, and other reflective practices to incorporate lessons learned about implementation challenges and successes

INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES

•Staff and parents report increased knowledge and skills in their ability to support the diverse needs of their students

•Staff, parents and students (grades 3 and above) report an increased sense of connectedness to the school community

•Staff report that services are more integrated, data driven and youth-centered

•Improvement in school climate as demonstrated by SCAI scores

•Elimination of out-of-school suspension/expulsion

LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

•Increase in student engagement for struggling students, including students with disabilities, as demonstrated by attendance rates and school climate data

•Improved behavior outcomes for struggling students, including students with disabilities, as demonstrated by a decrease in disciplinary referrals and suspensions

•Increase in academic achievement for struggling students, including students with disabilities, as measured by progress assessments and standardized tests

IMPACTS

•Reduction in the number of unnecessary special education referrals

•Local academic and nonacademic provider network with proven capacity to provide high quality, coordinated early intervention best practices is sustained

• System is more integrated, collaborative and data-driven

•Students are on track for high school graduation

• Students are healthy, thriving and succeeding in school

Figure 8. Logic model.

As in any school wishing to effect change within its halls, the most important levers for change at Rise were the adults most closely connected to its community (Elmore, 2005). For this reason, this study appointed willing members of the school's burgeoning Culture and Climate Committee (C3) as co-researcher practitioners, who were enlisted in helping conduct the action research on which this project relied. Chief among the committee members was the school's principal, Jennifer, who was set up to support in facilitating committee meetings, as well as participating in the various data collection and analysis efforts detailed below. Jennifer met with me, her supervisor, at minimum weekly for an hour or more of clinical supervision and collaboration. She was joined on the C3 by representatives of the school's general education and special education teams, one of the mental health therapists, an additional non-instructional staff, and family representatives. These individuals were selected among the wider community at Rise based on their interest and availability to serve on the committee.

Data Collection

In the spirit of qualitative research, this participatory action research project included several different data collection strategies, with an attempt to capture a holistic picture of a complex problem (Creswell, 1998). Borrowing from what Creswell names a social constructivist worldview, this study relied on emerging approaches, open-ended questions, and text and image data. In so doing, the problems encountered were to serve as lessons, coalescing in generative themes that I hoped would lay the foundation for change (Freire, 1970; Stringer, 2013).

Table 3, Metrics for Research Questions, aligns the data collection processes and protocols detailed in this chapter with each of this project's research sub-questions. The subsections help outline each of the data collection tools further.

Table 3

Metrics for Research Questions

Research Question	Data Source (Metrics)	Triangulated With
How do family and staff views of school culture and climate change as they work together toward a common goal?	SCAI Family Interviews Staff Interviews	TIM TFI Image-Based Reflection One-Minute Essays
To what extent does overall family and staff alignment with the school's mission and vision change as the school culture and climate do?	SCAI Family Interviews Staff Interviews	TIM TFI Image-Based Reflection One-Minute Essays
What can the positioning of staff and families as co-researchers reveal about their own practices, as well as their views and attitudes during the change process?	Image-Based Research One-Minute Essays	Reflective Memos
How does engagement in this work inform my identity as a leader for equity?	Reflective Memos	Meta-analysis of all available data tools

Interviews

Interviews are an important part of qualitative research, revealing insights and data not apparent through observation or artifact collection alone (Merriam, 1998). Interviews provide participants with an opportunity to voice their opinions in their own words. When carefully transcribed and coded, they protect from potential interviewer bias and make explicit the thoughts and opinions of diverse constituents. For this project, all interviews commenced with a clear statement of purpose and an outline of expectations, in alignment with the recommendations made by Taylor and Bogdan (1984).

Staff Interviews. The first data component included in this study was the in-person interview. As described in Chapter 3, the Sequoia partnership model which Rise Academy employs includes a semiannual comprehensive assessment of school culture and climate. That assessment includes several components, beginning with an in-person interview with every adult who works on campus, from the principal to the recess supervisor, from the front office administrator to the cafeteria manager. Since the goal of the assessment process is to uncover some fundamental truths about the school's overall health and well-being, the inclusion of multiple voices is an important precursor to conceiving of a holistic plan for the school's forward movement. Aware that – as Miles and Huberman (1994) indicate – a well-structured protocol ensures consistency of information obtained, specific interview questions were developed. These questions were intended to provoke reflection and generate ideas and recommendations for how culture and climate and student services could be improved. These are presented in Figure 9.

At Rise, these interviews were held twice during the course of the year by the principal investigator. Most interviews were conducted with a focus group of 3-5 staff members, controlling for power differentials so that no staff member was placed in a group with his/her

Role
1. Describe your role and how long you have worked here.
2. How is your role connected to the larger goals of the school?
3. How effective do you feel you are able to be in this role?
4. What do you think would make your role more effective?
5. What kind of support do you get in your role (including from leadership/supervisor/PD, etc)? Is it enough?

Referral Process and Student Services
1. How do you determine that a student is struggling academically, and how do you refer them for support?
2. How do you determine that a student is struggling emotionally or behaviorally and how do you refer them for support?
3. How do you tell whether interventions are effective (both for academics/behavior/SE)?

Discipline/School Culture
1. How is behavior handled at this school?
2. Do you feel that it is effective? If not, how do you feel it could be more effective
3. How would you describe the school culture? What improvements, if any do you think could be made? (This includes relationships between students, between students and staff, between staff, and between the school and the outer community)

Figure 9. Staff interview questions.

supervisor, either direct or indirect. Focus group interviews were recorded and transcribed. Summary data was provided to the Culture and Climate Committee (C3) as part of the data analysis process. Results shared did not include any identifying information as to the source of a particular opinion or comment. The actual transcript of the focus groups is being maintained in a locked location and will be destroyed after one year's time. These semi-structured interviews were supplemented by informal engagements with staff in the course of my role as a leader on campus. Those informal engagement included some small-group talks as well as one-to-one conversations.

Family interviews. In addition to interviewing school staff semiannually, parent input was regularly sought. As one strategy for achieving this (additional strategies include participation in the SCAI and the location of family representatives as key members of the C3) a group of 5 families were selected to participate in semiannual focus groups with the principal investigator. These families were selected with attention to representing a variety of voices within the school, including those of families whose students were new to the school as of the 17-18 school year, those who have been with the school since its opening during the 15-16 school year, those whose children have a previous history of suspension/expulsion, and those whose students generally excel in school.

Families were interviewed using the focus group format, with all focus groups recorded as noted above. The semi-structured interview process included a set of starting questions, as well as room for follow-up inquiry to their initial responses. This design allowed for additional responses and follow-up questions, as appropriate (Merriam, 1998). The main themes of the interview protocol included: (a) contextual and demographic characteristics about interviewees and their students; (b) their individual perceptions of the school's culture; (c) their own

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experience with the school's holistic services, disciplinary processes, or other interventions; and, (d) their experience as engaged community members at Rise Academy.

The School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI)

Although already in place and not formally a part of this project, another major component of the initial and ongoing school assessment process undertaken at Rise was a formal survey of students in grades 3 and above (third graders were the highest-grade level at Rise during the year of this study, and were surveyed), parents, and staff regarding the health of the school culture and climate. The National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments (NCSSLE), funded by the U.S. Department of Education, maintains a compendium of valid and reliable surveys, assessments, and scales of school climate that can assist educators in their efforts to formally assess school culture and climate. Sequoia has chosen to use the School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI), a validated tool developed by Dr. John Shindler and his team at Alliance for the Study of School Climate. The SCAI measures eight original dimensions of school culture and climate: Physical Environment, Leadership and Decision Making, Faculty Relations, Student Interactions, Discipline, Learning and Assessment, Attitude and Culture, and Community Relations (Shindler, Jones, Williams, Taylor, & Cadenas, 2011). In partnership with Shindler and his team, Sequoia developed a ninth dimension - Special Education - to include in the surveying process. The SCAI includes a survey for staff, parents, and students and most importantly, has a strong theoretical framework that assumes that schools with a sound culture and climate have a strong "Psychology of Success" (POS) that pervades every aspect of the school. The POS includes three main variables:

- Internal Locus of Control (LOC): This factor is defined by one's sense of internal causality and orientation toward personal responsibility. The more internal our LOC, the more we feel that our destiny is in our own hands.

- Belonging and Acceptance: This factor reflects how much one feels wanted and a part of the group, and how much one likes and accepts themselves as they are. The more one feels accepted and acceptable, the more they are able to express themselves, act authentically, and be fully present to others.

- Growth Mindset: This factor reflects one's ability to view a challenge as an opportunity to learn and grow. Those with a strong growth mindset do not see their performance within a situation as a measure of their innate ability as much as a measure of their investment - better results require more practice.

The theory of POS holds that healthy schools weave these interdependent variables into the fabric of school practice, policy, and process. And these concepts are important in the context of staff and parent experience as well – measuring culture and climate aims to assess the presence and vitality of these three variables for all stakeholders within the school community.

While the SCAI includes about sixty questions organized into the nine dimensions mentioned above, the underlying framework of each question is based on measuring the extent to which the school promotes these three variables within its practices and policies. Questions are organized in an analytic trait scale with scores of 5 representing a strong POS. The long-term goal for schools implementing the Sequoia partnership model is to accomplish a summative score of at least a 4, which represents a school with a sound culture and climate and, in turn, one that promotes students to reach their full social and academic potential.

The SWPBS Tiered Fidelity Index

Given that the major goal of this project was to help Rise move away from "zero tolerance," punitive discipline systems and toward one that would be more positive, instructional, and restorative in nature, the School-wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBS) approach aligned beautifully, while also maintaining the core tenants of a strong Psychology of Success. SWPBS provides a multi-tiered framework that builds a positive school culture and climate by creating clear and consistent behavioral expectations, and a

matching continuum of interventions for students in need of support in meeting these. The SWPBS Tiered Fidelity Index (SWPBS TFI) was created by Dr. Rob Horner and his colleagues at the national Technical Assistance Center on PBIS. The purpose of this tool is to provide a valid and reliable measure of the extent to which a school is implementing the core features of SWPBS. Completion of the TFI produces scores indicating the extent to which Tier One, Tier Two and Tier Three core features are in place. As a general rule, a score of 80% for each Tier One indicator is accepted as a level of implementation that will result in improved student outcomes. Each administration of the TFI provides information that can help school staff create action plans that guide implementation. Schools can quickly identify what core components are not yet in place and use this information to inform their action plan to further improve the behavioral support system at their school.

The Trauma-Informed Matrix

For schools serving communities where significant numbers of students experience the symptoms of chronic stress and trauma, such as Rise, it is imperative that school leaders and staff are trained on trauma-informed education and dedicated to the implementation of its core principles (Blodgett & Lanigin, 2015). To accomplish this, Sequoia's partnering schools use the Trauma-Informed Matrix (see Appendix C), which builds off of the work of the American Institutes for Research (AIR) and is a tool that outlines key domains that constitute a trauma-informed school: Supporting Staff Development, Creating a Safe and Supportive Environment, Adapting Policies, Involving Children and Families, and Assessing and Planning Services and Building Skills. Many measures in this tool overlap with those in both the SCAI and SWPBS, because, once again, these tools are based on general best practices for serving and supporting all students and families in schools. Similarly, many of the steps that schools take to become more

trauma-informed improve the education experience for all members of the community, regardless of trauma histories. By using this tool, schools can identify which practices are already in place, and what next steps should be taken to fully implement a trauma-informed approach.

Reflections

Freire's (1970) concept of praxis flows from the position that action and reflection are indissolubly united: "reflection and action on the world in order to transform it" (p. 43). Similarly, central to this *action* research inquiry is *reflection* – by the co-researcher participants, and by me, the principal investigator.

Image-based reflections. In Prosser's anthology *Image-Based Research* (1998), the author and his contributor, D. Schwartz, quote Paul Byers' 1966 statement: "The camera does not take pictures, people do" (p. 122). The authors further warn: "Like our field notes and other forms of empirical data, photographs may not provide us with unbiased, objective documentation of the social and material world". Yet, they continue: "They can show us characteristic attributes of people, objects and events that often elude even the most skilled wordsmiths" (Prosser, 1998, p. 166).

As co-researcher participants, the volunteer members of the C3 were asked to capture photographic reflections prior to their attendance at each meeting following the first. Participants were asked to bring with them a photograph that represents "unconditional education," based on the PhotoVoice protocol in Appendix D, inspired by the work of Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar and McCann (2005). As the C3 committee meetings commenced, each were asked to share their photo and pen a caption for it, following a protocol. In addition to accessing a reflective muscle that may not be consciously called into being by a linguistic task alone, I had

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hoped that asking for ongoing image-based reflections allowed for equity of voice among the committee members. By design, the C3 consists of high-powered individuals within the school community – its principal, its Masters-level therapists and teachers, myself – alongside others who have commonly been left out of such decision-making forums, including family members and Bachelor's level "classified" staff (Goldstein, 2014). According to Taylor, PhotoVoice and other image-based reflections have been eyed for their potential to "even out the power dynamic between researcher and the researched" (as cited in Prosser, 1998, p. 89). Allowing all participants to share their reflections not only through formal writing may engage individuals who might not normally be granted access to offer their input without criticism of self or by others.

One-minute essays. While image-based reflections were collected at each C3 meeting, an additional one-minute essay protocol was used at every other meeting as an alternate form for collecting reflections. The one-minute essay protocol (see Appendix E) allowed for participants to either write (on paper or electronically) or audio-record their one-minute response to one of several potential prompts selected by the principal investigator:

1. One example of our school culture is…

2. At Rise, every child is…

3. My ability to influence the school culture at school is…

The ability for participants to choose whether to write or speak their responses aimed to achieve equity of voice and ensure every member could contribute confidently. This intentionally attempted to equalize potential power dynamics in the room, a known strategy for effective school-home collaboration (Henderson et al., 2011). Likewise, offering a choice for participation honors and engages the adult learner (Knowles, 1977).

Reflective memos. After each meeting with the C3, and following each interview provided, I recorded memos detailing my experience with the research project. With only a few exceptions, these memos were typed, though on four occasions I audio-recorded memos and then transcribed these in order to allow for analysis through coding.

Data Analysis

The success of this project relied on consistent data analysis and response, key decision points in action research (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The very core of this project relied on re-norming participants' basic orientation to problem identification and solution seeking with an eye toward identifying, striving to solve, and continually returning to revisit critical problems (Copland, 2003). In so doing, data analysis for this project began in conjunction with data collection, with examples drawn out and emerging themes identified at their earliest appearance in order to inform further action and support micro-pivots as new truths were uncovered and opportunities for momentum presented themselves.

The specific analytical tools used relied heavily on coding methodology, beginning with the identification of common themes and pursuing a constant comparative analysis through further coding and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The coding process began with open coding of interviews, one-minute essays, and reflective memos, proceeding toward selective coding as additional data were gathered and more nuanced themes began to emerge (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

While coding assisted in analyzing interviews and reflections, different approaches were needed to analyze the various assessments associated with the Sequoia model more globally: the SCAI, the SWPBS TFI and the TIM. The SCAI results revealed the aggregate responses of each participant group – students in grades 3 and above, parents, and staff – in response to each

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question in the nine available dimensions. Responses provided the mean average of participants' choices, using an analytical trait scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest and denoting the highest available alignment with the characteristics of the psychology of success (POS). Meanwhile, the TFI and the TIM both include a rubric. For all three measures, an analysis was completed to identify areas of relative strength and weakness with regards to the dimensions being assessed. In addition, for the SCAI, consideration was given to those areas in which the greatest misalignment existed – that is, those areas in which there were noticeable gaps between the perceptions of one participant group (be they students, parents or staff) and one or more others.

Study Limitations

As the school's Executive Director and someone who has poured her blood, sweat and tears into the place in order to ensure its success, I knew from the onset that I would be far from an impartial observer of change at the school. Rather, I was a participant in this study both as its principal researcher and as a community member. To control for potential bias, I built in regular check-ins with trusted colleagues and collaborators further removed from the project, including two individuals with whom I was co-authoring a book on Sequoia's partnership model and who have facilitated its implementation at dozens of school, and with my cohort members and professors through East Carolina University. Keeping reflective memos of my experience also helped me document instances of potential bias as these arose.

The aim of this project was to study, in detail, one aspect of one school's quest for one specific type of transformational change. The study was limited by its scope and its short timeline, as well as by the size of the school, which only had an estimated 200 students enrolled at the start of the 2017-2018 school year. In order to generalize the findings of this work,

additional studies, including replication studies, would have to be employed. Because this was a single site study, attention to dependability and confirmability was vital to this work.

Ethical Considerations

The security of the data collected and the confidentiality of participants were of the utmost importance in this study. Pseudonyms were utilized for the school, the Sequoia organization, and each of the study's participants. All primary sources (photographs, video and audio recordings, written memos and reflections, etc.) were kept in a secure, locked location in the principal investigator's residence. None of the material collected was or will be replicated in any way.

In order for the researcher to conduct the study, a formal application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board, a body which closely monitors proposed studies to assure they meet the highest of ethical standards prior to commencing. Once approved, each study's proposed participant was given the chance to review a thorough consent form (see Appendix F), which clearly outlined that participation was voluntary, could be terminated at any time at the request of the participant, exposed them to no tangible risk or benefit, and that every attempt to maintain confidentiality would be made. When the consent form being presented, time was provided for any questions. No participant were coerced to sign prior to understanding the full detail of their proposed participation, and participants were expressly told they are able to opt out of the study at any future juncture.

Summary

This project's orientation as participatory action research was more than expedient. It revealed a fundamental belief system and worldview of its principal investigator, who cannot be excluded entirely from the research regardless of any precautions taken to reduce bias (Creswell,

1998; Herr & Anderson, 2015). As Kemmis and McTaggart (1987) argue, the selected participatory action research methodology was itself symbolic of the wish for this project to further an equity lens, purposely positioning self and community at its core.

Through the cyclical collection and analysis of data, the co-researcher participants in this study continuously refined their approach to improving Rise Academy's school culture. As principal investigator, I collected artifacts along the way, privileging multiple opportunities for equitable voice through a combination of interviews, image-based reflections and one-minute essays, and by the careful coding of these primary sources to uncover hidden truths that may enhance the school's ability to serve its hardest to serve students, so that like Joseph's Ford Elementary, it remained a school where, "All means all."

CHAPTER 5: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE ONE

Prelude

When we last left Joseph, it was the moment right after the moment when his team decided the only way he would be asked to leave the school was by successfully graduating fifth grade. More appropriately, we left the moment after Joseph's principal stood strong in reaffirming her commitment to his education. Even in the face of Joseph's intense struggles, she ensured that the team would not flinch in continuing to work with him.

And so it happened that ten-year-old Joseph brought a school community together to design an entirely new and individualized program within the mainstream environment. Within days, the team had created a plan for him. Days later, the plan changed as we learned our initial thinking was inadequate. Far from a direct route, Joseph's behavioral change ebbed and flowed – two steps forward and anywhere between one and four steps back. This pattern repeated until, by the spring awards ceremony, Joseph received awards and earned a coveted spot as the Principal's "right-hand man" and emcee of the show. In the world of urban education, it was a true "happily ever after." It was exactly the sort of story that inspired this one and my decision to translate successful examples of student and school success into graduate research, hoping to be able to create similar stories for similar Josephs, including those at Rise Academy. Of course, there are many different types of stories, and as I would soon learn, Rise's was just beginning.

Process

The first cycle of my action research was heavy on the action. By design, it was to be one unified cycle. In reality, there became a very clear dividing point in the cycle though not one orchestrated by me to aid in research. In the pages that follow, I describe the major events and activities that made up these two halves, etched into my psyche forever as Before and After.

Before (August-October 2017)

The onset of my project necessarily coincided with the start of a new school year, lending me the fortunate opportunity to launch during the summer lead-up to the first day of school. As such, my focus was clear: build shared understanding and investment in undertaking meaningful school culture work from the start, then spend the following weeks slowly and quietly planning, individually, with my lead co-researcher school principal Jennifer, and eventually with my co-researcher practitioners. Setting aside the first two days of staff's time to host a Community Learning Event (CLE) was a public way to stake a claim and announce with intention that we were undertaking culture work. From there, weekly meetings and data collection efforts with my principal co-researcher led up to the inaugural meeting of the Culture and Climate Committee, or C3, the group with whom I would be collaborating moving forward. Table 4 shows the schedule of the three main research activities from August to October of 2017. In the subsections that follow, I look at each of these individually beginning with the August CLE (see Figure 10).

August Community Learning Exchange. Appropriately enough, as referenced in Table 4, my research project officially kicked off during an annual gathering we call Kick-Off Week, a week in mid-August when all Sequoia staff throughout Washington State – some 65 people as of August 2017 – join together for several days of professional development and relationship building prior to the start of the school year. To mark the start of 2017-2018, we welcomed our staff back for a two-day Community Learning Exchange (CLE) co-facilitated by Lynda Tredway from the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) and Dr. Matthew Militello from East Carolina University. A Community Learning Exchange is a professional learning forum that brings community constituents together in a space where hierarchy has been intentionally flattened and leadership thoughtfully distributed in order to facilitate the transfer of the

Table 4

Schedule of Research Activities, August-October 2017

Activity	Aug 14-18	Aug 21-25	Aug 28 -Sep 1	Sep 4-8	Sep 11-15	Sep 18-22	Sep 25-29	Oct 2-6	Oct 9-13	Oct 16-20	Oct 23-27	Oct 30- Nov 3
August Community Learning Event	*											
Co-Planning with Jennifer	*	*	*		*	*		*	*	*	*	*
Inaugural C3 Meeting											*	

Research Activity: August Community Learning Exchange (CLE)
Activity Description: Hosted a CLE for all regional Sequoia staff to practice embodying our espoused values in our actions and interactions prior to the start of the school year.
Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, participant evaluations, artifacts of work completed (metaphorical representation of gracious space; physical embodiment of agency values; direct communication/warm demander feedback exercises)

Figure 10. August CLE summary.

community's own wisdom and strengths to solve their most entrenched problems (see www.communitylearningexchange.org). As one of my colleagues commented on an evaluation form, as we transitioned back from summer and into another year working to right historical and systematic wrongs with urgency and fire, the CLE served as a "reawakening and reconnection" (anonymous CLE evaluation forms, 2017). By design, the CLE focused our attention inward on our personal motivations for our work in schools before pivoting outward as we built consensus around how we would work as a team to embody our values in our partnerships with different schools and community-based organizations.

Following two days of intentional team learning, as shown in Figures 11 and 12, each smaller program within our region set off to prepare for the start of the year at its respective campus. At Rise Academy, the elementary charter school in its third year of founding, this meant readying classrooms and hallways for students' returns, shoring up systems (token economy, office discipline referrals, etc.) and routines (dismissal procedures, bathrooms, hallway rules, etc.), and continuing with professional training and team-building. Now that school was heading into session, I was ready to formally launch my second research activity: co-planning with Jennifer, the school principal, as summarized in Figure 13.

Co-planning with Jennifer. A couple of frenzied weeks later, the shoring up of routines at the school seemed to have paid off. Students' first days were marked with joy and excitement. They ran from the school bus to the building, then reunited excitedly with their siblings and friends at the end of the first day to share their adventures. The school's new routines made for calm hallways and orderly classrooms. For me, this translated into on-time graduate school assignments and hopeful memos, including this entry from September 7, 2017: "Could it be? A calm and orderly start to a school year at Rise?? It feels good just walking into the building!
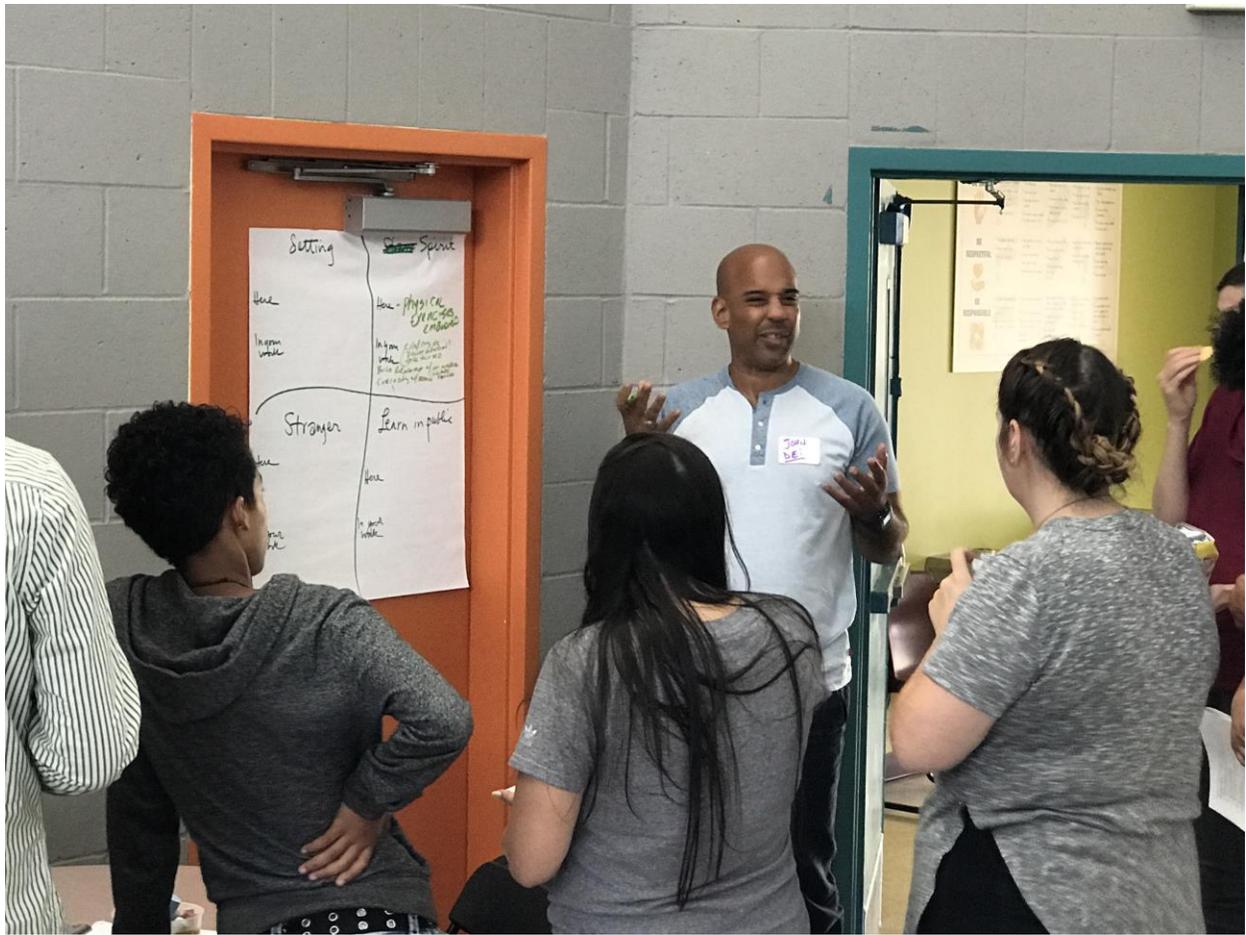
Figure 11. Learning in public at the August CLE.

Figure 12. Unconventional classroom at the August CLE.

Research Activity: Co-Planning Sessions with Principal Co-Researcher Participant (Jennifer)

Activity Description: Held weekly co-planning sessions along with weekly clinical supervision meetings with Jennifer, the school leader at Rise and the principal co-researcher participant I had planned to collaborate with, intending to share leadership over the research with her to ensure sustainability after my engagement with the school faded away. During these sessions, we discussed overall school culture and climate, planned for and administered the SCAI assessment, defined our C3 committee membership, and co-created the agenda for the inaugural C3 retreat.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, meeting notes, SCAI results, agenda drafts

Figure 13. August-October co-planning sessions summary.

After our walkthrough today, I also feel more confident I can pass off a lot more to Jennifer and be able to guide from the side rather than direct" (Research Memo, 2017).

I took the strong start to the school year as a clear signal to enact my previous theory of action: to step back and allow the school's principal and my lead co-researcher, Jennifer, to operate independently. As I released responsibility from much of the daily leadership at Rise, I sat and scheduled weekly times in Jennifer's and my schedule for us to meet not only for our weekly clinical supervision but also to co-plan the culture and climate work we had laid out for the year. Beyond availing myself to Jennifer for our weekly meetings, I trusted her status as a veteran leader and largely immersed myself in other regional projects, largely affording Jennifer the latitude to run the school as she saw fit. I was overwhelmed with joy to be spending time building capacity and systems alignment across the region, and it felt good. "I can't remember the last time I took longer to plan for a meeting than the meeting itself! And it's Still SEPTEMBER!!" (Research Memo, 2017).

I suppose I could have predicted it the moment I typed that memo, because by my weekly meeting with Jennifer two days later, on September 14, the honeymoon had begun to fade. Within the next few weeks, it became even more clear that the *novelty* of new systems, spaces and routines had played a significant role in the school's strong start. These first indications were slow to come – as early as that September 14 meeting I began casually noting, "It was a productive but somewhat unfulfilling session; I left feeling as though we discussed business item after business item but left out the heart of the story – why?" (Research Memo, 2017). I may not have had a formal answer, but anecdotally, what began to emerge in my weekly meetings was a pattern in which students grew accustomed to the school's new routines, and as they did, they became more comfortable testing their limits. And as they did that, they learned that while the

adults at school had spent meaningful time creating strong schoolwide systems, they had not invested the necessary time planning for contingencies, such as what to do when a student did not follow these. What began with a handful of students testing the limits and discovering none were in place snowballed into many students engaging in unexpected behaviors for hours on end, as well-intentioned but exhausted staff struggled to keep up. The calm hallways of early September were increasingly becoming preferred places for students who were finding these more motivating than their classrooms during learning activities. Some of the once-orderly classrooms turned into classrooms where teachers played "whack-a-mole" with one behavior at a time, while others escalated just out of sight.

At first, these weekly supervision meetings with Jennifer were my strongest indication that the school culture was deteriorating. I did not witness the change in hallway and classroom behaviors in my comings and goings from campus, nor did I intentionally seek out additional perspectives. As I began to see things that seemed out of place, I was slow to act. In an October 10, 2017 memo, I wrote, "The energy was different today. I really couldn't tell though: is that because it's October and she's exhausted and pessimistic, or has the culture eroded further than she's letting on? She also hasn't sent out the SCAI [the semiannual school culture and climate survey the school participates in] although that might just be a time-of-year thing." (Research Memo, 2017). In our clinical supervision meetings, I asked Jennifer clarifying questions about the school's functioning and the delay in meeting certain agreed-upon timelines and offered guidance, resources and support. I generally left our interactions feeling reassured things were moving, though in retrospect I can say some small things felt off. The growing spot of peeling paint in the office where students waited to have a conversation with Jennifer after an incident of misbehavior was one; the decreased enrollment another. I ignored these, rationalizing that they

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were emblems of the concerns I had had all along, concerns that to that point had proven unnecessary. I wrote, "While I often applaud myself for being able to take multiple perspectives, it seems that I painted the role of principal with a permanent marker. I need to learn how to see Jennifer – really see her! – as a leader, rather than try to fold her into a mold that isn't hers" (Research Memo, 2017).

During my scheduled planning time with Jennifer at Rise, I had set out to utilize a facilitative coaching approach, relying on questions and reframing statements to empower Jennifer to act independently (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2001). This approach led me to list out a number of actions for Jennifer to take, and over a series of weeks, to notice that she had not completed these. When by late September it became clear that she still had not independently addressed any of the actions we had agreed upon, I stepped in to help Jennifer more directly, beginning with the administration of the School Climate Assessment Instrument, the SCAI, an annual measure of school climate through the eyes of all staff, families, and students in grades 3 or above. Jennifer had been scheduled to give the assessment sooner but shared that the start of the year prevented her plans. We tackled it together and in our co-planning sessions began digging into the results while co-creating the agenda for the year's first Culture and Climate Committee (C3) meeting – a cornerstone of my research. Albeit a few weeks later than anticipated and with more hands-on support from me than intended, we were ready for the inaugural C3 meeting (summarized in Figure 14), a retreat to comb through the SCAI data together and refine our annual implementation plan!

Inaugural C3 meeting. From my planning sessions with Jennifer and our initial dive into the SCAI survey data, I walked into the C3 meeting we had co-designed with a renewed sense of urgency for shifting the approach to student interactions at Rise from caring but permissive to

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Research Activity: Inaugural C3 Retreat

Activity Description: Facilitated the inaugural C3 (Culture and Climate Committee; co-researcher practitioners) meeting of the year, with agenda co-created with principal co-researcher Jennifer. During the meeting, held as a retreat, C3 members pulled out themes from raw survey data on stakeholders' perceptions of culture and climate. After culling themes, the team arranged these into priority buckets in order to define areas for strategic focus for the remainder of the year.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, participant evaluations, meeting agenda, meeting minutes, SCAI survey results, artifacts of work completed (post-it themes; priority buckets)

Figure 14. Inaugural C3 retreat summary.

high care, high structure. In those final planning sessions with Jennifer, after we had scrambled to administer the survey and began reviewing the results, suddenly the anecdotal pangs of concern I had felt crystallized into a full picture – and one well deserving of concern and urgent action. In reviewing the results in preparation for the retreat, three things had become increasingly clear to me and would soon alter the trajectory of this project: (1) Families, staff and students were extraordinarily concerned about school culture and safety; (2) The level of concern was far larger than I had ascertained; and (3) There were sufficient data to show that Jennifer was not well-equipped to move the dial.

Until that point, I had developed some sense that the school's approach to student behavior needed some improvement, but only in the days leading up to the year's first C3 did I began to internalize the level to which this was true. In my memos, I regretted the oversight, "How did I miss this? I had plenty of clues… I did no triangulating whatsoever?!" (Research Memo, 2017). Simultaneously, I still had faith in moving forward as planned, even seeing the timing as fortuitous, "Well, if I was going to find out that I had no idea what the school's culture was, at least it was days away from the first C3 meeting and a year and a half long research project!" (Research Memo, 2017). Sure enough, the timing aligned nicely; the year's first C3 was being held as a four-hour retreat so that committee members could go through a process of coding SCAI data together and defining the year's big culture and climate priorities. There was reason for concern, I acknowledged, but there was also cause for hope. In my memo, I wrote, "The practice of co-creating this agenda with Jennifer as my principal co-researcher has had so much secondary benefit! Going into this retreat, I feel as though we are moving to the same beat and ready to tackle school culture [and climate with transparency] and grit!" (Research Memo, 2017).

In the end, careful pre-planning aside, the retreat did not last four hours. The committee members stayed for five. Together, using the raw SCAI data and over a thousand post-it notes, we drew out themes from each subgroup's (parents, staff, students) response to questions on nine domains of school culture. Once we identified all the individual themes we could pull out, we worked collaboratively to arrange these into 'mega-theme' buckets, each in turn defining a priority area in our plan for participatory action research that year (see Figure 15). The five hours we spent flew by, and .at the end, we were still far from where we had anticipated. Yet, I felt hopeful. Despite the sinking reality that the school culture at Rise was shakier than initially anticipated, I felt as though I was surrounded by a powerful group of allies. Confronted with graph after graph affirming the level of need at the school, the C3 members did not flinch away or cast blame but leaned in and offered insight. In a memo I wrote after the retreat, I reflected, "I had never signed up for 'easy' research, and now that we are here, I feel satisfied. There are real problems, and we are ready to roll our sleeves up and get to work" (Research Memo, 2017). Little did I know it, but real work was about to find me.

After (November-December 2017)

> *"The circus arrives without warning. No announcements precede it.*
>
> *It is simply there, when yesterday it was not" (Morgenstern, 2016).*

By its design, the second half of the fall semester was to be a continuation of its first, with only a second Community Learning Exchange (CLE) to punctuate it. In practice, things shook out differently, and rather than continuing a pattern with Jennifer as my lead co-researcher, I accepted a less facilitative and more directive role in steering the school's culture. The changes in my leadership actions can be seen in Table 5, which shows a de-emphasis of co-planning with Jennifer coinciding with a sharp climb in efforts focused on providing direct

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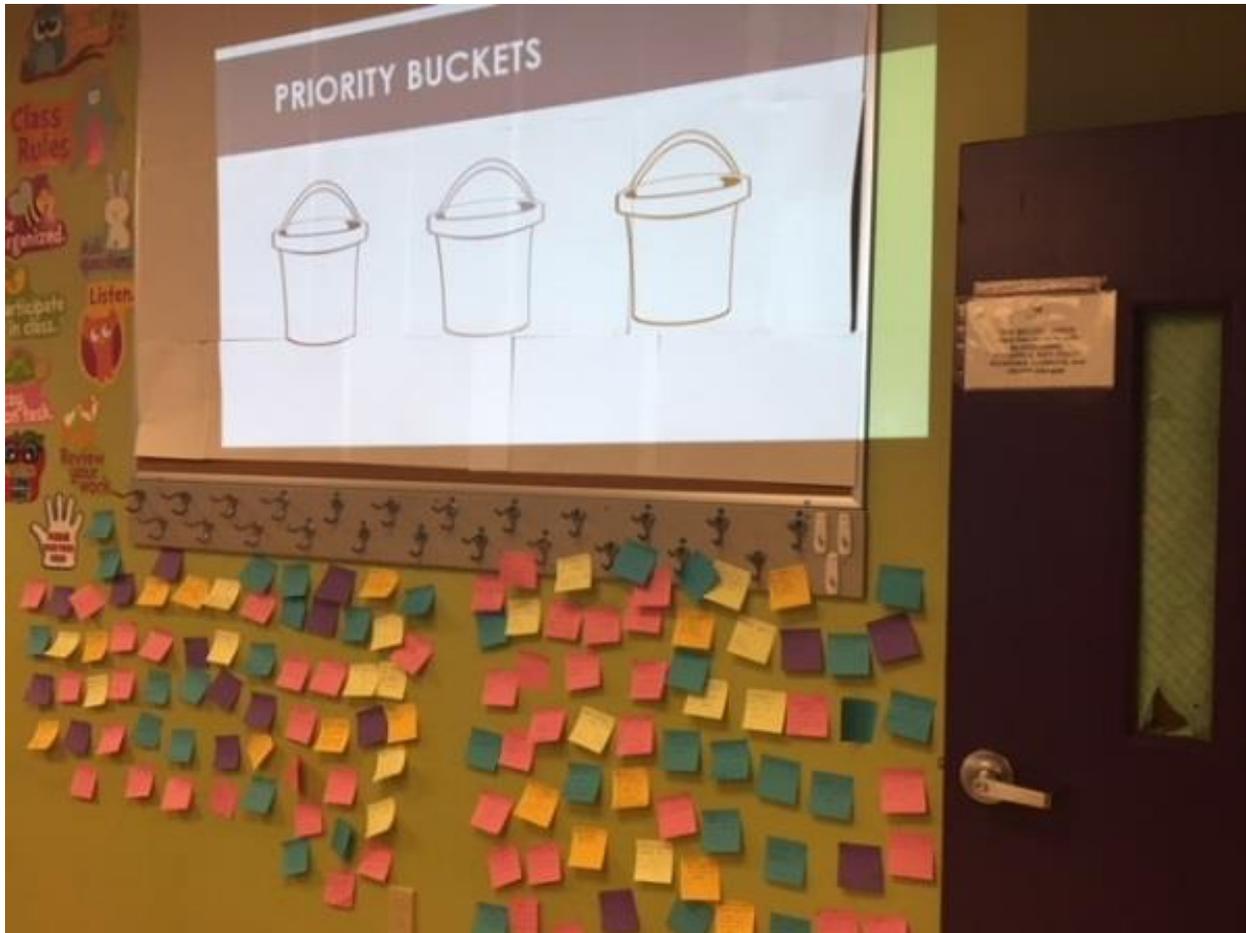
Figure 15. C3 retreat – Coding survey data and sorting into priority buckets.

Table 5

Schedule of Research Activities, November-December 2017

Activity	Nov 6-10	Nov 13-17	Nov 20-24	Nov 27-Dec 1	Dec 4-8	Dec 11-15
Direct Leadership Support	*	*	*	*	*	*
November Community Learning Exchange	*					
C3 Meeting		*				*
Clinical Supervision with Jennifer	*	*		*	*	*
Co-Planning with Jennifer	*				*	

leadership at the school site. The next subsection, summarized in Figure 16, will begin to share what turned my world around.

Direct leadership support. About a week after the inaugural C3 meeting, my research met a new variable. I became aware of a significant ethics violation initiated by Jennifer, the principal, and another member of her leadership team. I was not the only one on notice – the actions of their school leaders both directly and indirectly impacted many of the staff on campus and the entire building was abuzz as more information continuously came to light. Moreover, the situation laid bare a whole host of school culture problems which I had failed to see – preexisting perceptions of Jennifer abusing her power (regularly ordering items for herself on the school credit card, engaging in secretive behaviors, giving preferential treatment to certain members of the leadership team and staff, revealing confidential information, etc.); not checking her implicit biases in interactions with coworkers of certain racial groups, leading to microaggressions and what at least one supervisee believed crossed the line into hostile work environment territory; not effectively addressing critical areas of need at the school; and in general seeming to "hide" from her coworkers and students' families (notes from one-to-one staff conversations, 2017).

The school culture required urgent attention and as researcher but primarily practitioner, I snapped into action, initiating a new stream of work that had not been a planned portion of my research by immersing myself in a deep way in the school's day-to-day functioning. I had hoped my research would influence school culture by influencing leader practices. The data made itself clear: my research, and the school's wellness, rested on enacting a new theory of change, and quickly.

I worked with the school's Board of Directors, Sequoia's executive leaders and Human Resources Director, Jennifer, the other involved leader, and multiple other involved stakeholders.

Research Activity: Direct Leadership Support

Activity Description: In addition to increasing my presence on campus as a daily support to staff and families due to rising concerns about school culture, the discovery regarding Jennifer's inappropriate actions fueled my decision to meet individually with each staff member, codify priorities based on what I heard, and share these first with the leadership team and then with the staff as a whole to ensure we were on the same page.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, one-on-one conversation notes, thematic coding, meeting agendas and notes.

Figure 16. November-December direct leadership support summary.

Within days, I increased my time on campus from once a week for a couple of hours to 15 or more hours per week. Among my first tasks, I spent hours holding one-to-one conversations with each staff member on campus to learn more about their experiences at Rise and their needs in contending with the present situation. Meanwhile, I also supported Jennifer – who it was decided should remain in her position at least for the time being – both by trying to repair her relationships with staff with whom her actions caused harm and more generally by stepping in to help provide more assistance in leading the school, as my one-on-one interviews revealed multiple areas of critical need.

As I met with people and helped create plans to address the school's areas of growth, a final decision regarding Jennifer's continued employment hung in the air. In one of my memos, I wrote, "I feel paralyzed! The [SCAI/C3] assessment I did of the school before was a façade. It didn't even touch on its real issues. I've been studying a school that doesn't exist!" (Research Memo, 2017). I may have had the SCAI survey results to guide my assessment of the school's needs before, but now I was confronted with a school that was far from what it initially revealed itself to be. I spent time analyzing the data I had collected from my 26 individual meetings with staff members and focused in on several recurring themes. I let each staff member know that I would listen to their concerns and then within a week teach back what I had heard at an all-staff meeting, to ensure that I had captured what was most important to them. And so, as I collected information from staff and spent time coding it into subcategories, I gathered Jennifer and the remaining members of the leadership team to align on the main points I had heard and agree on five overarching goals for the school in the coming weeks. After agreeing to these, we met with the school team as a whole and shared what we were planning. We were largely met with agreement and appreciation, though also benefited from thoughtful feedback that helped us shift

some of what we had envisioned in response to follow-up feedback from staff. In the following section I turn my attention from responsive engagements with staff, such as the one-to-one meetings I held in the wake of that fall's leadership incident, to planned engagements, namely the November CLE (see Figure 17).

November Community Leadership Exchange. The swelling seas at Rise notwithstanding, we were now onto early November and my regional leadership team and I began planning our second Community Leadership Exchange (CLE) of the year, when staff from across schools and community-based programs would reunite after a fall spent at their individual sites or assignments. While on one hand, the air of uncertainty left by the hitherto unresolved ethics violation at Rise Academy cast a cloud over the CLE day, it also served as a catalyst for folks to engage from a place of vulnerability and risk-taking. Said one participant as she grabbed me by the arm on her way out, "I NEEDED this." In my memo at the end of the day I wrote, "People were feeling raw when they came in and it unleashed into an incredibly productive, honest, and transformative day of learning and teamwork. I am inspired! I've been at a loss of how to take collective action in the midst of this debacle, but today proved to me that it's exactly the time to do it!" (Research Memo, 2017). With a day focused on cultural humility and the working conditions that enable it, we were able to plan meaningful opportunities for our team to join together and raise their spirits. It seemed at last we may have begun to move forward. Wrote one participant in a follow-up email,

> "I wanted to say that this one was of the BEST all staff trainings that we have had. I'm not quite sure why, but it just felt good. The "I Am" assignment was also really powerful. It touched everyone (those of us that love doing these sort of activities, and those that felt they were being pushed to their growing edge). The Critical Friends protocol was also really useful. Our group got really deep and it was amazing to lead a group through problem solving a really difficult situation." (participant email, November 11, 2017)

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Research Activity: November Community Learning Exchange

Activity Description: Reunited all Sequoia staff region-wide for a day steeped in an examination of how cultural humility, professional boundaries, and direct communication further our ability to serve as change agents in the lives of youth.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memo, participant evaluations, participant post-training emails, artifacts of work completed (I Am From poems)

Figure 17. November CLE summary.

Figures 18 and 19 capture some of the day's learnings. Figure 18 is an artifact from an exercise that allowed each team member to identify their personal work style, sharing with others who chose a similar style and then presenting to the group as a whole. Figure 19 shows a mapping activity that asked participants to reflect on the current embodiment of the organization's core values, alongside other steps that could be taken to strengthen these. Both of these artifacts, and others, would make their way into the next C3 meetings, to which we turn our attention next, as summarized in Figure 20.

November and December C3 meetings. In the midst of the somewhat public upheaval that Jennifer's ethical lapse had created at the school, there were still committed C3 members, including families, who were ready to engage in the participatory action research we had defined together during our inaugural retreat. During the November convening of the C3 team, the group brought their first PhotoVoice artifacts, digital photographs they had captured that showed their perception of Rise Academy. The team used these as part of the check-in process and used a Why Wheel teaming protocol to connect the responses to value statements about the school's mission and vision. The Why Wheel is a version of Senge's Five Whys (1990) created by my colleagues at Sequoia and now in use across the country by child-serving agencies. Like Senge's Five Whys, the Why Wheel protocol invites stakeholders to work together as they seek to identify hitherto invisible drivers that may be influencing a problem at hand. The Why Wheel looks specifically at the nested ecologies in which any problem exists (from the micro to the macro), evidence to the Sequoia approach's steeping in Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theory.

Also during the November session, the C3 delved into the most urgent of the three priority buckets it had selected, (1) restoring a sense of school safety. To this end, the team reviewed a list of concrete milestones that might demonstrate stabilization in a school's climate

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1.) Reflective, Inclusive, Observant, Flexible, Supportive n/o enabling, humility, Collaborative Peace Maker, Agreeable, Emo available

2.) Indecisive, Enabling, Passive, Dishonest, Indirect, Cowardly hyper critical, Frustrated w/ other energies

3.) decisive, Strong, Result oriented Not Pushy, listeners, emotionally detached wider perspective,

4.) we're WITH them, bear w/ us Diplomatic, Adaptable

Figure 18. Artifact from group reflection on work styles.
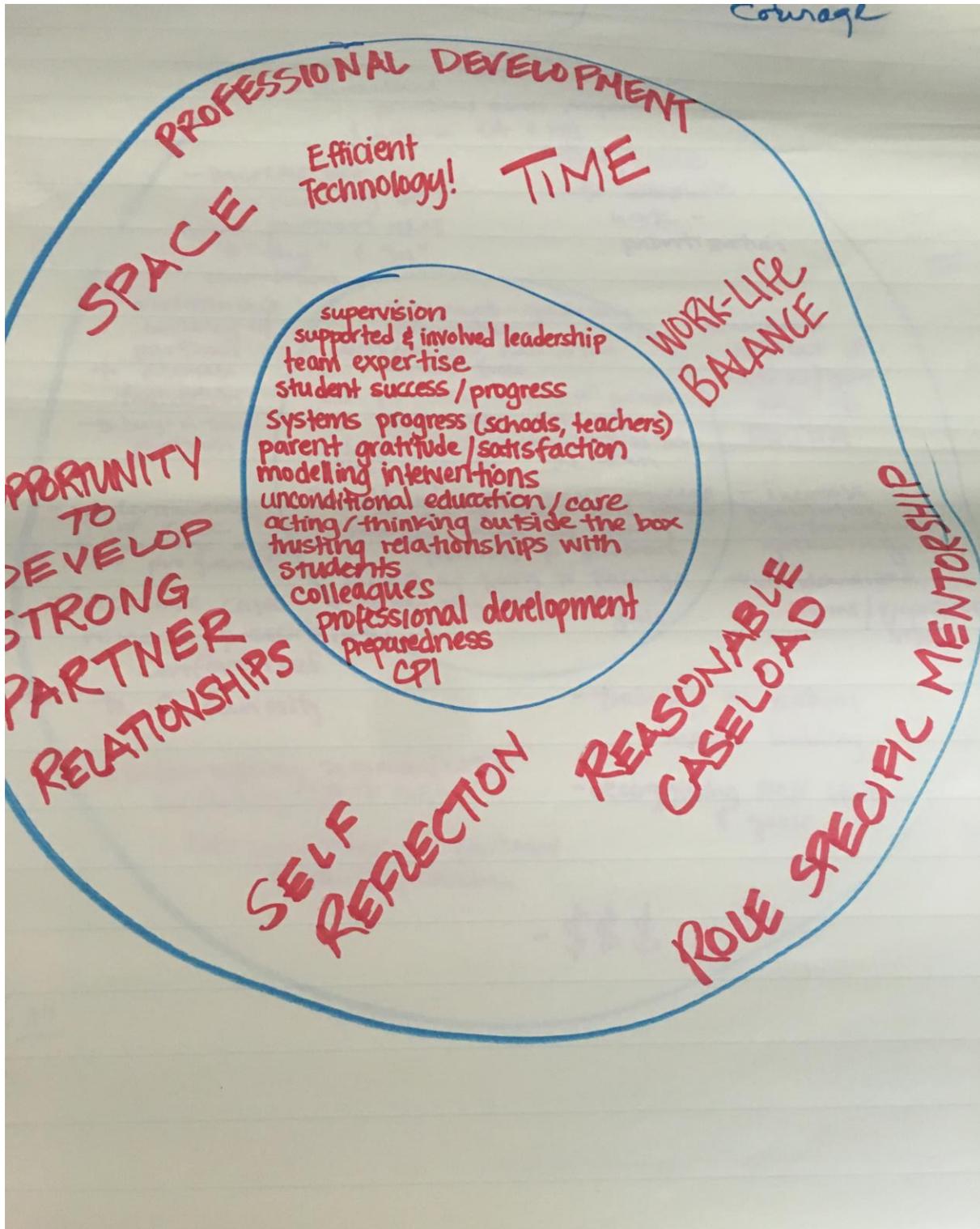
Figure 19. Artifact from group reflection on core values.

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Research Activity: November and December C3 Meetings

Activity Description: Facilitated two C3 meetings, in conjunction with Jennifer though with less common planning among us. Participants brought PhotoVoice artifacts to both sessions and conducted one-minute essays during the November session. The focus was on codifying the priorities we had identified into actionable steps to be taken.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, participant evaluations, meeting artifacts (agendas, PhotoVoice submissions, C3-created stabilization milestones for Rise Academy, one-minute essays, minutes)

Figure 20. November and December C3 meeting summary.

and contextualized it for use at Rise Academy, agreeing that this would take precedence over the other priorities, (2) increasing school pride, and (3) increasing staff wellness. Before parting ways, C3 members generously created one-minute essays reflecting on their time together. In my memo following the meeting, I reflected, "I feel so inspired by this group of people and the energy and flow among them. The fact that everyone spoke both so honestly and so positively about where we are as a community gives me so much hope! I just wish I had more time to plan." (Research Memo, 2017).

During the December C3 meeting, which was only attended by four of the seven participants due to illnesses, the team again shared their PhotoVoice artifacts, and spent the time working in subgroups on two of the priority projects: safety and school pride. Both the participant evaluations and my memos revealed that the session was not effective, with folks enjoying spending time together but not feeling as though we walked in or out with a concrete plan that advanced our work. While this generative work was ongoing, I was also continuing to meet with Jennifer, although not always as focused on co-planning research activities as I had thought. Figure 21 summarizes the work we did together during the months of November and December.

Continued meetings with Jennifer. Despite a hopeful end to the November CLE, within days of returning to the rhythm of the school year, more concerning feedback regarding Rise's leadership team – predominantly Jennifer – continued flooding in. I still met weekly with her to discuss concerns as they came up. For her part, Jennifer authentically tried to change her behavior at least in the ways she was comfortable with like embracing direction or feedback and going out of her way to avoid the same pitfalls she made earlier in the year. In my meeting notes,

Research Activity: Continued Meetings with Jennifer

Activity Description: Met frequently with Jennifer, with focus shifting away from co-planning for C3 meetings (a responsibility I had assumed more control over) and toward concrete steps needed to ensure the success of the school on a daily basis.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, meeting notes, artifacts (co-created meeting agendas, co-written emails, co-designed intervention plans, etc.)

Figure 21. Continued meetings with Jennifer summary.

I marked down three different times when I praised her efforts to grow and repair her relationships with team members. Yet, concerns continued to mount. While she avoided repeating her exact missteps, she did not fully generalize the feedback more broadly. Some staff referenced seeing her engage in another questionable act (left undescribed for confidential personnel reasons); she denied it. In my clinical supervision meetings with her, which now increased in length and frequency, I became increasingly directive as to specific steps she should take day by day. We rarely spent our time together co-planning for future C3 meetings now; instead, I was helping her think through actions large and small, from messages during the morning staff huddle to staffing plans for specific students or grade levels. Throughout the next two C3 meetings and multiple weeks, uncertainty was rampant. Jennifer and I were in contact daily; yet, no final decision had been made about what to do long-term with the school's leaders, with considerations ranging from the impact on families, for whom Jennifer was the fourth leader in as many years, to those on staff, particularly given the frankness with which some expressed their reservations about continuing to work with a leader who had betrayed their trust.

Finally, with only days left until the winter break, a decision was made. Jennifer attended a restorative session with staff at which she addressed her behaviors honestly and emotionally, and expressed her apologies. At the same session, we communicated to the team that she would remain at the school through the end of the school year with me on site to provide direct support at least half of the time each school week. Meanwhile, the other leadership team member involved in the incident would transition into a different role away from Rise come January. With some progress made through the restorative session and a lot more work to be done, we headed into 2018.

Analysis and Implications

There was no denying the frenetic nature of the school year to date. Surprising then was the remarkable consistency among the themes lifted both through the intentional research activities I set out to conduct and through the responsive action taken in the aftermath of Jennifer's ethics violation. The planned activities included engaging a culture and climate committee (C3), meeting weekly with the school principal as a partner in designing and conducting the work that team would be responsible for, and introducing new tools and structures for reflection and collaboration. In action, these relatively light-touch action research engagements were overshadowed by a far greater number of hours of unplanned yet intensive onsite support, including in the direct leadership of the school. Despite the variety of tasks which I was engaged in at Rise as a function both of my research and my professional responsibility, a surprisingly small number of key elements rose to the surface again and again. I highlight four here, in Figure 22, and throughout the remainder of the chapter: (1) Nothing comes before restoring a sense of safety, on which any other success can be predicated; (2) Strong alignment around the school's mission and intentional relationship building served as available protective factors in upholding the school community through some of its great trials. (3) Under the direct modeling of their leader, the team developed unproductive coping skills to manage the work-related stress and trauma they were facing; only once these were explicitly acknowledged and addressed did forward movement intensify. And, (4) where a strengths-based approach and a common purpose have been nurtured, healing may be possible even after great harm has been caused, though shortcuts are not available.
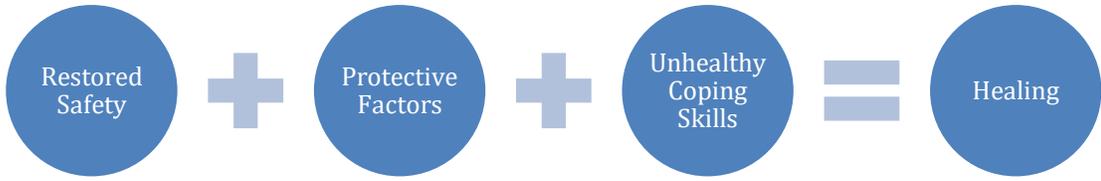
Figure 22. Key elements as my emerging framework.

Restoring School Safety as the Paramount Responsibility

Even before the revelation of the ethics violation, the year at Rise was off to a difficult start. Despite the reprieve of an early honeymoon period, unexpected behaviors at the school had escalated quickly. While the school community held strong to its trauma-informed principles and avoided exclusionary discipline, it was overwhelmed by the sheer needs of its students. Many of the concerns about school culture and climate that led me to choose this project re-emerged with force. Some families described the school as "chaotic," and others worried, "How can my child learn anything when their classmates are throwing furniture and cursing their teacher?" (email correspondence, October 4, 2017). School safety and morale featured prominently on the list of concerns expressed during the annual School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) survey administered to all staff, families, and students in grades 3 or above (see Table 6).

Further evidence of the level to which staff, families and students were aligned on their perceptions of the school were the comments shared during the C3 retreat as the SCAI results were reviewed, including, "How do we make teachers want to be here? That's just not right," and "If we don't have safety, we don't have anything" (notes from October C3 meeting, 2017). Quantitative data, from the school's number of incident reports to its injury rates, corroborated the concerns for safety, with over twenty student holds for imminently dangerous behaviors and four staff injuries in the first six weeks of school alone (incident report data, 2017). Conversations with families, staff and students left little doubt that the school's safety was at the top of everyone's mind. Remarkably, and an area discussed further below, many of these constituents expressed these concerns while simultaneously sharing their deep appreciation and alignment for the school's mission and vision. In November, a group of concerned parents joined a Board meeting to share their fears and frustrations. Even there, they extended grace to staff,

Table 6

Selected SCAI Results, Out of a Total Possible 5.00 per Category

Indicator	Students (Grade 3+)	Families	Staff
School safety	3.41	3.76	2.90
School pride	3.88	3.94	3.21
School fit	4.12	3.94	3.36

explicitly noting how deeply cared for and respected they felt, as well as how clear they were that resources were lacking (November board meeting, personal notes taken, 2017). A few days after that meeting, after another phone call with a parent whose child had been injured by another student, I memoed, "There is no grace when you're worried your child is going to get punched on the playground – none is deserved either. Idealism cannot come instead of basic needs and safety is a basic need. To be clear, too, I say there's no grace but I was given so much tonight – should I celebrate that as a strength of our community or worry about how low the expectations set by public schools are? Perhaps it's both" (Research Memo, 2017).

Upon finding out the depth of Jennifer's struggles as leader, I realized the need to hold one-on-one meetings with staff, an option I had kept open when designing my interview protocols, as described previously in Chapter 4. Here too, the feedback I heard was loud and clear: Rise did not feel like a safe school. Staff member after staff member underscored this and offered vivid examples, including descriptions of extreme incidents to which no follow-up occurred, partially because of the overwhelming level of behaviors elsewhere in the school and partially – at least per multiple staff's report – because of a principal who was not responsive and who many described as "checked out" and "unphased" (One-on-One Notes, November 2017). In fact, when I coded all of the themes that came up in my conversations, a total of seven of those were subthemes related to safety (see Table 7).

Of course, perhaps nowhere did I hear this more poignantly than from the parents at the Board meeting, or those who I had to call after an injury at school, or from the mother of two young first graders who shared that she had noticed an increase in stomachaches on Sunday evenings when she began laying out their school uniforms for the morning (Research Memo, 2017). This was a crisis.

Table 7

Coded One-to-One Interviews

Code	Student/ Student	Student/ Staff	Staff/ Staff	Student/ Leader	Staff/ Leader	Leader/ Leader	TOTAL
Safety: Emotional	4	3	5		6		18
Safety: Physical	9	6					15
Safety: Microaggressions		2		1	2		5
Safety: Bullying	5		3		3		11
Safety: Retaliation	1		3		4	2	10
Safety: Serious Injury/Death	5	3					8
Safety: Community		1				1	2
Abuse of Power					3	4	7
Communication: Transparency		5	3	2	4	2	16
Communication: Fairness			2		4		6
Communication: Direct/Indirect	1		4		3		8
Communication: Respect			1		6		7
Communication: Follow-Through			2		12		14

Table 7 (continued)

Code	Student/ Student	Student/ Staff	Staff/ Staff	Student/ Leader	Staff/ Leader	Leader/ Leader	TOTAL
Strategy/Clear Plan			1		6		7
Presence					8		8

Restoring safety was an urgent priority, one on which stakeholders were universally aligned. Establishing a sense of calm and order was critical. No other priority could proceed until it had been achieved, and I had ample data to show that it was not something I could lead through Jennifer but rather a place where direct intervention was needed. Having spent much of my professional life working with children during the hardest moments of their lives, I have learned that crisis is not a teachable moment (Maslow, 1943). Hopes of capacity building (for Jennifer or the school team) aside, I pivoted my efforts, realizing that before any of the adaptive work the C3 was hoping to do could be actualized, first there had to be an immediate change in (1) the school's current functioning and (2) the perception of the leadership team's ability or engagement in leading the school out of crisis. Particularly, it was clear that the school team was asking for an immediate increase in Jennifer's leadership presence and the quality and frequency of her formal communications. This spelled out my approach as well. The ethics violation had already led me to take a much more directive approach in supervising Jennifer than I had initially conceptualized doing. Now as I continued to learn how loudly the community's concerns had amplified, I leaned in further. To borrow Glickman, Gordon and Ross-Gordon's (2001) framework for teacher supervision, my assessment of her leadership style made it apparent that she lacked both the abstraction skills to lead transformational change on the high-needs campus and the commitment to doing so. Try as I might have to facilitate change through her, what the moment called for was assertiveness and direct action.

With such strong marching orders from my one-to-one conversations and the resulting themes, an approach that had started as facilitative became more restrictive as I took an increasingly directive approach to staging Jennifer's leadership at the site, at first by offering her with only limited options to choose from, and later by controlling the outcome even more

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directly. In addition to being responsive to the hierarchy of needs that was becoming apparent at Rise – recognizing that not all priorities are equal priorities, and that while school pride was an area identified for improvement, for instance, in no way could that proceed until safety, and more importantly, a *sense* of safety, had begun to be restored – my decision to prioritize the essential aligned with the change theory literature I had reviewed. My specific focus on order, culture and communication, for example, aligned with McRel's research regarding the elements a school principal needs to reinforce most during periods of crisis, as discussed in Chapter 2. The methodology by which I went about improving order, culture and communication – namely speaking one-to-one with staff, teaching back what I had heard, and encouraging engagement throughout – spoke to the fourth non-negotiable leadership element identified by McRel's reesarch: input (Waters & Grubb, 2004).

With support, Jennifer did execute a plan to increase safety on campus in multiple ways. Additional de-escalation training was offered to all staff members. Staffing changes increased the availability of adults, particularly during pivotal transition points. A behavior analyst was brought in from Sequoia's larger network to help create and teach routines and systems aimed at increasing consistency and predictability in students' experiences at school. A revamped lunch and recess routine decreased disruptive and aggressive behaviors. Jennifer implemented new feedback loops that had her return both to families and to staff within the timelines I set as her supervisor, so she could follow up promptly on previous concerns they had voiced and ensure our approach met their needs.

In addition, at our November C3 meeting, Jennifer and I engaged the committee in identifying observable milestones that would indicate to us when the school climate had stabilized and we could now move from actions strictly aimed at increasing safety to more

ambitious goals to transform culture schoolwide (see Figure 23). In creating this list, the team worked to adapt an existing resource created by Sequoia leaders for use in other school buildings. Language was updated to better reflect the realities and context at Rise. The C3 spent time debating one specific milestone, the one referencing out-of-school time, or OST. While Rise was not using in-school suspension or any other exclusionary discipline practices, the team ultimately felt OST, in this context, was an appropriate catch-all for time students spent outside of class, whether this was due to de-escalation in one of the school's designated intervention spaces or due to restorative activities related to prior behavior that students were to be supported in completing prior to their return to class.

Though the school's incident report rates and the acuity of students' behaviors did not diminish significantly during these first few weeks of intervention, affective changes were noted. More boldly, in a December memo I wrote, "Safety has not increased – there are still kids with ice packs in the front office every day. But I think the *sense of safety* may be on the rise. Clarity of comms on the walkie has improved, the [noise-reducing hallway filters] create a much calmer environment, and the staff I've checked in with seem more grounded and hopeful there's some sort of overall plan (is there??)" (Research Memo, 2017).

Indeed, during the height of behavioral crisis at the school, families came to the November School Board meeting to discuss their concerns, reported feeling that the changes were having an impact. A delegation even volunteered to return in January to share the positive update with the Board (Rise Academy public board meeting minutes, November 2017/January 2018). The newly enlisted behavior analyst's data collection efforts revealed greater levels of consistency among staff in following the school's revamped routines and schedules. Jennifer reported that staff members were coming up to her more frequently with ideas for improvement,

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Milestones:
- ✓ Students demonstrating the most acute behavioral and/or social emotional needs have individualized plans in place;
- ✓ Classrooms teachers have a clear understanding of what kinds of behaviors can be handled in the classroom and what behaviors warrant a referral to the office or additional levels of support, and clear systems for referring students are established and widely understood and utilized across the school community;
- ✓ Referred students have a consistent and safe space within the school to go to receive support from identified staff; the front office is calm and orderly;
- ✓ Procedures and staff are in place to promote safe and structured transition periods (e.g. use of bells and clear expectations for behavior during transitions) with adequate supervision, based on the developmental level of students
- ✓ Procedures are in place to assist staff overseeing lunch, recess, and special classes in meeting the needs of students who are demonstrating behavioral and/or social challenges;
- ✓ Procedures are in place to assist Out of School Time (OST) program staff in meeting the needs of students demonstrating behavioral and/or social challenges;
- ✓ A unified crisis-response procedure is in place, including a clear understanding of who gets informed and brought in to make decisions when there is a crisis, including the role of communication with parents and caregivers.

Figure 23. C3-identified milestones of climate stabilization.

which she personally inferred was evidence that their faith in her ability to follow up was beginning to increase (clinical supervision notes, 2017). The C3 members' PhotoVoice artifacts (see Figures 24 and 25) revealed that they too were seeing shifts in the school's safety, with two of seven members choosing to document bulletin board displays about the school's efforts at re-establishing a safe and orderly learning environment, captioning these as they went. From the mental health perspective and an understanding of trauma, the fact that prioritizing the restoration of safety was an effective intervention is not surprising. Just as a child experiencing crisis is soothed when an attuned caregiver responds in a developmentally appropriate way to restore emotional regulation, so did the school respond when they sensed that their leaders understood their pain points and were responding in kind (Detterman et al., 2019). By communicating to staff that "your need is our need, too," Jennifer and I took some of the stress staff members were walking around with off their shoulders, and in turn found our colleagues to be amazingly willing to engage in the much harder work of truly transforming the school's dysfunctional culture and climate. When we asked for staff representatives to help reform specific routines, volunteers were quick to surface. When we asked for staff attendance at family meetings to show a united front, our team organized an after-school potluck and showed up in force. With safety on its way to being re-established – and perhaps more importantly with a shared perception that this was a top priority for all of the school's leaders – further work began to seem possible.

Protective Factors Revealed

Not unlike the surprise of seeing a perception of safety rise without clear indicators that safety itself had increased, other areas of the survey exposed surprising bright spots as well. Given the overwhelming concerns about school safety, the C3 was taken aback by the highly
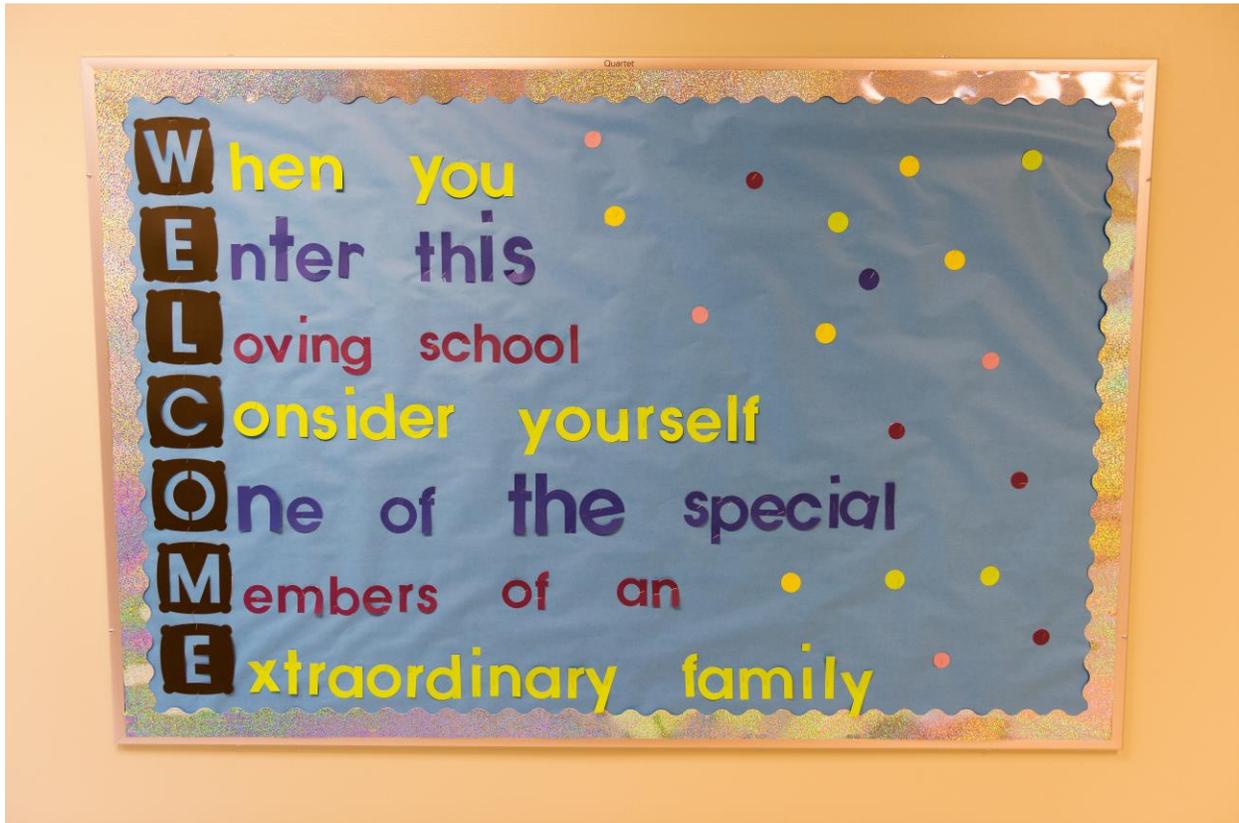
Figure 24. PhotoVoice entry 1, captioned: "Safety begins at hello."

Figure 25. PhotoVoice entry 2, captioned: "Community."

positive responses on some of the other fields included in the survey. For example, while only 38 percent of families agreed that they felt their child was "generally" or "very" safe at school, a jaw-dropping 80% of those responding to the survey indicated that they would recommend Rise Academy to other families. And, while significant questions about the school's approach to addressing the acute needs of its student population were everywhere, the survey also revealed something seemingly incongruous: high levels of respect for the school's staff and a genuine belief in their commitment to the school and its students. This dichotomy between an incredibly challenging practical experience (38% sensed safety) and a remarkably strong theoretical alignment (80% felt connected enough to recommend the school to others) became a compelling theme. To what could these paradoxical conclusions be tied, and what did this reveal about the effectiveness of certain protective factors at a time of existential institutional threat?

More simply, how could it be that a school so new, with so many problems, and already on its fourth unsuccessful leader in three years, could engender such trust and optimism from its community? And what could this hidden strength mean for the road ahead? To unpack these questions, at the November C3 meeting I facilitated an inquiry protocol called the Why Wheel, in which C3 members looked at self-identified "bright spots" they had selected as their PhotoVoice artifacts. The PhotoVoice prompt simply asked participants to capture photographic evidence of "unconditional education" in action at Rise. From this curated collection of photos, the seven C3 members split into two groups to dig deeper into one photograph each. As they did so, the groups attempted to generate a list of explanations ("Whys") for the presence of these bright spots, with the hopes of identifying primary drivers, and in so doing hopefully reveal foundational truths about the school's core strengths.

For example, in one parent's selection (see Figure 26) of a photograph that shows a young man "body surfing" on a yoga mat, the process of repeatedly asking why drew meaning, ultimately leading to her reflection that, "It has value because it shows Rise is a place where kids are allowed to be kids, and adults are along for the ride" (Why Wheel worksheet, 2017). Following our practice why wheels, collectively we worked as a group of seven to unpack another bright spot: the community's response to the statement, "I would recommend Rise Academy to other families looking for an excellent school," in which a full 80% of Rise families had responded positively, despite ongoing concerns about the school's safety.

Our layer-by-layer analysis into the factors that contributed to such high parent faith in the school led us to different stages of understanding. We first saw that families recommend the school because of its perceived potential to be amazing. Secondly, this potential was the result of of its strong and unified staff; upon further inquiry we learned that the team is strong and unified because they were called to action by a singular, compelling mission. It was this mission – to become (by any means necessary!) an inclusive community which never casts any child aside, working against all odds and precedent to meet every community member's needs within their school walls – that allowed families, staff and other essential stakeholders to remain engaged with the school even through periods of acute concern.

The knowledge that the belief in the school's dream state was such a strong protective factor during its current reality state was critical, but not yet instructive. The C3 team checked this newfound wisdom against other change processes and found numerous examples where a team fully committed to a mission did not persevere in the way that this particular staff had. We dug into another level of why, and landed on a second protective factor: not only was the community united in its investment in the school's mission and vision, but because that mission

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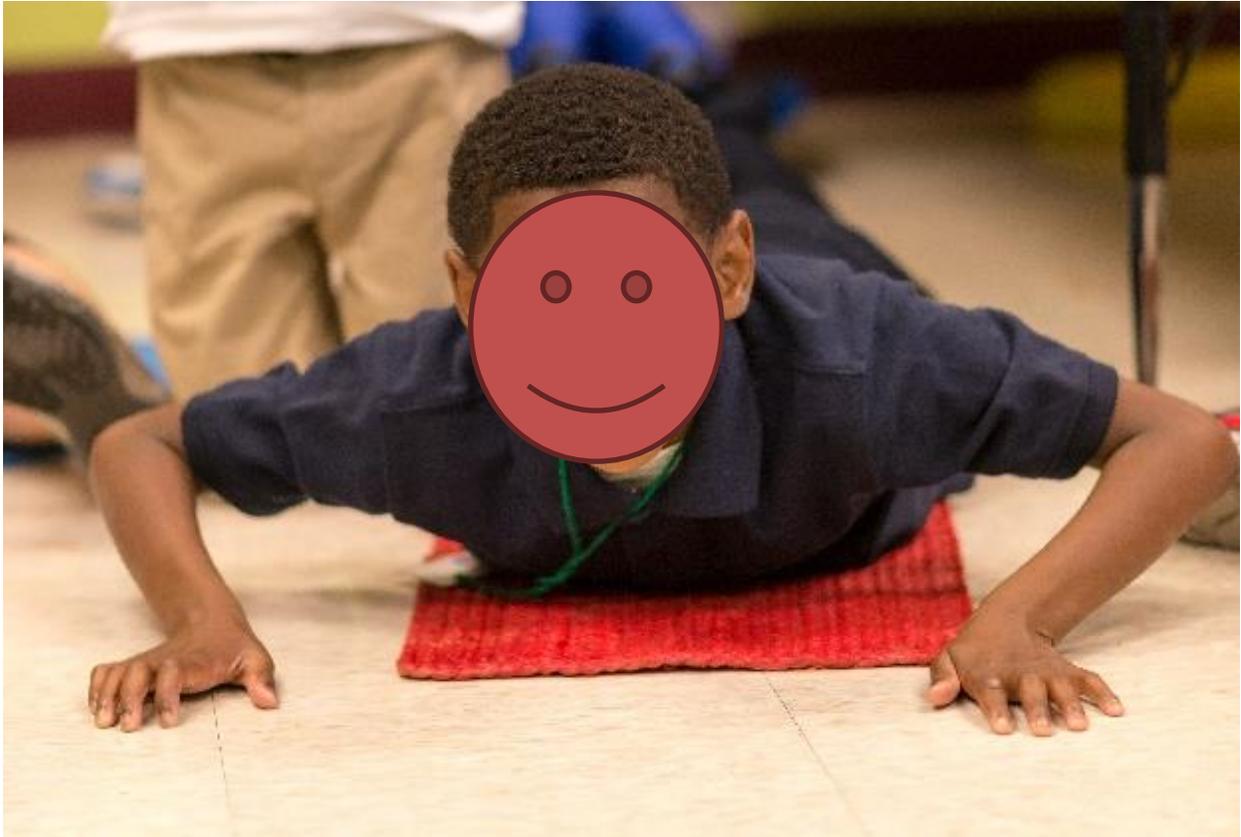
Figure 26. PhotoVoice Entry 3, captioned: "Surf's up!"

and vision rested on member interdependence, the community was perhaps equally invested in the networks of interpersonal relationship that had formed among them. In other words, the very thing that made the school so hard – that its mission was to change the status quo by doing absolutely whatever necessary with very little resources but incredibly like-minded individuals – also served as its strongest protective shield. At the end of the exercise, the why wheel we created looked more like a web than a wheel. Several words stood out in black marker among the lines and connections we had drawn. Among them were the words "risk-taking", "start-up," "vulnerability," "collective impact," and "proving them wrong." (November C3 artifacts, 2017)

The Rise community was resilient, this was clear. It was more than just a belief in that end goal though; they were mobilized by the struggle to get there itself. One parent on the C3 commented that, even though her daughter is an advanced learner with no behavioral challenges, she continued to feel invested in Rise – drawbacks and all – because of the strength of the school's commitment to disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline. Another mother on the committee chimed in, adding that if she wanted something predictable, she would have enrolled at the school down the street, as they had been doing things one way for a very long time. While acknowledging she was not yet satisfied with where Rise was, she reflected that the fact that the school actively worked to improve was meaningful to her (Research Memo, 2017). In my own memos, a personal theme was emerging as well: "I find that the culture work at Rise feeds me! I have no idea how to get out of this hole – we're understaffed and poorly led with no money to fix either! BUT the challenge of working to do it with this incredible group of people is enthralling. If not us, then who?" (Research Memo, 2017). Like others, I too was finding hope not in resolution but in productive struggle.

My one-on-one conversations in the aftermath of the situation with Jennifer and the other leader revealed a similar theme among staff. "Tomorrow is always a new day, and I know we're going to try something different, and that keeps me coming back," said one. "I grew up here and I believe in what we're doing," said another during her one-on-one. A third added, "I've worked for the agency for a long time; most people are great. There's always exceptions." (One-to-one meeting notes, 2017). Seemingly, the norming the team had done around a shared mission, and the genuine pull that the mission had on individual team members had a profound impact.

Community members' alignment with the mission, and the extent to which they felt involved in enacting it, assisted them in staying in a problem-solving mode even when their confidence in the school's progress was at its lowest. Furthermore, the emphasis on relationship building and creating meaningful structures for direct communication supported remaining in this productive stance. These results showed up in the SCAI survey as well. Unlike the three statements shared earlier in this chapter, which evidenced wide agreement that lack of safety was perceived at Rise, when queried about their belief and alignment with staff at the school, responses rose among all subgroups, as shown in Table 8.

With interpersonal relationships and mission alignment serving as protective factors during the school's most tumultuous days, the opportunity to plan a November CLE grew in importance. In recognition of the vulnerability of the situation at Rise, the regional leadership team and I co-created an agenda for the day that aimed to reconnect staff with one another and, equally importantly, with the mission of our work. "Tomorrow is the CLE and I have no idea what to expect," I wrote in a memo on November 9, 2017. "Is it even fair to ask people to be raw and real? Should I have asked Jennifer and [the other leader] to do anything specific on that day, such as not come or address the whole region?" (Research Memo, 2017). Only a day later, my

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Table 8

Expanded SCAI Results

Indicator	Students (Grade 3+)	Families	Staff
School safety	3.41	3.76	2.90
School pride	3.88	3.94	3.21
School fit	4.12	3.94	3.36
Caring staff	4.88	4.82	4.64
Committed team	4.78	4.82	4.32
School has students' best interest at heart	4.83	4.72	4.75

anxieties had been replaced with hopefulness. The CLE had gone off without a hitch. Staff created "I am from" poems and engaged in rich discussions around cultural humility with each other. The critical friends group protocol we introduced provided for powerful dialogue. Less structured times in the day revealed the strength of bond between different staff members, some of whom had not had the opportunity to share the same space since the August CLE prior to the start of the school year, which necessarily dispersed the staff among different settings. The timing of the CLE and its thoughtful facilitation and design were meaningful for the region's ability to recover from a difficult fall at Rise. While tensions remained in the air with the future leadership structure of the school unclear in the aftermath of the violation that occurred, the day allowed staff to reconnect with each other and the unifying mission that defined their community.

Addressing Unhealthy Coping Skills that Develop in a Response to Crisis

"All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." (Tolstoy, 1966).

While harnessing existing strengths and enabling their role as protective factors became a strong theme that reverberated through personal memos, one-on-one conversations and parent comments and more, an equally powerful shadow theme emerged. While celebrating the role of available protective factors that had emerged, I saw an equally strong pull in the data to put energy into managing the unhelpful coping skills that occur naturally enough when a group of overtaxed individuals contends with an ongoing crisis of large magnitude (see Figure 27).

It is not a deeply original observation to note the ways in which school teams, over time, come to resemble their leaders. At Rise, when two of the school's foremost leaders engaged in secretive behaviors, other staff resorted to lies and omissions as well. Similarly, in the absence of
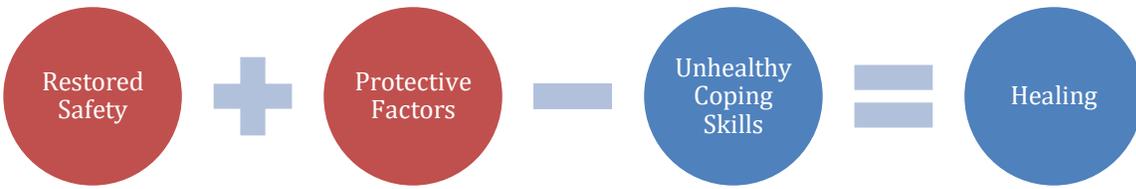
Figure 27. Key elements, theme 1.

a leader able to contain the team's feedback and channel it into effective forward movement, a culture of gossip, venting and indirect communication began to spread. Memos I wrote in October and November reveal that these patterns of staff behavior were observed in the immediate aftermath of the disclosure about the leaders' unfortunate choices. "While I was away, trusting Jennifer's reports of what was happening at the site, I didn't acknowledge the full experience of other members," I wrote in late October. "Now that I look more closely, I realize that not only was I not actively tapping into the experiences and insights of the team, but because no one was soliciting their input in a productive way, they have begun to self-organize to support each other, sometimes in remarkably unsupportive ways (DISCOURSE I!!! [a reference to the Eubanks, Parish and Smith 1997 article 'Changing the discourse in schools'" (Research Memo, 2017).

Among the early indications of the prevalence of unhealthy coping skills in the aftermath of the personnel situation at Rise were several actions that compromised community trust. The same day that I began hosting one-on-ones, also one of the first days I stayed at Rise beyond my formal engagements with Jennifer, I noticed that I walked into several rooms in which staff were huddled together, seemingly – or rather in some cases quite obviously – talking poorly of particular school leaders. By late the same week, I memoed about casual glances and smirks in team meetings. In a check-in at the start of a regional leadership meeting later in November, I observed an increasing use of divisive "Us vs. Them" language at the school, such as referring to school leaders as "admin" and replying all to email with an accusatory list now accessible to the team as a whole, instead of directly approaching the person involved. Still, at first my memos aimed to categorize these behaviors and move past them, still unable to see a larger pattern: "I understand why they feel frustrated and helpless. Their leader has been hiding in her office and

making excuses for inaction and her supervisor (me!!) has been seemingly unaware. Who were they going to turn to if not each other?" (Research Memo, 2017). In fact, I justified, the strength of relationship among staff members was one of the strongest protective factors available to the school. Surely it was appropriate for staff to form allegiances as a means of coping with a difficult situation wholly outside of their control.

Throughout the first few weeks, I attempted to validate staff's experiences. Even when they shared examples of counterproductive engagements with other staff, I rationalized that these made "good sense" given the harm that had been done within the community. During a season when both nationally and locally the issue of power abuses by those with means was on everyone's mind, I both recognized as ineffective and simultaneously excused behaviors that were unlikely to lead to a resolution. Instead of addressing directly the unhealthy climate that had been created and reinforced by an absence of strong leadership, I let it continue. I addressed individual actions as they rose above a randomly selected threshold of appropriateness, such as an email in which a supervisor cut down the school's leadership team, to which I responded with concrete feedback or a particularly strongly-worded comment which I pushed back against when uttered in a public staff meeting.

Still, as safety slowly restored across campus and more time passed from the initial violation, it became apparent that the coping skills staff had developed during the height of crisis (complaining to those closest to them and expressing judgment about other players at the school, staying stuck in discourse that identified problems and their instigators, rather than their solutions, and gossiping about other staff members) remained. On one hand, these contributed negatively to staff cohesion and morale, and needed to be addressed. On the other, doing so thoughtfully was critical, as these coping skills also evidenced high levels of social bonds among

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staff members. The CLE on November 10 provided the perfect "reset" opportunity. After a day

of meaningful interactions with each other and the mission, I addressed the region as a whole and

returned to a commitment made at the August CLE, to serve as each other's "warm demanders,"

offering direct feedback as a testament to our commitment to each other and our belief in the

endless capacity of those willing to confront change head on.

The "reset" followed a day of positive staff interactions and was received well. In the

coming weeks, I followed it up in multiple ways. Immediately after the CLE, I sent an email with

an invitation to reflect on a piece of constructive feedback they had not yet delivered in their

upcoming supervision meetings. I emailed supervisors with suggestions around how to support

staff with this endeavor and offers of more training and support. I also committed to checking in

with staff members each and every time I saw them utilizing an unsuccessful coping skill to find

out how they were feeling and what support they may be needing. Lastly, we began reviewing

progress on this goal during team meetings and scheduled one-on-one follow ups with a few

specific staff members.

In a memo, I wrote, "It's starting to take! I checked in with two supervisors today and

they both feel…the language used to describe interactions at Rise has shifted over the past two

weeks…I also heard two staff members brainstorming how to give feedback to a coworker!"

(Research Memo, 2017). In a further debrief with the regional leadership team, in which we

reviewed the feedback received from the month's CLE, we delved deeper into the issue at heart

by engaging in an inquiry protocol called What? So What? Now What? From the National

School Harmony Foundation. We began with a problem statement: "Our staff were gaining

support from each other to cope with significant stressors at work (good), though not always in

the ways we as leaders would prefer (problem)" (meeting notes, November 27, 2017). Together,

we problem solved our next steps and came two overarching conclusions: (1) Our staff were our and each other's greatest resource, and were actively seeking ways to gain support from each other, which we needed to honor and support; and, (2) Unless we consciously named and coached around unproductive coping skills, these would likely continue, as our taxed, stressed and tired staff were likely engaging in behaviors not entirely conscious to them.

In response, we committed to two distinct streams of work. First, we created a monthly cadence of relationship-building opportunities, both formal and informal, both during work hours and outside these. We organized a series of afternoon trainings incorporating many of the activities and experiences that the team had reacted to so positively at the previous learning exchanges. We planned a staff potluck as an opportunity for team building, with each staff asked to provide a dish that transported them back to childhood, and share why. We invested in consciously creating space and time for folks to deepen their relationships with each other. Secondly, we installed a new consultancy protocol in our regular supervisor meetings by which we could reflect on our ongoing practice building and sustaining a culture of respectful and productive feedback.

Restoration Is Possible

In the November C3 meeting, participants were asked to complete their first bimonthly, one-minute essay. In coding their responses, as shown in Table 9, several buzzwords appeared frequently. Even in the heights of crisis, the responses of participants showed that hope persisted. At the following C3 meeting, the committee zeroed in on action steps to take in the second half of the school year to continue improving not only safety but also the other elements of the school's culture and climate, including staff morale and school pride, without failing to serve its most challenging students (see Figure 28). Rather than sink into despair at the depth of the work
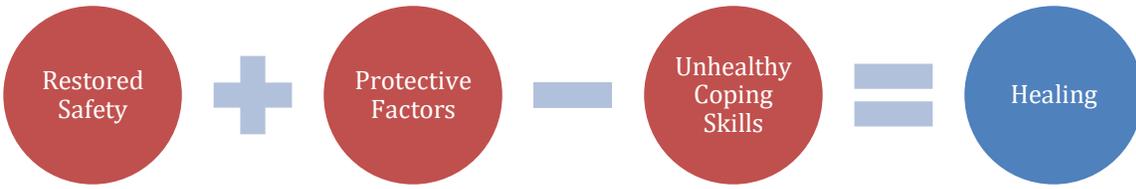
Figure 28. Key elements, theme 2.

Table 9

Coded Responses for November One-Minute Essays

Term	Occurrences
Hope/hopeful/promising	6
Community/team/moving together	5
Improvement/getting better/working hard to improve	5
Feedback/listening/voice/input	4
Belonging/acceptance/inclusion	4
Fear	2
Hard work ahead	2

ahead, the team repeatedly found hope and enthusiasm, coming together once more to plan for the school's success.

Meanwhile, the team as a whole was evidencing growing resiliency. Where negative gossip and indirect communication had become too commonplace, a shift in discourse was beginning. Staff, families and students were responding positively to an increase in school safety. There remained, however, one place where little change had been realized. Now more than two months after the initial discovery of the ethics violation in which Jennifer was involved, few staff were feeling a sense of resolution. Many noted that Jennifer had yet to address them directly or authentically. Some focused on the lack of consequences, noting that she had been neither fired nor publicly chastised. For two months, while awaiting a decision about whether Jennifer would remain at the school, a fog of discomfort filled most rooms in which she was present.

From Jennifer's perspective, she was doing everything in her power to seek resolution. She reflected in our clinical supervision sessions that she had told people she was sorry, and that she clarified her intention had never been to cause harm. At her most defensive moments, she shared feeling as though others were engaged in a witch hunt and would never be satisfied until she was left humiliated and suffering. At more reflective times, she could speak openly about the harm she had caused and sought active input on what she could do to repair it. When, eventually, clarity was reached and it was decided that Jennifer would indeed continue on at Rise, we scheduled two restorative sessions for her to participate in, one with the Rise team as a whole and one with the other leaders and supervisors.

Emotionally raw and feeling insecure, particularly as the height of some staff members' disapproval became more known, Jennifer relied on me and Sequoia's Human Resources Director for specific language to use when addressing staff. She incorporated our feedback

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expertly, and when time came for the circles themselves, Jennifer was able to calmly yet emotionally express her regrets to the respective teams, reflecting on specific harm her actions had caused in the community, stating her commitment to try and repair the damage that had been created, and opening herself up both to questions and to feedback from the circle.

The feedback from participants in both circles was overwhelmingly positive. While a couple of staff members expressed feeling uncomfortable watching Jennifer "pour her heart out," the more common response was one of gratitude for her willingness to be honest and vulnerable, and to accept responsibility in such a meaningful way. Several staff members reflected past the circle that they had achieved a level of closure and were ready to move on. While others were still grappling with the impact Jennifer's choices had on them and their work, the overall tenor in the room changed for the better, with a palpable feeling of relief witnessed throughout, as evidenced by changes in body language and facial expressions.

Despite multiple failures – to see the initial crisis, to remedy it with the force necessary from the start, etc. – the effort to restore the school's safety had been successfully underway for a number of weeks. The incredible dedication of the team to each other, the students, and the school's mission kept the team together while enacting these difficult reforms. Attention to discontinuing unhealthy coping skills, and ultimately to seeking true resolution, led to a palpable healing on the school team. Far from the culture work I had envisioned when I embarked, about halfway through the school year, Rise had finally arrived approximately back to baseline, or so at least it would seem.

Summary

The December C3 meeting marked the end of my first cycle of inquiry. Once the spinning stopped, I returned to my original theory of action and design framework. I was unsure

at first what relevance I would find in my original research questions, given how much had

transpired since I first wrote them (see Figure 29). Yet, given my project centered on culture and

climate, and that a culture and climate crisis was what I had spent the first half of the year

addressing, there was a surprising amount of insight to be gleaned regarding each individual

question.

Implications for Principal Research Question

It may not have been exactly the work I had planned to do with administrators, parents

and teachers, but the year's unexpected twists and turns only deepened my engagement with

each of these groups. I took an opportunity to recast the cycle's main activities in relation to my

principal research question, "How can administrators, parents and teachers work together to

create and implement a healthy and equitable school culture?" Interacting closely with each of

these stakeholder groups, I worked alongside them to re-instill a sense of calm in the school and

help the community recover from a breach of trust. The work revealed important lessons about

how to join with diverse constituents to effect change in school culture and climate. From the

research I had done on change management in schools, I anticipated that there would be four key

levers I would need to immediately focus on in the absence of Jennifer's ability to be the person

to hold them. These were order, input, culture and communication, described by Waters and

Grubb (2004) from McRel International as the four essential leadership elements that must be

attended to by someone outside the principal during times of turmoil.

Similarly, from the disparity in responses on the SCAI, I began to collect data regarding

the importance of mission alignment and strong relationships in maintaining organizations'

resilience through times of trial. From the need to become more directive with Jennifer and more

explicit in helping staff communicate in effective, above-ground ways, I learned the importance
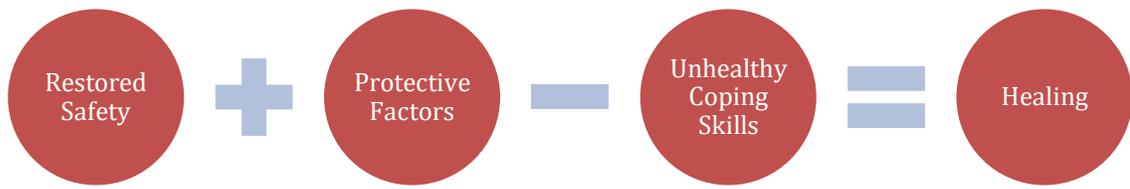
Figure 29. Key elements, theme 3.

of installing structures to enable new cultural patterns to form. And, from watching the process of restoration and the many failed attempts to circumvent it, I learned about the importance of honesty and the power of vulnerability.

Implications for Sub-Question 1

My first cycle of inquiry included only a total of three C3 meetings, and thus there is not yet enough longitudinal data to notice meaningful shifts related to my first sub-question: "How do family and staff views of school culture and climate change as they work together toward a common goal?". That said, in just three sessions, the work of the C3 members, inclusive of families and staff, evidence a capacity for honesty, even when difficult. For example, from the first retreat, in which committee members stayed for an additional hour to continue unpacking the data from the SCAI assessment, the C3 showed a willingness and capacity to focus on critical areas for improvement with force. In the two subsequent sessions, the committee participated actively in inquiry protocols, including the Why Wheel, participating actively to identify potential action steps.

Implications for Sub-Question 2

During this first cycle, the most notable difference in the school culture and climate occurred with relation to the safe operating of the school. I returned to my second sub-question, "To what extent does overall family and staff alignment with the school's mission and vision change as the school culture and climate do?" What became clear in this process was that although C3 members were concerned about the school's safety, they – like the respondents to the SCAI survey – felt a strong sense of allegiance to the school's mission and vision, and were able to parlay this enthusiasm into the creation of milestones for the school's climate and a hopeful attitude toward the changes that could be achieved.

Implications for Sub-Question 3

Perhaps the biggest learning at this juncture, the first cycle of research revealed a passionate desire to participate fully shared by families and staff alike. When coupled with my third sub-question – What can the positioning of staff and families as co-researchers reveal about their own practices, as well as their views and attitudes during the change process? – these early findings spoke back to the research. For, when given the opportunity to provide input, join in action planning, and reflect on strengths and areas of growth, the C3 rose to the challenge. Attendance at all three meetings was high, despite their scheduling on staff break days or late afternoons, during cold and flu season no less. 100% of participants brought their PhotoVoice artifacts to both C3 meetings (note: no artifact was required at the initial retreat, as this is when IRB consent forms were discussed and protocols such as PhotoVoice first rolled out). Similarly, the one-minute essays submitted by participants revealed high levels of hopefulness, a strong desire to see improvements, and a genuine commitment in the power of the community to work together toward positive change (One-Minute Essays, 2017).

Implications for Sub-Question 4

My last sub-question was the most inward, asking, "In what ways does engagement in this work inform my identity as a leader for equity?" A quick review of the memos I have drafted to date reveals my evolution as a social justice educator throughout these brief but busy three months. My earliest lesson was perhaps the most important, underscoring the vitality of gathering a more holistic assessment of a school or leader's functioning, rather than relying on the input of one main individual. Similarly, I learned to embrace a more directive approach than might be my preference when evidence points to the need for clarity and precision. This lesson

would serve me well as I headed into the start of 2018. Rise Academy had successfully

weathered several storms, but the skies ahead were far from clear. It was time to begin cycle two.

CHAPTER 6: PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH CYCLE TWO

Prelude

Both Troy and Joseph benefitted from the coordinated care they received from a team of trauma-informed staff. Both eventually outgrew this team and transitioned into new settings. That's where the similarities in their circumstances ended. That isn't to say that Joseph never had another behavioral outburst again. But unlike Troy who transitioned from Sequoia's specialized nonpublic school to a setting wholly unprepared to respond to his needs with trauma sensitivity, Joseph matriculated from one neighborhood school into another nearby, a middle school also working to integrate trauma-informed education into its fabric. This meant that Joseph did not experience the same drop-off in services and shifts in mindsets that Troy had to endure. Instead, because both his elementary and middle schools were deepening their awareness and capacity for working with students with trauma histories, and he already knew how to excel at one of those schools, he had an easier time making the adjustment.

There were other factors that facilitated this change too. With Joseph, from the moment services began his team was planning for their exit – a lesson learned from watching Troy and others like him struggle when the team stayed narrowly focused on the here and now. One of the first things Joseph did with his behavior coach was to plan his graduation from services: what it would feel like, who would be there to celebrate, what increased independence meant for him and his family, and the cake and ice cream flavors too, of course. Likewise, Joseph's team focused intentionally on building the capacity of others, rather than being satisfied if the team members themselves could intervene successfully. This meant that through thoughtful intervention the classroom teachers Joseph worked with grew stronger and more confident in their abilities to set limits with him that did not result in power struggles or escalation. School

staff who did not know how to develop positive relationships with students like Joseph were supported in doing so through real-time coaching and ongoing encouragement. The team as a whole became aware of the importance of predictable responses to behaviors and well-designed routines. These lessons stayed with them when Joseph transitioned to middle school, allowing them to start at a higher baseline when a "new Joseph" showed up on their classroom rosters the very next year. Joseph's capacity was expanded too.

*Not only did Joseph increase his social skills, emotional regulation and coping strategies through intervention, he also developed an increased sense of self and an ability to advocate effectively for his needs. He didn't just dream about his graduation from services; he helped bring it into existence. After several months of intensive work with his behavior coach, Joseph showed and expressed readiness for less adult supervision and more independence throughout the day. Rather than the adults working to make this happen, Joseph was tasked with the responsibility. He helped create a behavior contract that defined what was expected of him as a student, and what would adults would look for to know that their current levels of support are sufficient and a student is continuing to make progress independently. This contract was monitored through a daily points tracker at first, and Joseph spent the last portion of each school day reflecting on both successes and challenges, revising the plan as appropriate. As he learned more about what powered his success and what inhibited progress, he created a PowerPoint presentation to share with his teachers and staff about his needs, his triggers, his goals and his passions. And every time a substitute teacher came to school for the day, Joseph was responsible for introducing himself and sharing his plan – **his** in every sense of the word. By the time Joseph was promoted to middle school, he was a "new Joseph," too. Unlike Troy, who*

struggled to generalize the skills he had mastered in one context to the next, Joseph had been

practicing for exactly that reality throughout the whole course of intervention.

In many ways, the actual work of supporting Joseph was more complex than the process Troy followed when he arrived on a campus ready-made for his needs. There were more adults involved in Joseph's interventions and more variables by the sheer fact that these were enacted on a public school campus. But it worked. *In the end, Joseph's experience seemed to validate the hard work and complexity of challenging existing school systems to incorporate trauma-informed principles within their practices and policies, permeating every level at the school from the classroom to the principal's office. But was Joseph an anomaly, a lucky exception? Or could the hard and at times painful path Rise Academy had traversed in its own journey to increase access and outcomes similarly demonstrate it was leading to a worthwhile destination?*

Process

As school resumed in January, staff fell into the new routine that had started to crystallize shortly before the winter break with the restorative session between Jennifer and staff, and the move of the other administrator to a different campus. Within days, the school was fully buzzing with the activity of the resuming school year. My schedule now had me at Rise for half or more of each school week, and I continued to utilize a highly directive approach in my supervision of Jennifer, ensuring tight feedback loops and accountability checks that focused on disconfirming staff's earlier experiences that their leader was either not aware or not concerned that the school year was off to a rough start. In my leadership memo, I reflected, "I am trying to give as much choice, grace and flexibility to Jennifer as I can, but I am monitoring closely. I'm trying to set her up for 'wins,' while not setting up the site for any more misses" (Research Memo, 2018).

While I continued to provide Jennifer with direction and support through clinical supervision, we co-determined that she would no longer serve as a principal co-researcher, instead participating through her attendance and involvement with the Culture and Climate Committee (C3). As such, in addition to taking on a larger role in leading the school as a whole, I also redistributed the leadership of the C3 to other members, including two eager rising leaders who were moved to take a more active role in the school following the events of the fall. Both joined as co-practitioner researchers beginning in January.

The new co-researchers were not the only Rise staff to start the new calendar year off eager to see progress made. Still lifted from the restorative session that occurred in December, the first couple of weeks in January seemed lighter on-site. In a memo from January 9, I wrote, "It feels good to be in the building again. There's less walking on egg shells and more walking with purpose" (Research Memo, 2018). When I conducted my midyear family interviews later that month, I heard similar echoes from families. One shared that her children were coming home with exciting updates about school projects and read-aloud books, whereas the fall afterschool updates centered mostly around mean comments from peers. Another high-fived me and said she loved the new hallway procedure, which was not my brainchild but rather that of the behavior analyst we brought onboard mid-fall (Interview notes, 2018). In all, of the five families I interviewed in both September and January, all five said they felt more positive now than they had earlier in the fall. Three of the five made specific note of the fact that they felt the school had responded to their concerns, and that this was meaningful to them.

Just as the momentum was beginning to feel infectious, the honeymoon effect began to dwindle, much as it had in September. By the third week of January, staff absences were on the rise, due at least in part to a vicious virus that circulated throughout the school. Nonetheless,

these had an impact on staff, or as I wrote in a memo, "Three teachers cried today about the difficulties of having staff out. It's not that this isn't an understandable stressor, but it seems to be having a disproportionately large effect on staff morale – why? Are people so exhausted by this fall that they are less resilient? Shoot – are they so exhausted that they're also getting sick more often?" (Research Memo, 2018).

The most obviously struggling person on-site remained Jennifer. At first, it seemed our new rhythm, imperfect though it may have been, quickly became normal. Staff and parents grew accustomed to seeing Jennifer and me sharing the responsibilities routinely held by the principal alone, and with increased coaching and direction, Jennifer was able to experience some wins and add productively to the school's goals. Yet, I soon began to suspect she was mustering every ounce of her energy to be able to do so, because once her reserves emptied out, she seemed less and less able to move forward (themes from research memos, 2018). As we will return to soon, she was beginning to decompensate and eventually would make the decision to leave her role before the end of the school year. The following pages provide more information on the factors leading to that change, while also reviewing major happenings at the school both before and after it. Each section walks through one of the four main activities I conducted, as described in Table 10. We begin by returning to the Culture and Climate Committee, the C3.

Spring Semester C3 Meetings

In comparison to the jarring difference between the start of the fall semester (when Jennifer's indiscretion was not yet known, and the school was in a honeymoon phase) and its latter half, the spring C3 meetings felt much more organically progressive. Still, it was possible to break the meeting cadence into three stages (see Figure 30). In January and February, the team welcomed new members, reflected on the first cycle of intervention that ended in December,

Table 10

Schedule of Research Activities, January-June 2018

Activity	Jan 1-15	Jan 16-31	Feb 1-15	Feb 16-28	Mar 1-15	Mar 16-31	Apr 1-15	Apr 16-30	May 1-15	May 16-31	Jun 1-15
C3 Meetings		*		*		*		*		*	*
Clinical Supervision with Jennifer	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				
Direct Leadership Support	*	*	*	*	*	*	*				
Service as Interim School Leader								*	*	*	*

Research Activity: Planned for six and facilitated five C3 meetings at the school site

Activity Description: Facilitated transdisciplinary meetings with co-research practitioners, including introducing two new members and positioning one as lead facilitator by early spring. Meetings focused on reflecting on data, designing research activities, identifying additional milestones and looking toward next year. I co-facilitated meeting 5 with a C3 member and she independently facilitated the final metitng of the yera

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, artifacts of work completed, cultural mapping artifacts, PhotoVoice submissions, one-minute essay submissions, milestones list, spring SCAI data and other existing assessments

Figure 30. Spring semester C3 meeting summary.

and agreed on the data needed in order to initiate a Plan, Do, Study, Act cycle in early spring. The next stage, March and April, focused on making meaning of the newly gathered data and enacting a plan of action. Seemingly too quick to follow were May and June, in which progress was reviewed and the conversation focused toward how to best leverage the work that had been done to date into planning and organizing for the following school year. Below, I review the major activities of each two-month stage, with the implications that arose more fully detailed later in this chapter.

January and February C3 Meetings. Toward the end of January, the Culture and Climate Committee (C3) met for its monthly session and continued to work on climate-related action steps, reflecting on newly available data using different protocols and exercises (see Figure 31). With the departure of the school administrator who, along with Jennifer, was responsible for an ethics violation in early November, new opportunities emerged. An opening allowed for existing staff members to increase their leadership on campus, and two of the school's staff leapt into action, joining the C3 while accepting new areas of responsibility in moving forward the school's PBIS and restorative justice protocols. Simultaneously, efforts to improve school safety continued, with the hiring and training of new staff, and revamped debriefing procedures introduced so that staff could learn from each behavioral incident and modify their plans as a result. While the school continued to be challenged by many students' behaviors, its hallways, classrooms and common areas became increasingly calmer and more orderly. Evidence of this change appeared in my reflective memos and in photographs shared through the PhotoVoice data collection process at the C3 meetings.

By the February C3 meeting, the team reviewed school-wide data from their first cycle of intervention that fall and determined that though the school had yet to meet most of the

milestones of stabilization they previously agreed to target (see Figure 23 for original list), efforts were underway in each. We agreed to continue monitoring the stabilization milestones in our monthly meetings while also refining a new set of milestones that would move the work forward. The C3's evidence gathering efforts related to the stabilization milestones is displayed in Table 11.

In the same meeting, the C3 turned its attention to a new set of milestones, working off a generic version created by Sequoia leaders for other partnering schools. The committee worked together to review these milestones and refine them for the context at Rise Academy. This time, rather than focusing on the conditions required to stabilize the school's climate, the team queried a level deeper, envisioning what milestones would define a well-articulated process of reflective assessment. Now that things were stable, we wondered how we could create a comprehensive map of the school's current culture and climate to work off of in setting our new priorities. We agreed on a plan: (1) to continue working on stabilizing the learning environment through ongoing monitoring of the initial milestones while (2) simultaneously conducting a deeper cultural mapping of the school to most effectively target our culture and climate needs by appropriately leveraging existing assets. Part of this process would take place through new research activities assigned to individual C3 members and designed to study the school culture in detail. Since there were new members on the team, other efforts would focus on understanding and then re-aligning around existing data, such as that fall's School Climate Assessment Instrument (SCAI) results, the Schoolwide Positive Behavioral Supports Tiered Fidelity Index (SWPBS TFI) and the Trauma-Informed Matrix (TIM). The new milestones, laid out in Figure 31, defined clear expectations for the team's work from February through the end of the year.

Table 11

Evidence Related to Stabilization Milestone Progress

Identified Milestone	Evidence Reviewed	C3 Discussion Notes
Students demonstrating the most acute behavioral and/or social emotional needs have individualized plans in place.	IEP, 504s, Behavior maps, Class binders	Completed for grades 1 and 3; Mr. X finishing K and 2 by mid-winter break
Classrooms teachers have a clear understanding of what kinds of behaviors can be handled in the classroom and what behaviors warrant a referral to the office or additional levels of support, and clear systems for referring students are established and widely understood and utilized across the school community.	Anecdotal evidence, testimonials of C3 teacher and parent participants; behavior flow-chart; PD PPT, behavior analyst data	This has strengthened since November; behavior analyst created flow chart and delivered PD; her data shows that 4 of 7 teachers regularly utilize flow chart aligned expectations; we will focus on this during next Wed. PLC
Referred students have a consistent and safe space within the school to go to receive support from identified staff; the front office is calm and orderly.	Anecdotal evidence, front office testimonial	Locking front office has helped; when short staffed due to illness, etc., front office still very hectic and full; 3 students still regularly brought in for naps in professional office space (often in midst of tantrum)
Procedures and staff are in place to promote safe and structured transition periods (e.g. use of bells and clear expectations for behavior during transitions) with adequate supervision, based on the developmental level of students.	C3 testimonials, discipline referral #s during arrival/ dismissal, behavior analyst data, staffing map during arrival/ dismissal	Team felt encouraged! Behavior analyst procedures are clear and training seemed effective; data shows staff and students understand new routines and so long as staff follows these, things improve; 2nd grade classes most regularly greeting students at door and have fewest students out of class in AM

Table 11 (continued)

Identified Milestone	Evidence Reviewed	C3 Discussion Notes
Procedures are in place to assist staff overseeing lunch, recess, and special classes in meeting the needs of students who are demonstrating behavioral and/or social challenges.	C3 testimonials, discipline referral #s during lunch/recess, behavior analyst data, new lunch routine document, positive emails from Dean of Students	In this area team felt most hopeful about changes; Ms. Z has revamped lunch routines and team feels they are clear and calmer; behavior analyst has taken data during meal times that shows staff know what to do; when more staff is out, routines are not followed as regularly and unexpected behaviors tick up
Procedures are in place to assist Out of School Time (OST) program staff in meeting the needs of students demonstrating behavioral and/or social challenges.	Behavior analyst data, C3 testimonials, incident reports showing time out of class	Behavior analyst did successful training and follow-up coaching; when staffing is low, these procedures are not kept up as regularly; some staff still not comfortable supporting de-escalation
A unified crisis-response procedure is in place, including a clear understanding of who gets informed and brought in to make decisions when there is a crisis, including the role of communication with parents and caregivers.	Crisis notifications policy, crisis reflection process, incident report data, behavior analyst data; C3 testimonials	Agreement staff seems increasingly comfortable with incident notification, decision-making and reporting guidelines, behavior analyst has noticed increase in coherence since last crisis intervention training

Milestones:
- ✓ A school-wide mapping of the current inventory and state of multi-tiered supports (including special education services for eligible students), which clearly outlines the:
  - o Academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and health screeners being used by staff;
  - o Data systems and progress monitoring tools in place, and utilized across school staff and partners;
  - o Office referral processes implemented to differentiate appropriate supports and services for students;
  - o Coordination of services processes, team members, and meeting structures and protocols to ensure student needs are identified and addressed;
  - o Academic, behavioral, and social-emotional interventions available at each tier – universal, early intervention, and intensive services;
  - o Roles and responsibilities of each school staff member, and their relationships to one another.
- ✓ Site leadership has a clear understanding of the distribution of student needs, corresponding caseloads, and staff hours distributed over the three tiers of service, how they align, and how they compare to the school's ideal goals. This includes recognizing gaps or redundancies in service;
- ✓ Site leadership members have each personally participated in 360° assessment of school culture and climate
- ✓ Site leadership has a clear understanding of the overall perception of school culture and climate, including areas of strength and areas of growth; and
- ✓ Site leadership has a clear understanding of current strengths and gaps in systems of support for staff, parents, and students.

Figure 31. C3-created milestones for reflective assessment phase.

With the milestone adoption process complete, the C3 began distributing action steps among different members so that by the next meeting a cultural map of Rise could be co-created from these discrete pieces of information. A parent representative signed up to hold focus groups with staff, Board members and parents. A teacher and a support provider devised an arts-based activity that could be completed by each grade level in order to aid in ascertaining even very young students' perceptions of school culture. Meanwhile, Jennifer and I signed up to participate in the School Retool Network's Shadow a Student Challenge, spending an entire day following the school routines of a young member of our community. With our research roles in place, as represented in Table 12, we set off on our inquiry, vowing to return with data in hand by March so that we could begin the second stage of the cycle: sense-making and action.

March and April C3 Meetings. By March, each C3 member made significant progress on assigned tasks, and the team met during another extended retreat to review the data, draw conclusions, and narrow in on key strategies for the remainder of the year. The one task that was initiated but not completed was the stakeholder interviews undertaken by the family representative. In sharing our team's cultural mapping plan during the February Board meeting, the Board asked if a representative from the strategic planning subcommittee would be able to join the family representative in her fact-finding mission. The representative, a Board member with prior experience both as an elementary teacher and as a strategic consultant, met with the family representative and me to devise a series of questions and sent out interview invitations. While two small focus groups were held before the March C3 meetings in time to be shared with the group, the work was ongoing, and would eventually spin off into an inquiry into the school's strategic direction more globally.

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Table 12

C3 Cultural Mapping Roles and Responsibilities

C3 Representative	Assignment	Evidence to be shared at March C3 meeting
Family Member	Focus groups with families, Board members and staff	General perceptions (high and low lights) about school culture, including significant outliers
Principal and Executive Director (Jennifer and Lihi)	Shadow-a-Student Day	Reflective memos and observation notes from day
General Education Teacher and Support Staff (with assistance from unassigned C3 members)	Artistic creations students	Artifacts and field notes about process
New C3 Members	Review beginning-of-year SCAI, TIM and SWPBS TFI	Notes and reflections about materials reviewed

The cultural mapping exercise, while certainly closely linked with my study, fell outside of my formal research and was instead work I participated in not as a researcher but as a practitioner at Rise. As such, I did not code the data individually but instead facilitated the C3 members by engaging them in a reflective protocol that asked them to make meaning of the insights they had gathered, with my own input offered as a community member at the school. I reflected in my memos, "Watching [the C3] speak back to the data, asking questions of it and each other, and attempting to lift evidence and themes was inspiring! I was particularly impressed by the shared leadership role they played in taking action at different moments, including by driving us to make some definitive moves by the end, knowing full well that we were in experimentation mode and might need to return to the drawing board if our conjectures were wrong" (Research Memo, 2018).

At the conclusion of the March retreat, prior to recording one-minute essays to aid in data collection, the C3 members and I reviewed the insights we gained from speaking with families and staff, allowing our students the creativity to express what mattered most to them, and shadowing our young learners throughout the highs and lows of their day. We also confirmed our decisions for next steps. We agreed to focus in on four fundamental processes that we believed could greatly improve the school's culture if executed carefully: (1) a process for repairing relationships among students after a significant incident has occurred; (2) tighter school/home communication loops that included both positive updates and important notifications; (3) an increase in classroom differentiation to eliminate the amount of time students spent either reviewing known information or unable to access unfamiliar material; and, (4) an increased focus on markers of school pride, including student clubs and committees, a classroom ambassador program mascot selection, and revamped uniforms.

Ready to jump into action at the end of spring break by dividing up discrete tasks at our April meeting, the C3 and I were in for one more shock in our schoolyear. Prior to our April meeting, Jennifer decided to step away from her role leading the school, which is further detailed later in this chapter. This event understandably slowed progress and altered our course, although perhaps not as much as might be expected. Instead, when we met in April, we assigned a lead to each of the four subcategories listed above and drilled down into individual tasks, as shown in Table 13. Our goal was to begin working on our action steps immediately, knowing that while some items might be able to progress quickly others would focus more on staging for the following year. We agreed to check back in on our progress during the May meeting.

May and June C3 Meetings. Technically speaking, May and June came after the end of my second cycle, but I pause to review them briefly here as a wrap-up to the C3 team's year. As agreed upon, the C3 members came together again in May, eager to share their last PhotoVoice selections, which had become a ritual of sorts we would say goodbye to after this meeting. I wrote in a memo that May, "The photos are so interesting. Every time I see someone [from the C3] prior to the meeting, they are fretting about their photos and seem stressed out and put off by the idea of finding one. By the time I ask them to share, they bubble with enthusiasm!" (Research Memo, 2018). At the same time, there was certainly a tiredness in the air as well, which I likened to the cumulative exhaustion from the year at Rise: "Everyone seems ready for a break. We've been in it so long. People seem just as committed as ever – heck they're here late on another Thursday! But it's clear how drained we are and what a toll the year has taken" (Research Memo, 2018).

The May meeting was oriented around business, due partially to the fact that it was the first meeting to be facilitated by one of the new C3 members. While my original intent was to

Table 13

Action Items Assigned to C3 Members Based on Identified Subcategories

Subcategory	Action steps for current year	Action steps for next year
A process for repairing student relationships following significant incidents (leads: dean of student and behavior analyst)	• Gather examples of best practice • Ask more questions of students and families to see what matters to them most • Create a draft procedure for review next meeting	• Provide PD including role-playing • Create scripts for staff • Designate space in school for conversations • TBD
Tighter school/home communication loops (lead: school-wide systems manager)	• Learn more about different software platforms • Find out preferences and past experiences from parents who have transferred in from other schools • Send out materials three ways for upcoming school news/events	• Institute new platform • Look into marquee • Use ClassDojo school-wide for daily updates • Task support staff with updating Dojo at least twice daily per student • Move up conferences
An increase in classroom differentiation (lead: assistant principal)	• Conduct weekly walkthroughs • Observe instruction with teachers during prep periods • Deliver PD • Focus on differentiation in upcoming PLC	• Adopt new curriculum for ELA and math • Provide multi-day PD in new curriculum • Work with state association to bring in UDL training series • Work with Coordination of Services Team and special ed team to start intervention cycles earlier • Conduct additional screeners in Kindergarten

Table 13 (continued)

Subcategory	Action steps for current year	Action steps for next year
An increased focus on markers of school pride (leads: family representative and support staff)	• Identify process for selecting mascot • Plan field day for end of year • Plan spirit week after SBAC • Send survey about preferred clubs/committees	• Look at new uniform options • Consider revamping school logo after strategic plan completion • Institute class ambassador program • Host community-wide events to showcase school strengths

pass the baton to Jennifer, she was no longer at the school. The new member though had already accepted a position for next year as the culture and climate specialist at the school and was chomping at the bits to further her involvement. She had taken the meeting format Jennifer and I had been using and made it her own, utilizing a Google doc to keep everyone aligned and projecting it on the wall so that everyone could experience it as interactive, regardless of their technical skills. I wrote, "What a difference to experience someone take this and make it their own. Will this work finally get the attention it needs? I feel more confident than I have most year about shifting back into a less direct role next year" (Research Memo, 2018). Time was spent reviewing the action steps agreed upon earlier and further outlining what we wanted to see in place next year.

From there, the C3 focused attention to the upcoming end-of-year SCAI assessment. Given the timing in the school year and some hectic upcoming schedules, the C3 agreed to come together during a summer retreat to review the results, reflect on the year and create a baseline action plan for 2018-2019. Reconvening in July felt both expedient and wise, giving everyone a chance to take a deep breath at the end of the year so that we were best positioned to gain insight and make informed plans. The committee decided to spend the June meeting celebrating the work it had completed. The following week, the SCAI surveys were administered to students, staff and families. I will touch on their results in the implications section of this chapter.

The June meeting came seemingly only a few short weeks later, due to the mid-month conclusion of the school year. By that time, given Jennifer's departure several weeks earlier and my assuming direct responsibilities for the school, I was spending virtually all day every day at Rise, while attempting to keep up with my other regional responsibilities. As such, I shifted most of my required off-site meetings to either early mornings or late afternoons, and so was unable to

join the afternoon C3 meeting due to a pressing commitment elsewhere. Instead, the new C3 member moving into the culture and climate specialist role took the lead again. We co-planned an agenda which included an appreciation ritual, some celebratory snacks, a reflective exercise, and gifts she had prepared for each C3 member. At the time, I was expecting her to pick up some chocolates and thank-you cards. But that changed when I arrived back at Rise the morning after the meeting and discovered that I too had received a gift from her, the same one as everyone else did, which was waiting on my desk and is photographed in Figure 32: a yellow chrysanthemum in a glass jar, complete with a stanza from a Hattie Knapp poem printed on an attached card.

Ah! she is not a "Summer Friend,"
She stays when all the rest have flown,
And left us flowerless and alone;
No singing birds, or blooms to lend
Their brightness to the autumn haze,
'Tis she who cheers the dreary days;
'Tis joy to know so sweet a friend;
No fairer flower blooms 'neath the sun
Than autumn's queen Chrysanthemum.
(Knapp, 1894)

When I had the chance to catch up with the C3 member later that day, she shared the significance of the gift and poem. I learned that the chrysanthemum carried special meaning in her Asian-American culture, where it was celebrated for its resilience. I recalled her account in a memo, "The chrysanthemum only rises when the other flowers have ceased to bloom, never to be in competition with them. It is versatile and can grow in almost any environment without harming the local ecology. And it shines brightest in the gray, dark days of autumn and winter. To her, this was a symbol of the C3 team's perseverance and ability to shine brightest when the days were darkest" (Research Memo, 2018). To say I was touched was an understatement. Before continuing to discuss resilience in more detail, however, it is time to take a few steps back, returning from June flowers and celebrations back to the rains and clouds of January in

Figure 32. Photograph of C3 appreciation gift.

Washington and the direct leadership support that I provided to the school to complement Jennifer's efforts to head off the second semester (see Figure 33).

Direct Leadership Support

In the fall, my plans pivoted in response to the leadership incident and the need for stabilization at the site. Despite the reprieve that was offered by Jennifer's successful participation in a restoration circle in December, the need for direct support remained high at the school and I continued to support Rise in this manner, as summarized in Figure 33. In addition to trusting my intuition, notes, and observations from supervision meetings as to the need for ongoing support, I trusted the input of staff and families. Two staff had recently left the school as a result of the violation that had occurred, and others had shared only a month prior that they felt Jennifer was micro-aggressive in her interactions with them. Most parents were less direct in voicing their concerns, although some did do so, while others communicated through their choice to disenroll their students from the school, unpleased with the direction it was going or the responsiveness they received. Whereas the school began the year with approximately 200 students enrolled, by January's count date that number was down to 158 (student information system data, Retrieved July 5, 2018). My presence at Rise felt needed. And as such, it felt right.

For my part, I tried to direct some of my actions through either Jennifer or, increasingly, the C3. Doing so rather than acting as a solo operator felt sustainable and strategic given what I hoped would be my short tenure at the school – I intended to spend the rest of the year closely involved, but my long-term plan was to back away again at the end of the year as a new principal was identified. As such, it was through the C3 that I facilitated certain campus-wide changes, relying both on their expertise as the daily practitioners on site and their passion and work ethic to institute complex change. Many of these changes were directly identified through the cultural

Research Activity: Direct Leadership Support

Activity Description: In a continuation of the fall, despite not planning to do so at the onset of the project I spent at least half of my week at Rise providing direct support to Jennifer and leadership to the school as a whole. This time included meetings with staff and families, problem solving scenarios that arose, and making decisions as required. I did so until April when Jennifer stepped away from her role, at which time I assumed the principal position more formally.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, one-on-one conversation notes, thematic coding, meeting agendas and notes

Figure 33. Spring semester direct leadership support summary.

mapping exercise, where various C3 members committed to taking them on and I was able to provide my support through coaching and monitoring. Still, other needs in the building required my direct and immediate attention and I attempted to provide this if I saw the need, while also trying to work with and through Jennifer to act where and when she could.

A review of the memos I wrote during this period revealed that my reactions to playing a more direct role than intended were positive, with not a single entry directly addressing any negative impacts I was feeling. In January I wrote, "Sure, it wasn't what I expected, but I do feel privileged to support a school in the heights of its existential crisis, and it sure feels better than sitting on the sideline" (Research Memo, 2018). I struck a similar note in early February, writing, "Honestly, while I'm exhausted, I feel that my anxiety is down significantly now that I'm here almost every day to see it for myself. It feels nice to 'hold' staff through this and genuinely feel as though I'm doing something I'm good at again" (Research Memo, 2018). Late February brought more of the same, "I guess there's a reason I'm drawn to [Rise]: my background working with those in trauma? It feels comforting to know what I can do – provide consistency, safe space, grace. I won't lie, it's also nice to feel like I'm giving people something they're hungry for" (Research Memo, 2018). As I will discuss in the implications section below, these particular memos eventually illuminated an interested learning for me. For now, suffice it to say that it is likely that, at least in part, providing direct leadership support to the team felt positive because of the difficulties Jennifer was continuing to experience in our one-to-one clinical supervision meetings, to which I turn my attention next (see Figure 34).

Clinical Supervision with Jennifer

Since the initial revelation about her behavior, Jennifer had worked hard both during our supervision meetings and outside them to incorporate feedback, take responsibility for her action,

Research Activity: Clinical Supervision with Jennifer

Activity Description: While Jennifer and I were no longer co-planning C3 activities together, we continued to meet weekly for a minimum of one hour of clinical supervision.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, supervision notes

Figure 34. Spring semester clinical supervision summary.

and rebuild her relationships with staff. She also continued to struggle. The incident that occurred over the fall had affected not only Jennifer's professional life and relationships but many facets in her personal life as well. In my memos, I also suspected, "It's taken over everything. Her insecurity as a leader is sky-high – [opposite of] her self-esteem, decision-making skills and intuition. Of course I believe in restoration and I know she deeply wants to 'make it better;' but what are the limits to wanting change that may not be situationally possible?" (Research Memo, 2018). As a result of the stressors Jennifer was enduring, it became increasingly difficult for her to remain engaged at work. Through staff and family reports and my own observations, her moods became labile, with frequent incidents of defensiveness or blaming behaviors and an increase in crying or somatic complaints during the school day. These behaviors seemed understandable; it was clear that Jennifer was processing a lot following a volatile fall, and the level of harm she had caused within her community understandably made Rise a difficult place for her to come daily. They were understandable, but also unhealthy. I worried Jennifer's behaviors were evidence of continued harm, to Jennifer and to the community. I wrote, "I worry we're stuck in a lose-lose situation" (Research Memo, 2018).

Rather than decreasing over time, Jennifer's unpredictable behavior at work continued to intensify, leading me to speculate, "She is constantly trying to rise to the occasion, and hasn't had any time to reflect or heal. We are further away from what happened but in some ways she may just beginning to feel it" (Research Memo, 2018). We continued to meet weekly and she accepted my direction and feedback, to the extent she was able to. Simultaneously, Jennifer also continued to fall short of the expectations she, the staff, the community and at times I as her supervisor set for her. I firmly believed that leading a school like Rise would be a challenge for any leader, and precisely at the time when all eyes were on her leadership skills, she was at her

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lowest point. In my memos, I was developing a theory: as staff continued to experience her shortcomings, her self-esteem continued to plummet. I wrote in March: "I just don't know how this can go on. I know [the decision for her to stay] was made with stability or kids and families in mind. But are they getting that? And, more importantly, is she?" (Research Memo, 2018). Finally, during the week after spring break, the house of cards started to fall.

During that fateful week in April, Jennifer acted in unexpected ways on several occasions, exhibiting disorganized or bizarre behaviors. Twice, general disorganization led to two critical meetings being missed, and Jennifer struggled to rebound emotionally after each. That same week, she was observed falling asleep in a crucial professional development – one on diversity, equity and inclusion, areas in which some staff felt she was coming up short. When given feedback, she was quickly overcome with emotion to the point of needing to leave campus for the day. Early the next week, after multiple inquiries and offers of support, Jennifer and I had a transparent conversation at which she shared that the overwhelm she had been feeling since the incident this fall was now also affecting her physically. After a productive and difficult conversation, we mutually determined that, for her own health and well-being, she should reduce her role at the school for the remainder of the year, shifting her focus to off-site recruitment efforts while I stepped in formally to lead the school through a transition to a new principal next fall. We worked together on messaging and updated the school's multiple stakeholders of the change in direction. The focus of our work shifted again.

Staff, parents and other stakeholders adjusted to the news – a surprisingly simple process, speaking to the resilience of the existing community, and perhaps also to their low expectations of leaders based on previous experiences. I memoed, "I don't know if to feel relieved that no one is thrown off-balance by this latest change or saddened. Is it a statement of the trust, transparency

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and strong relationships we have built, or of the preponderance of trauma the community has grown anesthetized to?" (Research Memo, 2018). Within only a couple of weeks, with Jennifer struggling to keep up with the off-site recruitment responsibilities she has signed up for, she vacated her position entirely. By this point, however, there was no disruption for the community as they had already felt her absence and I – with my initial goal to decrease my role on site progressively throughout the year now laughable – had stepped in to serve as their day-to-day school leader in the interim (see Figure 35).

Service as Interim School Leader

Jennifer's departure from the principal role coincided with the planned end of my second cycle. Yet due to its obvious impact on my research, I committed to continuing to memo through the end of the school year. Those final few weeks of the year flew by, as represented in Figure 35. Celebratory events like the end-of-year dance showcase, field day and Kindergarten graduation punctuating nearly every week. Simultaneously, increased attention went into planning for next year, from inviting families, Board members, teachers and other stakeholders to help select the school's new principal to readying the school for a geographical move to a new building. I wrote, "Wow – putting energy into forward planning! What a welcome and optimistic change" (Research Memo, 2018).

Once again, my memos spoke to a sense of positivity, with entries such as, "It feels so amazing to work with the team that is here! [Jennifer's departure] has shined a light on the folks who are still in the building, particularly the leadership team, who recognize this moment for what it is and have come together with grit and with grace" (Research Memo, 2018). In a conversation with a confidant I recall saying that the year could be represented through a relief

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Research Activity: Service as Interim School Leader

Activity Description: In Jennifer's absence, I stepped up to lead the school through June. In addition to assuming additional oversight over the daily functioning of the school, the supervision and evaluation of its staff, and being the outwardly-facing leader to families and other stakeholders, I worked to ready the school for the new schoolyear.

Artifacts Collected: Reflective memos, end-of-year culture and climate assessments, meeting notes, work artifacts

Figure 35. Spring semester service as interim school leader summary.

sculpture, clearly delineating both the valleys and the peaks, including the ways in which the different professionals in the community had responded.

Interestingly, although I felt equally positive directing more of my leadership activities to the site since the initial revelation about the precipitating incident Jennifer was involved in that fall, I now looked back at those times differently, noting, "This feels so much better than before! Cleaner, more focused on moving past then on enduring through, more resolution than containment… I didn't realize how much we, how much I, needed this" (Research Memo, 2018). To unpack my shifting perceptions and what they might signal about change processes in light of traumatic events, in addition to many other learnings from the second cycle, I dug up my codes, photographs, artifacts and memos. It was now time to begin looking for patterns and themes, reducing the year's highs and lows into implications for future learning.

Analysis and Implications

The year had been nothing short of a whirlwind of activity. Still reeling in many ways from the twists and turns of the year's start, Rise Academy barreled through its second half. In my last memo of the school year, written on a long, transcontinental flight just a day later, I wrote, "I feel like I just rode the Teacups ride at Disneyland for a year. I'm dizzy, disoriented and crossing my fingers my stomach doesn't betray me. I also feel satisfied, proud, alive" (Research Memo, 2018). When the spinning stopped, several key claims emerged, among them two principal learnings, seemingly somewhat odds with one another: (1) Asset-based thinking and action are critical for diverse stakeholders to work diligently to make critical improvements, and (2) Authentically recognizing the limits of hope and the weightiness of complex trauma honors the experience of the community, in turn increasing these same internal assets.

Pitted against each other, the two themes send an explicitly contradictory message. That was the message that had previously led me to incomplete answers, such as one of my main assertions in Chapter 5: that "unproductive coping skills" needed to be reduced in order to grow the restorative power of protective factors, like "relationships and mission alignment." In keeping with Chapter 5's emerging framework (see Figure 22), these could be represented as competing forces, as I have attempted in Figure 36 to provide a visualization of the incorrect relationship I assumed to exist between the two themes. Yet, as additional evidence piled on, I began to see that I was wrong. I began to think of unhealthy coping skills as a byproduct of responding to trauma and grief. With that frame in mind, I began wondering if rather than resenting the behaviors that people develop when undergoing grief and trauma, I could instead acknowledge them, making room for people's disappointment and anger. I started to consider that seeking to understand – rather than immediately moving to suppress – people's difficult experience was not a defiance or betrayal to asset-based thinking. Rather, it was a natural extension of one of those very assets: strong relationships. I began seeing that it was important to meet people where they were and speak truthfully about what I saw. Figure 37 attempts to show what I was beginning to realize: that healing and progress are achieved through a balancing act of recognizing reality and conjuring aspiration.

To put this differently, I began to resonate with the idea that leveraging existing assets was critical, *as was* making room for and giving voice to frustrating realities. In this mental model, coping skills were essential protective factors too, right alongside the rest. By joining with people and finding ways to meet their needs, I theorized, I could encourage more healthful responses to trauma. The key was releasing the wishful thinking that I could simply stamp out gossiping or venting without recognizing these were the result of an unmet need during a
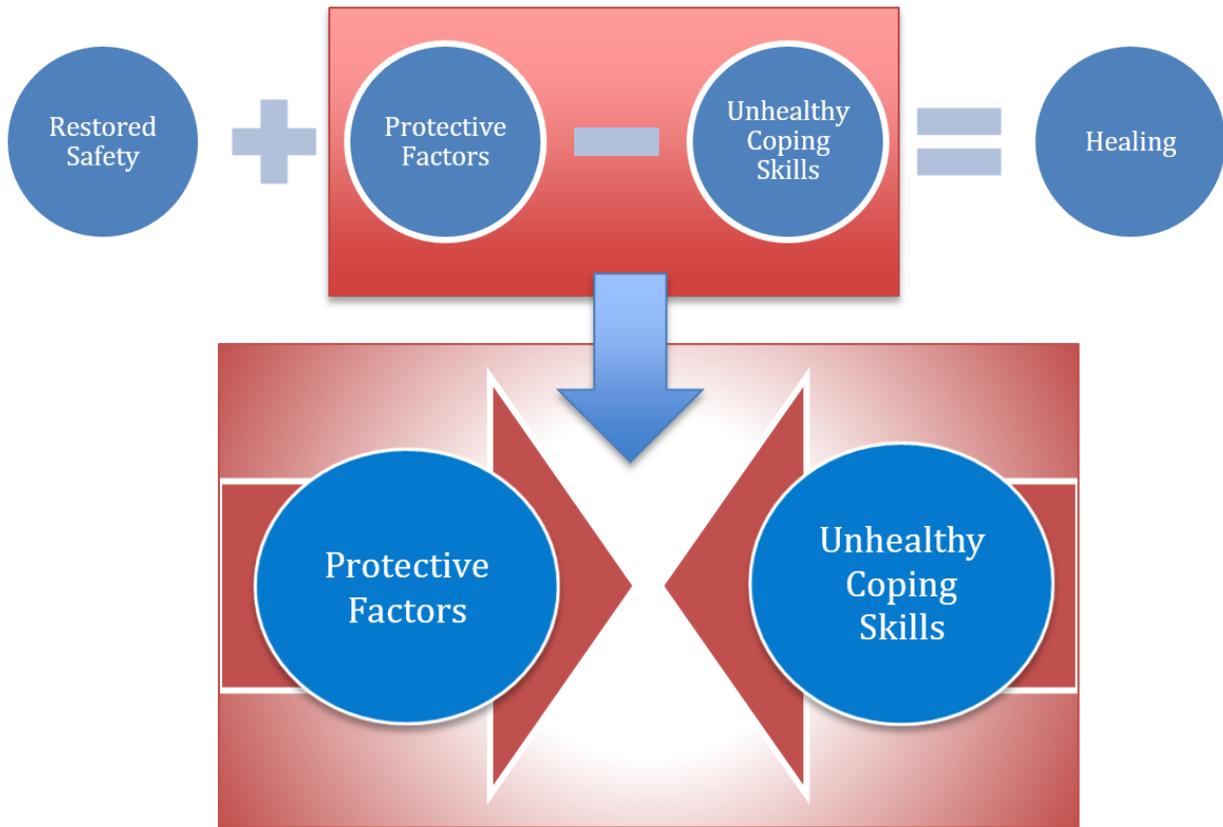
Figure 36. Visualiation of previous, incorrect assertion.

recognition of struggle, harm, complex trauma
(*which at times produce unehealthy coping skills*)

healing & progress

asset mining
(*relationships, mission alignment and meaningful work*)
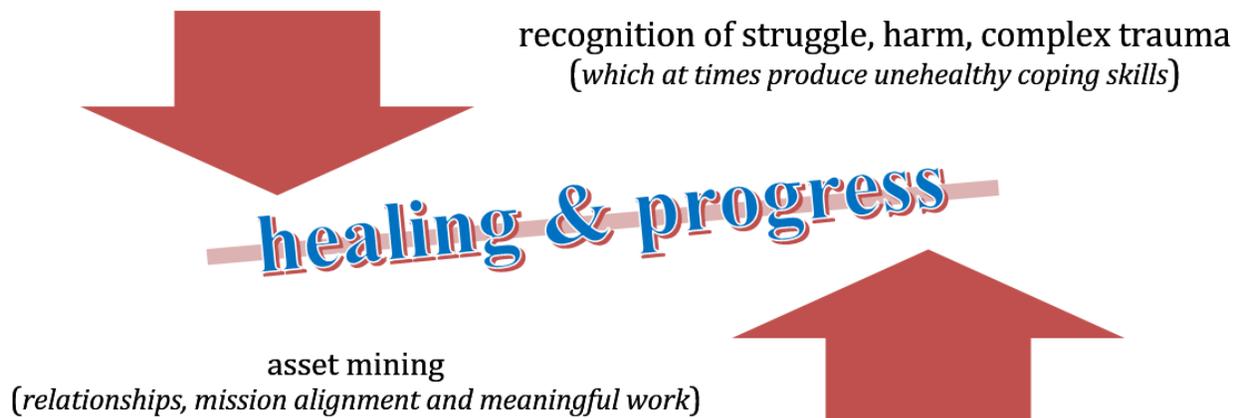
Figure 37. Newly emerging framework.

moment of crisis and working earnestly to provide the supports people deserved. Together, my new framework proposed that these two very different strategies could shape the path toward healing and progress. In two subsections below, I explore both sides of this balance board, examining themes related first to asset mining before giving equal weight to the importance of examining, sitting with and making room for trauma.

Asset Mining

Building off the body of evidence that was forming by the end of my first cycle, several subthemes regarding the protective factors at Rise continued to gain traction. I have written previously about two of the strong assets evident at the school: (1) The overwhelming *mission alignment* (even though reality had not yet caught up to vision); and, (2) The *strength of relationships* present throughout the community, relationships buoyed by the consistent, intentional efforts to ally with one another and with families. These two subthemes emerged just as clearly as before, and were this time joined by a third: (3) the power of *meaningful work*, which showed up in the consistent desire of community members and co-researchers to lean furthest in when the problems were at their stickiest, rather than attempt to sidestep or ignore these in favor of attractive "easy fixes." Together the saturation of these protective factors at Rise, when leveraged through leadership action, helped tip the school toward healing and progress.

Mission alignment as an asset. In the previous chapter we uncovered a discrepancy in the fall SCAI data (represented previously in Table 8), which showed constituents at one end deeply concerned about the very safety of their children and on the other aligned with the school's commitment to serving every student, every day. The data from cycle 2 revealed this gap still existed, as did high levels or pride in the school's mission. This mission alignment was

evident in the PhotoVoice submissions of my co-researchers, in the cultural map the C3 created from perceptions from families, students and staff, as well as in the year-end SCAI results.

Evidence of mission alignment through PhotoVoice. Throughout the spring, I continued to collect PhotoVoice submissions from C3 members monthly, although a couple of members did not continue contributing, one other member missed two submissions, and two members missed one submission. Still, with the photographs in hand, I coded emerging themes. What I saw in examples such as Figures 38 and 39, captioned "We work, learn, create and exist together" and "The work is never done" respectively, was emblematic of a wider theme related to "worthy-ness" of the school's goals, as shown in Table 14. Namely, that when asked how to represent "unconditional education in action" at Rise Academy, its culture and climate committee members found evidence that the sort of radical inclusion that accounted for the needs of students with trauma histories at Rise was not only an espoused theory but one in action at all levels of the school.

Albeit very different in focus, the two pictures evidence similar learnings about Rise Academy. Both pictures focus on the collective impact of voices and experiences at Rise Academy as an important element, echoing the one-minute essays collected in December, in which all of the C3 members present at the meeting mentioned "community" or "team work" as integral to the work being done at Rise. That interdependence among different community members to ascertain new learning factors in strongly in both pictures, but the second delves more explicitly into the idea that unconditional education means learning not only from formal opportunities to do so but also by looking both inward and externally to our team and asking difficult questions about process and progress. Furthermore, both photographs evidence learning that is, at least in some way, public, likely leading to an amplification of the mission through

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Figure 38. C3 PhotoVoice entry 4, captioned: "We work, learn, create and exist together.
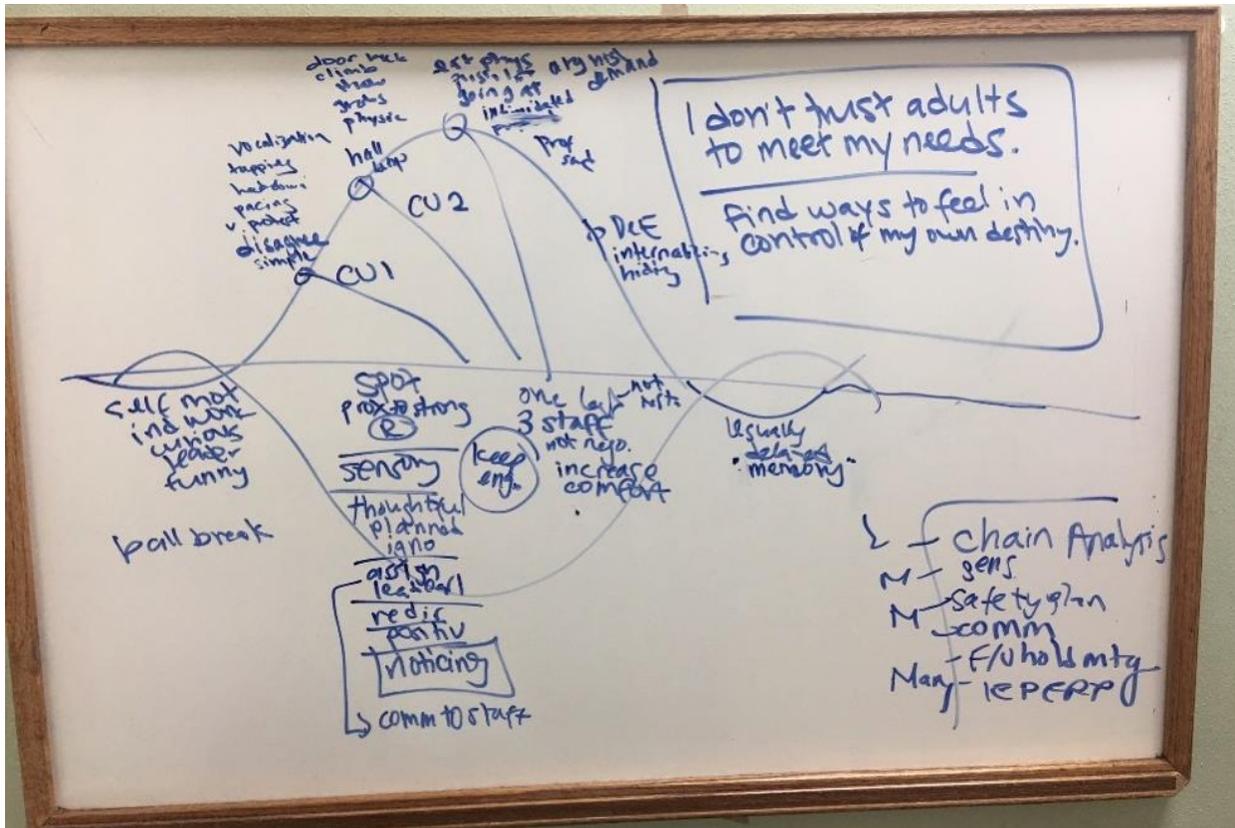
Figure 39. C3 PhotoVoice entry 5, captioned: "The work is never done."

Table 14

Codes for PhotoVoice Submissions (October – April)

Code	Total appearances (Oct-Apr)	Total number of C3 members coded in each category (Oct-Apr)	Notes on coding methodology
Learning as active, dynamic, joyful	14	6	Student movement, smiling students, non-traditional learning, pride
"Worthy-ness" of school goal	20	6	Mission, hard work, pride, goal
Academic rigor	7	3	Outcomes, hard work, traditional learning
Diversity, equity and inclusion	8	5	Mission, pride, learning differences, trauma sensitivity
Relationships	17	8	Connections, community, interdependence, mission-alignment, trust, vulnerability
Physical environment	9	4	Pride, community, love, inclusion
School value that "arts are foundational"	9	3	Joy, nontraditional learning, outcomes
Resilience/growth mindset	8	4	Pride, making mistakes, trust, vulnerability, "stick-to-it-ness"

small, daily actions in the building. In fact, with the exception of the young man "body surfing" in Figure 26, none of the PhotoVoice selections submitted by the C3 members who participated feature students making meaning alone. Each of the pictures features at least two individuals, and in only one of the pictures submitted all year is someone in the formal role of "Teacher" the one sharing the knowledge. I wondered if similar evidence could be traced in the cultural mapping the C3 members did in preparation for March's meeting, to which I turn my attention next.

Evidence of mission alignment in cultural map of school. Because they were outside the scope of my formal research, I did not orchestrate or code the mapping activity the C3 engaged in, rather participating as a practitioner and reflecting in my research memos. This was limiting in my ability to analyze the process as deeply as I may have wished. Yet, when I returned to the memos, despite not having the range of evidence I would had this been a formal research activity, I did identify a theme related to mission alignment. In the memo I wrote following the March C3 meeting, in which I reflected on the cultural map created, I wrote, "Even the student artwork showed a connection to Rise as a 'family,' and a place where all kids were welcomed and wanted" (Research Memo, 2018). I continued a few paragraphs later, "The day-to-day experiences of the student shadowed showed several places where the student did not experience the safety, engagement or optimal learning environment the school strives for" (Research Memo, 2018). Looking at these within the greater scale of the evidence collected to date, this again showed the gap between goal and present reality: desperately wanting the inclusion model to work, and to hold each and every individual child unconditionally, but struggling in the absence of safety and order. Still not knowing exactly how to locate that truth, I did find evidence both in the students' artwork and in comments from the two focus groups that the strong mission

alignment at Rise kept the school from sinking into frustration and disappointment. Next I wondered what the latest round of SCAI data, from May and June of 2019, would reveal.

  Evidence of mission alignment through spring SCAI data. What I saw in the SCAI data made intuitive sense to me. The results of the assessment as a whole, summarized in Figure 40, showed that perceptions of school culture and climate were not quick to rise, if at all. The highest scores remained those ascertained in October of 2016, almost a full year before the start of this research, when a different principal led Rise. In those instances, parents rated the school's culture, as a whole, above the 4.00 mark recognized by the makers of the SCAI to denote a high psychology of success and a healthy and functioning school culture (Shindler, Jones, Williams, Taylor, & Cadenas, 2011). School staff approximated this, rating the culture a 3.90. From there, the October 2017 results – taken after Jennifer and the other administrator began acting in ways that were a violation of organizational norms but before this was known to the school community – show that the school had much work to do, with scores dipping to 3.72 for parents and an even more concerning 3.02 for staff. By the spring, after the staff community reacted to the news of the ethics violation and after all school constituents were impacted by the departure of its principal midyear, perceptions began rising significantly for staff. Scores for both parents and students dropped, but only moderately, especially given the seriousness and disruption of all that had occurred. To me, this signaled the effectiveness of some of the interventions my colleagues and I had put into place to mitigate the harm experienced. Next, I wanted to return to the scores on certain subcategories, particularly those related to mission alignment, to see if SCAI scores related to mission alignment and community engagement remained among the higher of the scores, as they previously had in Table 8 in the previous chapter. I updated the data to include the latest administration of the SCAI, as shown in Table 15. Indeed, again here I found that one of
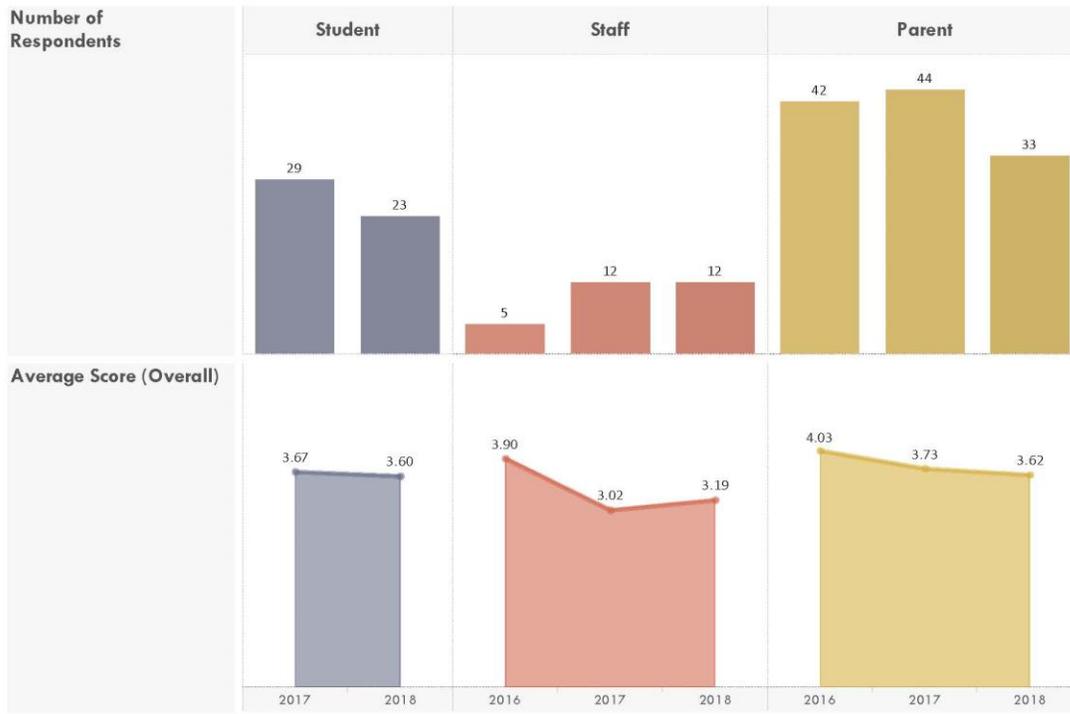
Figure 40. SCAI scores among participant groups, October 2016-June 2018.

Table 15

Comparative SCAI Scores in Targeted Subcategories

Subcategory	October 2016 Results (schoolyear prior, different principal)	October 2017 Results (start of research, Jennifer as principal)	May/June 2018 Results (end of research, Lihi as interim school leader)
Welcoming to Parents Subcategory (staff response)	4.18	3.96	4.00
Welcoming to Parents Subcategory (family response)	4.12	4.08	4.07
Equity and Connectedness of Student Groups Subcategory (staff response)	3.44	3.67	3.92
Equity and Connectedness of Student Groups Subcategory (staff response)	4.03	3.97	4.03

the reliably high-scoring themes on the SCAI was families' feelings of inclusion and belongingness at school, along with their belief and approval of the school's mission to ensure equity among all groups, including those historically most marginalized. Consistently and throughout various data gathering exercises, mission alignment remained a highlight in Rise's culture and one that helped stabilize culture and climate when crisis emerged. Yet, I also recognized that the mission alignment at Rise was not just to the theory. Individual stakeholders, myself included, were driven to achieve this mission because of the strength of relationships among us and the mutual respect that existed at the school.

Relationships as an asset. Like mission alignment before it, intentional relationships among stakeholders was an abundant asset at Rise that could be leveraged to improve its cultural health. The nature of the whole child approach at Rise and the complex, holistic needs of its students necessitated relational interdependence among stakeholders, all within the construct of progressing toward a singular goal or end-phase as the previous section explored. Despite undeniable fissures in the relational network at the school, many but not all related to the leadership challenges it faced, Rise's community members continued to feel connected to each other in pursuit of an ambitious goal. They were truly, as Figure 38's PhotoVoice submission put it, "existing together" in, per Figure 39's image, work that was "never done." The pride and ownership staff and families alike felt for this orientation – even in the face of irrefutable challenge – sustained their hope and efforts and buffered them from despair or resignation.

One of the places where I saw evidence of the power of strong relationships at Rise was in the cultural mapping exercise designed by the C3. Since relationships and mission-alignment have such a strong pull on C3 members, perhaps it should be unsurprising that the committee engaged so actively in devising research activities that ensured that every member of the

community could share their voice on the school's culture. As I introduced the idea of culture mapping at the school, with C3 members splitting up in order to acquire different insights we could bring together at our next gathering, the committee leapt into action. The parent representative offered to speak with families and staff in small, safe focus groups, explicitly reflecting on how she could make them feel comfortable in sharing honestly with her given the relational nature between parent and teacher. Two staff co-researchers developed the idea for utilizing the arts as a way to tap into students' understanding and devised the arts activity students would participate in to offer their own input (depending on grade level, some students were asked to create vision board collages of their ideal school whereas other were asked to draw what made them happy at school and why being a Rise Scholar mattered). The Shadow a Student Challenge, suggested by one of the parents at the C3, was the final data collection tool identified, and aimed to offer Jennifer and me a chance to look through the lens of a student community member, so that we were anchored in their lived experience before attempting to redesign it. Documenting the experience of co-creating data collection processes with the C3 in my field notes, I shared, "The commitment to collaboration is astonishing! This is just one committee meeting, once a month, on top of an already overwhelming schedule, and the work ethic and commitment to digging in are impressive to say the least" (Research Memo, 2018). Just as the strong appeal of the school's mission and the faith in its community kept its constituents locked in a process of improvement, rather than falling into despair, so seemingly were the developing relationships among the C3 and their laser focus on advancing the school's mission, a self-rewarding cycle which seemingly continued promoting their commitment to each other and the work.

Further evidence that pointed to an appreciation and thoughtfulness about relationships included the updated SCAI results from the spring of 2018. In the subcategory of Mutual Respect, for example, staff ranked the school as a 4.08, the highest score by staff respondents for any subcategory (note: the SCAI does not query parents' or students' responses to the area of mutual respect, which reveals a possible limitation to the instrument's embrace of the importance of full family and student partnerships for improving schools; this was a researcher bias that stuck out quickly at Rise, where much attention has gone toward the goal of full embracing parents as equal partners in their children's education). The subcategories Sense of Camaraderie and Welcoming to Outsiders also scored relatively high with staff, at a 3.83. Welcoming to Parents, reviewed in the previous section, scored a 4.00.

The last lens that I viewed relationships through was by examining my own response to the turbulent year at Rise. In coding my own memos, I found that I referenced appreciation, admiration or joy with at least one member of the community in a remarkable 91% of my memos! Clearly, if not for the school as a whole, the respect I held for individuals within this community and the ways in which their contributions were meaningful for me propelled me forward in this process, giving me both perspective and purpose for marching ahead. In a way, both my own experience and that of other staff members evidenced that our culture of unconditional care was more than just a sound byte. We truly did care a great lot.

With that, I had a fairly strong evidence base that relationships and mission alignment mattered a lot at Rise Academy. I attempted to triangulate what I saw through research, including Schmoker's (1996) *Results: The Key to Continuous School Improvement*, which emphasized the importance of taking time simply to enjoy the relationships involved in collaborative work. The power of team relationships and culture appeared again and again, from the literature on

relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) to its impact on fostering change (Aguilar, 2003) and increasing school climate (Price, 2012). I had evidence; I was close to stopping there. But I still felt something was missing. I kept returning to a premise I began drawing in Chapter 5: the Rise community was getting something out of working to fix big problems. That rather than being put off by the undeniable areas needing to change, the struggle to address these gave meaning to their work. I began re-coding my data to see if I could justify an additional subtheme, a previously unacknowledged asset and protective factor: meaningful work.

Meaningful work (productive struggle?) as an asset. When I began to re-code the data to see if a third subtheme emerged, my initial title for the pile I was creating was "big problems, big investment." At the top of the pile of evidence sat a quote from one of my memos, represented below in Figure 41.

My field notes from the day after January's C3 meeting evidenced my growing admiration for the committee and its fiery members. After witnessing the strength and resolve of Rise's community through the tumultuous start of the year, I was nonetheless stunned at the C3's willingness – in fact their mandate – to go deeper into the work, rather than stay at problem identification or superficial fixes. Despite the positivity of its staff and the commitments of its families, the student culture at Rise was still problematic at best. Although more staff had been hired and new routines put into place, a memo I wrote in March estimated that on a given day approximately 15% of Rise's students were missing some portion of instructional time during the day due to unexpected behaviors. With C3 meetings only occurring once a month and so much happening in between one session and the next, this meant that there were only two choices for how to run the meeting: tinker at the edges to keep meetings tight, or deepen our inquiry,

> *We aren't talking about field day and fundraisers. We're not choosing themes for the prom. This team of people is tackling – head on! – problems of such scale that at many (all?!) of the schools I've worked at would be reserved for closed door meetings or cryptic memos to the Board* (Research Memo, 2018).

Figure 41. Anecdotal evidence for meaningful work as a subtheme.

soliciting more input even when it revealed further, difficult evidence about the fragility of the school's current state. Out of respect for the C3 members' commitment to the school and its improvement processes, I chose the second path. I would not come to regret it.

The committee had shown its desire to dig in, and I took them at their word. And, the deeper we went, the more invested the team became. In the February meeting, for example, a staff member shared during a check-in an experience of feeling overwhelmed earlier in the day by a fight between two students and finding herself struggling to gain her composure so she could assist other students. The rest of the committee – staff and families alike – offered support and encouragement, and asked open-ended questions as she processed her response to a difficult situation, taking risks and being vulnerable while reflecting on her personal motivations for working with trauma-impacted youth. This level of rich, raw, unscripted honesty – to me – indicated that a level of trust and respect had formed among the group in only its first few months together, the sort of relational trust between staff and families that I had only read about attempting to build with other professionals (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Predictably, as difficult truths surfaced in the group, the C3 remained engaged in processing these and seeking their resolution, where possible. Rather than feeling I was losing control of meetings or putting the school's welfare or reputation at risk, I found myself gaining strength and motivation from these moments of radical truth and the catalyst effect they had on my investment in improving the school. In memos written both in January and February of 2018, I used the word "risk" 8 times, "invest" or "investment" 6 times, and the word "progress" 5 times. "As the work gets more difficult," I wrote in February, "It gets more fun too. I started the year worrying that if anyone really knew how big some of the school's issues were, they would walk away now. The opposite is happening. The more risks we seem to take in sharing the real, raw, hard truths about where

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we are and the root causes, the more people seem ready to join with us and invest in real solutions" (Research Memo, 2018).

These sentiments echoed what I had seen and felt in the first cycle, such as in this December memo I shared in Chapter 5: "I find that the culture work at Rise feeds me! I have no idea how to get out of this hole – we're understaffed and poorly led with no money to fix either! BUT the challenge of working to do it with this incredible group of people is enthralling. If not us, then who?" (Research Memo, 2017). I then flashed back to other moments from the year. I thought of the new C3 members who jumped heart-first into the leadership opening left by Jennifer and the other administrator, one of whom would honor me and the other C3 members with a chrysanthemum, poetically acknowledging our resolve as "she who cheers the dreary days" (Knapp, 1894). I thought of the parent of the student who excelled at school, who felt compelled to keep her there because she was not satisfied knowing her own daughter would succeed at another school when it meant that those less fortunate than her would not.

Intuitively, I was starting to believe pretty strongly that we were each gaining something by participating in this hard, meaningful work, this productive and collaborative struggle to solve deeply-entrenched, systemic problems. In reviewing earlier drafts of my work, my mentor and dissertation committee member was curious too, noting: "It is interesting…the doing the deeper work is a motivator to the staff. People actually do not like to be in the complaint and worry space; any action that seems more positive is a motivator" (Professor feedback, 2018). Would this be borne out in the research? I turned back to the literature to see if I could find evidence for what was emerging. It did not take long.

I returned first to the research I had reviewed in Chapter 2. In thinking about how to engage adults in the change process, I had reviewed Bryk and Schneider's 2002 work on relational trust. I focused on several crucial ingredients for sustainable school reform:

- Collective decision-making and broader teacher investment in the success of the school;

- Staff confidence to reflect on and experiment with new practices, without shame;

- Ability to have difficult conversations about challenges that impede learning and progress, such as racial bias and the impact of trauma on development;

- A moral imperative to work together as a team to take on difficult work.

Each of these elements that theory associated with success, I now saw in the evidence at Rise. Moreover, Rise Academy had taken the research one level further. For every mention of "teachers" or "staff" in Bryk and Schneider's work, Rise had embraced parents as well. Just as the SCAI subcategories had proven not sophisticated enough to address the genuine depth of parent partnership that Rise was bringing to life, Bryk and Schneider had not captured families as lead actors in a relational play on trust. Rise's efforts to engage parents as experts was more than just lip-service, it was piercing through, changing the way in which the school was operating.

Other researchers whose work I had reviewed in Chapter 2 appeared in support of the claim that productive struggle was a powerful lever for transformational change too. I returned once more to Schmoker (1996), who wrote that the special bonds that were formed when working on transformational change had a positive influence on the individuals working together. It was Knowles (1977) who reminded me that adults fare well when new learning is tied to problems they are personally incentivized to solve. Osterman and Kottkamp (1993) reiterated that the sorts of environments that tended to generate results were ones in which new

ideas and out-of-the-box thinking were actively invited, creating an open and supportive space for both risk and reflection. Like a modern startup environment, I imagined the space Osterman and Kottkamp invoked as one where incredibly bright people work at the edges of their skills and abilities to try and solve seemingly unsolvable problems – much the way that I kept returning to the fulfilment Rise community members seemed to feel being involved in meaningful work.

Adding to the research I had previously surfaced, at the suggestion of one of my committee members I added a new voice as well. In examining Marianne Maeckelbergh's (2011) "Doing is Believing: Prefiguration as Strategic Practice in Alterglobalization Movement", I found not only evidence for my assertion that productive struggle was inherently an asset, but also an explanation as to why this might be so. As Maeckelbergh articulates, in movements or organizations in which new forms of social relations are being introduced – as was very much the case at Rise – it is important to favor means over ends, beginning with prefiguration. The struggle itself, not its resolution, IS the progress we seek. It builds on other assets such as mission alignment and strong relationships, adding the all-important element of purpose. My hunch began to feel like a strong assertion: digging into big, meaty, cultural problems was itself a culture-building exercise. It was the equivalent to actualizing a problem-posing education rather than the banking education, Freire (1970) warned of. And finally, the big A-ha, captured alongside other data inputs in Table 16: "People are fulfilled to the extent that they create their world (which is a human world), and create it with their transforming labor" (Freire, 1970, p. 145).

Together, the three assets I now felt confident were present at Rise: (1) mission alignment, (2) strong relationships and (3) meaningful work acted as protective factors for the school in meeting its midyear challenges. One page of the SCAI survey portrayed the data like

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Table 16

Triangulated Evidence for Meaningful Work as a Subtheme

Type of Evidence for Meaningful Work as a Subtheme	Evidence Examples and Quotes
Upon Personal Reflection	• "We aren't talking about field day and fundraisers. We're not choosing themes for the prom. This team of people is tackling – head on! – problems of such scale that at many (all?!) of the schools I've worked at would be reserved for closed door meetings or cryptic memos to the Board" (Research Memo, 2018) • "It is interesting…the doing the deeper work is a motivator to the staff. People actually do not like to be in the complaint and worry space; any action that seems more positive is a motivator" (Professor feedback, 2018)
Among the C3	• Individuals accepting expanded leadership opportunities • Willingness to go deep and be brave • Generative work of cultural mapping • C3 member's chrysanthemum metaphor
At Rise Academy	• Mature, productive, solution-focused response to crisis • Appreciation of raw, hard truths – no pressure for easy answers
In Literature	• Relational trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002) • Principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1977) • Social bonds during improvement efforts (Schmoker, 1996) • Prefiguration as strategic practice (Maeckelbergh, 2011) • Problem-posing education (Freire, 1970)
In Sum	"People are fulfilled to the extent that they create their world (which is a human world), and create it with their transforming labor" (Freire, 1970, p. 145).

nothing else could. One of the SCAI dimensions, "Faculty Relationships" asks questions only of staff members, with one exception in which students' input is also sought. As Figure 42 shows, the staff's perceptions from October to May increase sharply, creating the visual of a boomerang effect. While we know from Figure 40 that family and student perceptions have shifted slightly downward, we can see in the staff's responses that they have been buoyed by something at the school, something which may be a lead indicator in additional changes to come.

Recognition of Struggle, Harm and Complex Trauma

I had spent ample time mining the existing assets at Rise to help the school achieve healing and progress. I had isolated three important protective factors hard at work at the school: (1) mission alignment; (2) strong relationships and (3) meaningful work. Meanwhile, from a process standpoint, evidence was increasing that Rise was truly engaging families in deep ways. Where other researchers mostly considered staff when thinking about relational trust, Rise was asking those questions of itself in relation to *all* community members, including families. Next, I felt compelled to test the second half of my emerging framework, as shown in Figure 37. I was about to do something that did not always come easily for me: focus slowly and deliberately on the very real harms and deficits that existed at Rise.

It may not have appeared with automaticity, but once I began reflecting honestly about the depth of challenge the year had presented, two subthemes emerged, one new and quite familiar. The first subtheme was quite a surprise to me and revealed a blind spot in my own leadership: not accepting the limits of hope and positivity. The second subtheme, to which we will return shortly, led to more familiar terrain, exposing the omnipresent impacts of complex trauma.
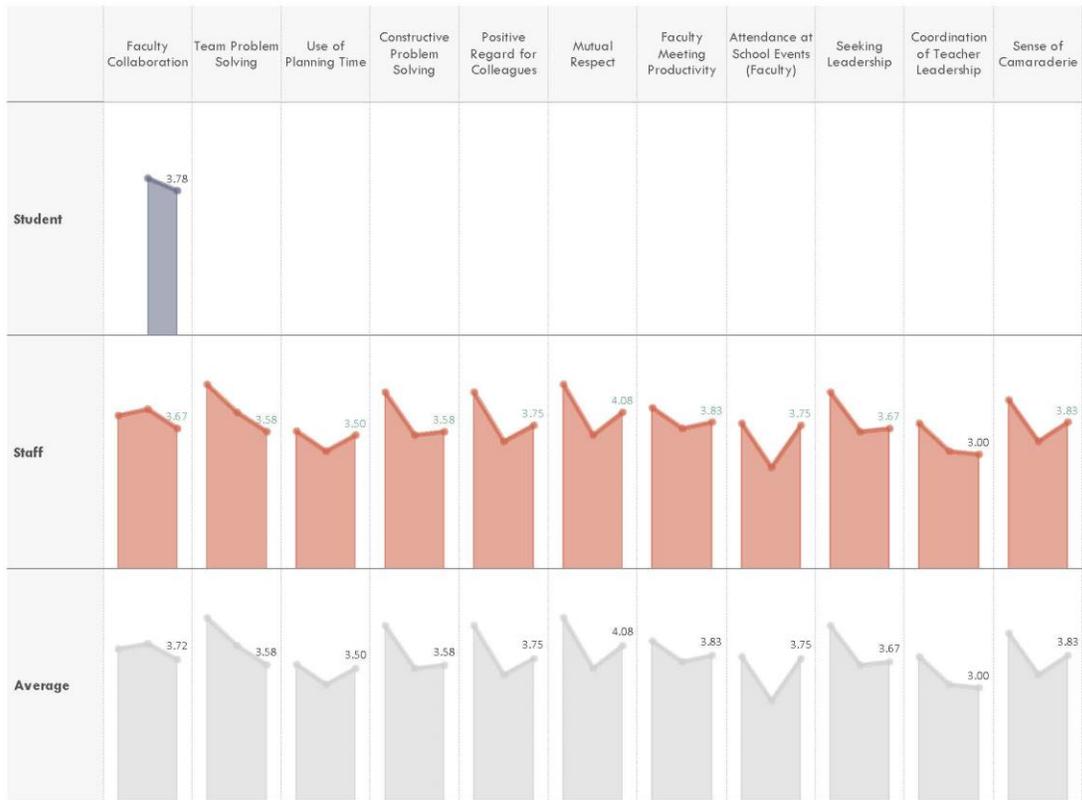
Figure 42. SCAI results on "Faculty Relationships" domain.

The limits of hope and positivity. The weight of the school's struggles that fall had in some ways required me and the leadership team more broadly to speak truthfully about some very uncomfortable realities about the school's current functioning and the behavior of some of its leaders. Doing so was difficult, and it came too late for some parents and staff at the school. While they told me they appreciated the thoughtfulness we were giving to some of the core issues at hand, two staff members resigned their positions at the school between November and January, citing ongoing culture and climate issues (both related to school safety and to trust of the school's leadership team). Several families also opted out of the school, transferring their students to nearby alternatives. Almost universally, these families told us that they loved everything about Rise's mission (mission alignment) and the people who worked to enact it (relationships), but that their children's physical and emotional safety had felt compromised.

For this and many other reasons, casting all of the evidence against the backdrop of hopefulness alone was inauthentic. It also began to seem unproductive. For, ironically, the alignment among the community about how low the starting point was, may have played an important factor in preparing them for difficult change. In Chapter 2, I introduced a table from Grubb and Waters' 2004 work on first-order versus second-order change (see Table 1). In the table, the researchers assert that a second-order change is one in which the change is a break with the past and exists outside of existing paradigms. In many places, this may come at the detriment of change, because in almost all systems, some stakeholders are deeply attached to the status quo (Freire, 1970; Senge, 1990). Uniquely, at Rise, this was not the case. Nobody steeped in the school's rich culture and fabric of relationships believed change should be incremental or negotiated by external experts, as would be the argument for first-order change. Instead, the conflict between the prevailing values and norms of the school – to create an excellent school

with equitable access to all students, measured by the success of those most easily disenfranchised – and its current functioning was known and publicly acknowledged. In a way that (at least from my limited, anecdotal research) is extraordinarily rare in public schools, no one in the school community was attached to the status quo, while everyone was attached to a vision of equity and excellence. This uniquely aligned perception of problem state AND a hopeful resolution enabled the school's change in a way that defied expectations. There is little in the history of American public education that would have led me to predict how willing the Rise community was to embark on second-order change (Baldwin, 1971; Dewey, 1938; DuBois, 1906; Goldstein, 2014) agreeing universally to leave behind a broken status quo for the promise (though no one was under the pretense it was a guarantee) of a better future. I next wondered, what role did I play in this process? I was again somewhat surprised to find the answer.

I mentioned earlier that 91% of my reflective memos explicitly mentioned relationships with other community members. Well 94% of them (a full 112 of 119) included some version of my expressing positive thinking, hopefulness or gratitude. Whether I was reframing needing to serve as principal for the year as "exciting" or "a relief" or whether I was gushing about my admiration and enjoyment of my colleagues, I focused on at least one positive element with incredible consistency (Research Memos, 2017-2018). Surely this had a positive influence, both on my own resilience and likely on my ability to identify assets and reframe challenges; I was like a self-help aisle poster child. In fact, the previous section focused in depth on my ability to identify assets, and to begin facilitating a process of leveraging them systemically. Yet, could it be that the vow I had sworn to optimism was also standing in the way of truthful reflection?

It was a mentor and dissertation committee member who launched me on this inquiry, emailing feedback on an earlier draft by commenting, "Sometimes your own levels of hope and

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the purported optimism you exude are not realistic, huh?... I am not saying we do not need the optimism; we count on you for it, but is it possible this is a leadership blind spot at times?" (Professor feedback, 2018). It was starting to sink in. Seeing the solutions through the problems was an organizing frame in my life. I could serve in trauma-impacted communities because I had a built-in defense: seeing something bad as an opportunity to create better. Doing so had allowed me to maintain radical hope in the face of a sometimes bleak reality. As Jonathan Lear (2011) writes, "Radical hope anticipates a good for which those who have the hope as yet lack the appropriate concepts with which to understand it. What would it be for such hope to be justified?" (p. 103). But was it also true that I was pivoting so quickly to putting a positive spin on things that I was failing to take stock of what my surroundings looked like?

I saw evidence that I had in fact been ignoring the important data buried in the mud of the status quo so I could instead dream of the flowers that might one day rise in a more hopeful future. The best example is one I previously alluded to: the now defunct emerging framework I first introduced in Figure 22 in Chapter 5. There, unsatisfied by the presence of unhealthy coping skills amongst the Rise staff – from gossiping to venting or maintaining secrecy – I wrote with conviction of the importance of stamping out these processes, guiding the staff instead toward the light. Now I saw it differently. Those behaviors, undoubtedly unproductive in the long run, were also a natural, perhaps necessary, developmental stage. Staff were thrown for a loop. They were traumatized. And uncomfortable as that fact may have made me feel, they could not rush their way out of it, and neither could I. In this, I found further support for the new framework I had first introduced in Figure 37, which suggests not that we must minimize and push aside the negative, but instead that we needed to give it space, see it as a human response to being harmed

by other people and by a larger system, and work to balance that with the best of our strengths and the biggest of our hopes.

Suddenly, with that reckoning complete, other pieces clicked too. It made sense that raw, vulnerable truth-telling, such as at the February C3's spontaneous support group meeting, was so embraced by the Rise community. The willingness to honor people's experiences and confirm that they were indeed exposed to an unhealthy environment allowed them to safely engage, knowing no one was trying to fleece them with easy promises or sticky catchphrases, that something was indeed out of whack and that it would take hard work to make it better. Indeed, as Figure 38 showed, the recognition of the bad, the hopeless, the harmful and the gross was not working against asset-based thinking. It was instead offering a balance, honoring the present moment so we could build from our assets toward a future of healing and progress.

It all began to feel familiar. It was familiar in the way that when Sequoia student Troy arrived, the first step in his intervention was not shaping his behaviors, but acknowledging that they were hard, and we as his team would not be scared off by them or less eager to help him. It was familiar in how the pivot for student Joseph was not a great intervention plan the day he arrived, but the principal standing strong in the face of our failure to say we did not yet know how to fix this, but we were all in together and would keep trying until we got there. And it was familiar in the way that the initial intent of this research was to contribute to a body of knowledge about the tough, circuitous AND necessary and rewarding work of installing trauma-informed practices in school. What was starting me in the face was the impact of complex trauma and one of its most basic principles: the need to think about context, and acknowledge the pain that has been caused in order to gain the empathy and understanding needed to begin healing. It was time to look at complex trauma in more detail again.

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The role of complex trauma. In Chapter 2, I made a distinction between simple trauma (a singular event perceived by the person affected by it as unlikely to repeat, a freak accident, a departure from the norm) and complex trauma (deep, sustained trauma that impacts many life domains, such as systemic oppression or ongoing abuse and mistreatment, with no expectation of relief in sight). Given that there were strong ties at Rise, and no patterns of unethical behavior, it may have first seemed that the violation Jennifer and the other administrator engaged in could be classified as simple. In reality, it was anything but. For one thing, there was no clear and immediate resolution. Additionally, the act occurred within a context, the context of an environment with intense needs, that had experienced disproportionate numbers of transitions and losses, at which individuals were highly reliant on their trust with one another and at which they were formal leaders within the community. The more I thought about what was happening at Rise, the more I began to recognize the complex nature of the trauma the school and its members were experiencing, both from within the building and by the nature of their lives, professions or environment (micro, meso and macro).

I looked through my memos to see if this existential angst could somehow be drawn off the pages. I lifted every description of the organization out of my memos over the previous several months and all of a sudden, a new pattern emerged. In eight memos, I had used the phrase "organizational trauma" 14 times. When I first saw it, I was hardly surprised. It felt like a reframe I practiced often throughout this schoolyear, a way to remind myself that what I was feeling and experiencing was, in fact, real: that I, like others at Rise, was walking daily into an unpredictable, unsafe environment riddled with overlaying layers of personal, community and intergenerational trauma; that every day we were re-playing our roles in an under-resourced, overtaxed system; that some of us were so impacted by trauma that we either walked around

triggered throughout the day or developed coping skills – healthy or not – to assist us in self-regulating; and that, in the midst of it all, we were finding strength in our community and holding on to radical hope to transcend our current circumstances with resilience and courage. I thought back to my course on organizational theory, and how I had not been able to neatly fit any of the organizational theory criteria I had collected perfectly. But that was because Rise was a traumatized organization. This preoccupation with basic needs like survival and safety had thwarted the school's development of an explicit organizational orientation.

Here, again, more questions followed. Would the same principles of trauma-informed care that I had spent my career applying to schools work organizationally? Which of these principles had in fact already been leveraged, given that I and others with a deep orientation toward understanding community trauma had been in the lead this far and are only now beginning to recognize these invisible patterns? What is significant about the strength of bond/alignment between the school's staff and families, particularly given how rare it is for these two groups to "join" even in the healthiest of organizations?

I began in what I assumed would be too simplistic a place to find real answers: by returning to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, reproduced in Figure 43. I started to think of the hierarchical nature of a school community's needs from a similar trauma lens. I envisioned that fulfillment and community actualization, for them, would be the generative work of instituting educational best practices and creating a just and excellent school. One layer below was the attention to what fed their psychological needs: relationships, productive struggle, mission alignment – all elements found in research to be prescient in successful second-order change (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Freire, 1970; Knowles, 1977; Waters & Grubb, 2004). At the foundation though was something even more basic – safety. I began to visualize these as their

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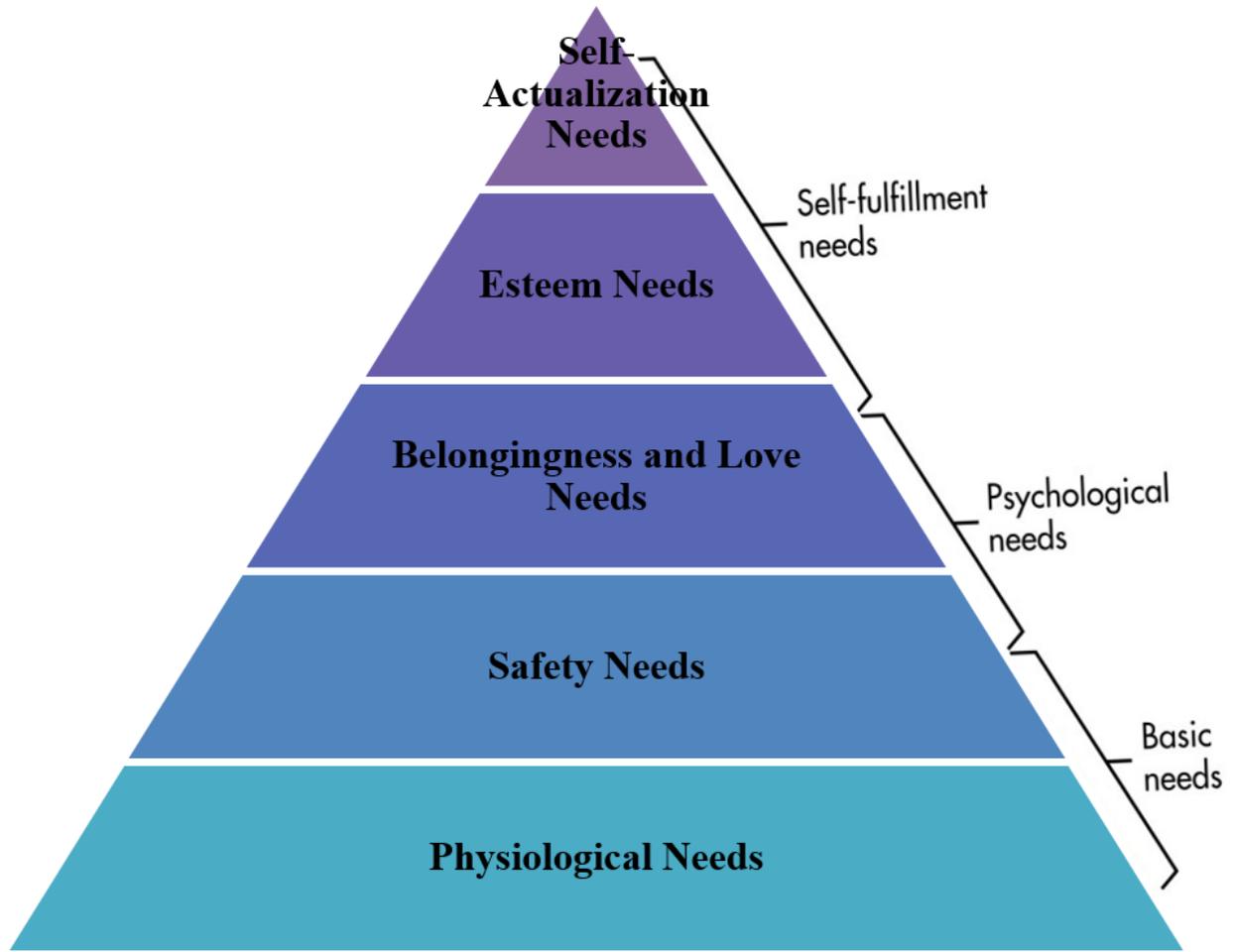
Figure 43. Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

own pyramid, with each layer speaking both to the community needs and to the leadership moves that enable these, as shown in Figure 44.

In hopes of generalizing further, and because I just did not need any more educational pyramids in my life, I then imagined standing at 10,000 feet, looking down at the new pyramid from its top, as represented in Figure 45, my revised framework. Before me were nesting containers that showed the relational nature between leadership, leadership for change, and leadership for change in high-trauma schools. My head spinning with data, themes and more questions than answers. I was eager to return to my five original research questions to see how what I had uncovered during the second cycle of research related to my original intent and the work that lay ahead for Rise Academy.

Summary

Authentic transformation develops over time, with research indicating that substantial, system-wide changes may take four to seven years to achieve (Speck & Knipe, 2005). Surely, by the spring of 2018, little change could be cited by looking at survey data or concrete outcomes alone. Having a strong structure to guide implementation – such as the Culture and Climate Committee (C3), the semiannual 360° assessment process, and the process of co-creating milestones to define incremental steps to success based on the latest information available – was but one essential ingredient to success. Yet, this structure was nothing until paired with a strong understanding of the environmental and organizational context that would enable its effective adoption (Barker & Gump, 1965; Brofenbrenner, 1974). This context is strongly influenced by the quality and capacity of site leadership and the school community's ability to assess readiness for change and adhere to an intentional, staged process of transformation. Significant, sustained transformation requires, first and foremost, a long-term commitment to the assessment, planning,
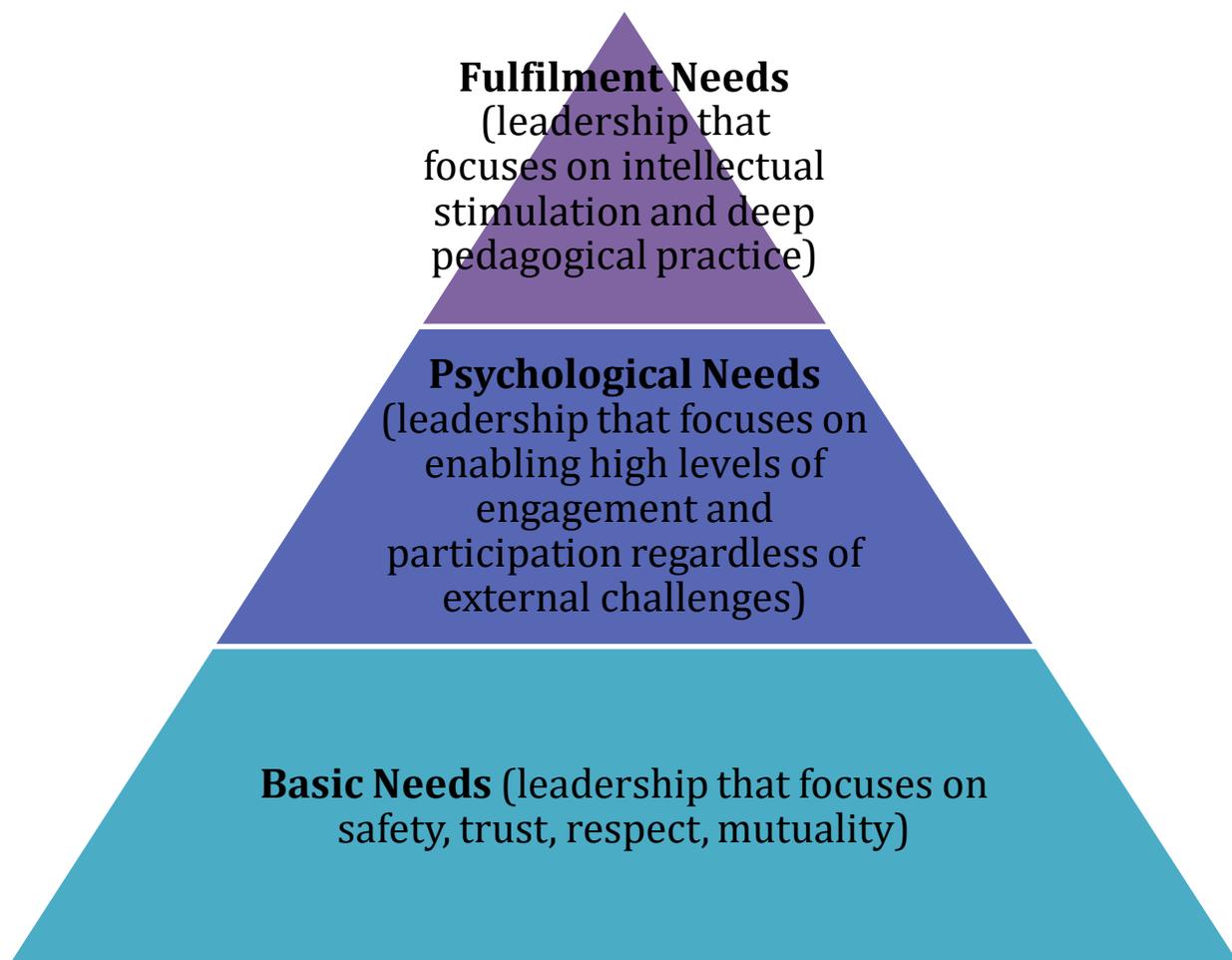
Figure 44. A re-imagined hierarchy of needs for those in high-trauma schools.
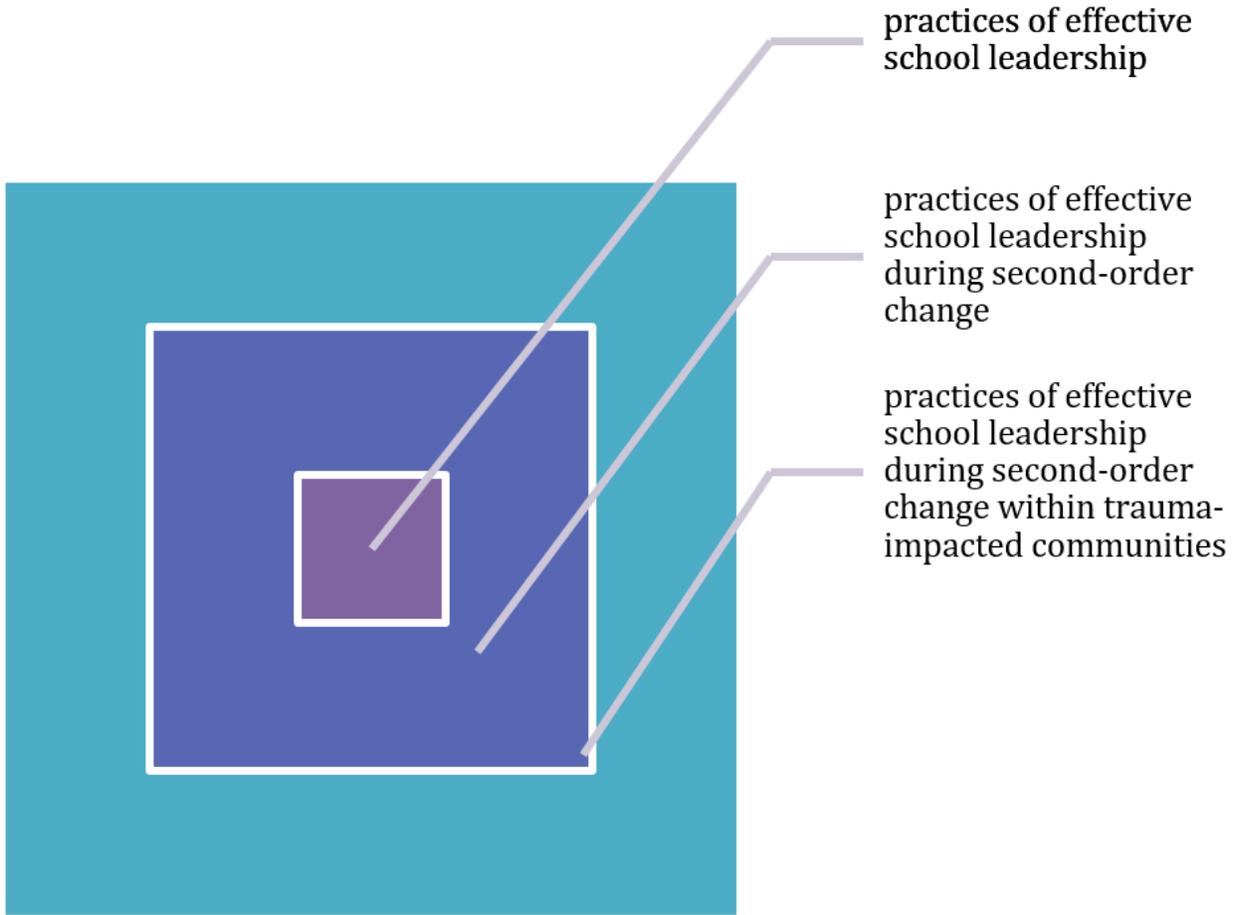
Figure 45. 10,000-foot view: My revised framework.

implementation support, and evaluation that are requisite components of any change process. This commitment to and engagement with this process must be fostered among all stakeholders in the community. Here, the strength of the ties among Rise Academy's staff and families, and their shared investment in the school's mission, play a critical role. For, while my research had revealed the depths of Rise Academy's cultural issues, it also revealed a community united in vision and spirit. Intuitively, my team and I had connected to this underlying strength; it was a theme that resonated loudly through both research cycles and was echoed in everything from photographs to one-on-one conversations to email correspondence. In this way, despite a disappointing entry point, the school community gelled successfully to embolden change, all absent any illusions it would be easy. I turned to my research questions to see what answers this newfound understanding might help spell out.

Implications for Principal Research Question

It is hard to capture all of the learning I had in response to my first research question, "How can administrators, parents and teachers work together to create and implement a healthy and equitable school culture?" Through the personal, interpersonal and systems-level data I had collected and analyzed and through the extant research in the field, I revealed far more than I anticipated I might. The strength of the bonds amongst the community at the school, particularly among families and staff, their alignment around the school's ambitious mission, and their willingness to engage in difficult, meaningful work predisposed them toward having a deep impact on each other, and the culture at the school. Simultaneously, because transparency has been a guiding principle of the school from the start, the ways in which Rise has struggled had been public, and not subtle. As a result, there is a shared perception of the needs of the school among parents and staff, alongside a surprising level of trust that each is working to the best of

their ability to enact change. Throughout my memos and one-on-one conversations, this pattern stood strong, signaling that despite any challenges and disappointments the school might bring for staff and families alike, they continued to gain grounding and strength from returning to the core mission that brought them together.

This pattern could be seen in the way that parents and staff communicated feedback, being both honest and graceful in holding others to high expectations. It was seen in the ways in which staff and families took risks in front of each other, students and leaders, whether by speaking truth to their concerns at Board meetings or volunteering to spend hours collecting and analyzing data that may help drive improvement efforts. As I increased my time at Rise due to some ongoing leadership gaps, I saw more and more the consistency with which this gracious space was afforded in the midst of the most unexpected moments. For instance, in April alone, I met with two mothers whose young children had been hurt by another student in their class. Both parents told me they understood there was a lot happening at home for the students involved, that they supported the school's commitment to continuing to work on it, and that they appreciated all the school was doing to communicate with them and follow up on their concerns (Research Memo, 2018). This level of grace is unheard of; I am not even entirely sure how it is possible. Yet, while Rise's baseline for healthy culture was low, factors such as this spelled strong potential for administrators, families, and staff to work together to enact cultural change.

Implications for Sub-Question 1

The first sub-question asked, "How do families and staff views of school culture and climate change as they work together toward a common goal?" Given the changes that had occurred throughout the year, it was hard to say precisely how the views of culture have changed. The SCAI data showed a meaningful increase in staff perceptions, but a slight dip in

perceptions among students and families. And, on the one hand, the C3 remained consistently positive and almost homogenously aligned in its perception of school culture issues since the beginning, while on the other, little stayed stable in the school during the entire history of the C3. Taken together, it was difficult to come to anything resembling a definitive conclusion. I began to suspect it was simply too early, and that this question would be appropriately asked only after a duplication study or additional case studies.

Implications for Sub-Question 2

The second sub-question – "To what extent does overall family and staff alignment with the school's mission and vision change as the school culture and climate do?" – may also have been a bit lofty given the amount of time it would likely take for culture and climate to dramatically change, as evidenced by the incremental changes noted in the end-of-year SCAI survey, as previously noted in Figure 40. Yet, early evidence was emerging. As part of the cultural mapping exercise, the C3 parent representative held focus groups to discuss the responses community members had to the changing school culture and climate. Overwhelmingly, families shared that they felt grateful that the school's overall safety had improved since its lowest point this fall. Still, the school already enjoyed high levels of mission and vision alignment among stakeholders at the beginning of this research project, and so it remains unclear to what extent these changed as the culture and climate did, although certainly I did memo in April about seeing a greater number of families increase their engagement at the school as it became a more positive place to spend time volunteering during the day – a promising leading indicator (Research Memo, 2018).

Implications for Sub-Question 3

Inviting families to join the C3 and actively investigate the school's critical areas of growth was the biggest lever I had for answering the third sub-question: "What can the positioning of staff and families as co-researchers reveal about their own practices, as well as their views and attitudes during the change process?" In retrospect, the process of incorporating family voice through the C3 felt like a remarkably gentle progression, speaking to the school's existing strength in genuine, strengths-based relationships. Yet, empowering families and staff as co-researchers on the C3 also opened up new, bold opportunities for leadership. In the second cycle of inquiry, 88% of participants returned PhotoVoice artifacts, despite multiple conflicting priorities on their schedules. Similarly, when deciding upon research activities to embark on in the first C3 meeting of 2018, a parent representative on the committee was the first to volunteer a strategy, working independently to organize focus groups with structured question protocols in order to gather more input from members of the larger community. To me these did not seem like radical activities, and so I was prepared to accept that there was not much I could add in response to this sub-question. Yet, when I returned to research to understand my findings, I found something else too. Whereas the makers of the SCAI or authors who focused on relational trust also spoke strongly to the importance of family connections, neither had expanded their frames to include family voice, something that was instantly noticeable in comparison to the work at Rise. The positioning of parents as partners influenced the way the school did business. While there was much that was yet unknown about the outcomes possible by such a change, the change itself proved noteworthy.

Implications for Sub-Question 4

Alas, in response to the last question, "In what ways does engagement in this work inform my identity as a leader for equity," I felt I could write an entirely new dissertation! Flexing my leadership role at Rise in order to meet the school's evolving needs had been both taxing and immensely rewarding. I have worked in schools steeped in trauma for the entirety of my school career, but no two alike. At Rise, my ability to grow as a leader for equity was enabled by the existing orientation of the school toward authentic family engagement around impactful decision-making for the school. The ability to support parents and other nontraditional decision-makers to make sense of their environment, create incremental milestones and engage in transformational work has been one of the greatest honors of my career. It has both offered professional pride and intellectual stimulation, all while connecting deeply to the underlying values I place on empowering grassroots leadership and disrupting ill-performing systems by listening to those who have been most impacted by their failures.

Yet, armed with more professional data than I had been at any time in my career, I was full of questions. While I had started to make meaning and sense of some of my learnings, I felt somewhat smaller and less prepared than I had before. As my knowledge grew, so had my awareness of all that I did not yet know, and with it some fear that I, in fact, would not produce any "real" results, rather continuing to support the status quo I disdain, eventually watching Rise fall into the predictable outcomes that we have come to expect from well-intentioned schools struggling to meet their obligations to their most marginalized students. To protect against doing so, I was ready to look beyond my own experience as a practitioner and researcher at Rise and try to distill some bigger findings and implications, which is where I will place my energy in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Prelude

At the start of Chapter 6, I mused about Joseph's relative success compared with Troy, pinning it at least partially on the fact that Joseph's struggle had occurred within his community school and, ultimately, that this struggle had been resolved by the community itself. Unlike Joseph, for Rise Academy, "graduation from intervention" was still a dream, though one that the school would continue working to bring into existence, as he had in his story. And the similarities didn't end there. Student-facing interventions in the aftermath of trauma begin, as Troy's did, by ensuring safety. For Troy, this meant the promise of unconditional care, that no matter how hard it got, nothing could compel his caregivers to reject him. At Rise, this showed up in the transparency offered to the community in the face of real crisis, and the promise that though we had not yet made it, we would neither slow down nor give up. Joseph's intervention centered him as the expert and changemaker, increasing his self-esteem and propelling him to move forward, much as the community at Rise leapt into action to solve their own problems. In a way I didn't quite understand yet, Rise Academy appeared to be involved in a trauma-informed intervention on the systems level that was similar to ones I had seen work with individuals. I was dying to understand more about it, which meant returning to the very beginning and reviewing how we got here.

Introduction

At the onset of this project, I set out to learn more about the conditions that facilitate meaningful cultural change within schools. My job allowed me unique access to a school setting primed for this exploration, the innovative Rise Academy in Tacoma, Washington. I had identified what seemed like a lofty focus of practice: a school community's desire to create and

sustain a healthy and functional school culture – by multiple constituents' perspective, especially those of families – and all without relying on exclusionary discipline practices to uphold cultural norms. There was no shortage of foundational literature available for review, yet also an opening for further inquiry. I designed a study rooted in Freire's (1970) principles of participatory action research. Along the way, there were emergent themes, surprise learnings and unmet expectations. In this chapter, I will review the work that was completed, discuss its location within the existing literature, offer implications for the field, and reflect on my own growth as a leader for social justice.

Overview of Study Parameters

One of the clear limitations of my study was its small scale and short length. It lasted less than a school year, in only one school, with less than 200 students, all in grades K-3. While participatory action research is considered to have relevant results when looked at in the local context and is generally seen as a sound and appropriate research methodology (Herr & Anderson, 2015), if my project was taken independently without duplication studies, it would almost surely lack dependability and confirmability, even if I was beginning to believe it had credibility and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As such, prior to staking a claim and presenting my findings, I felt it was important to review the specific micro-context from which these arise: a school site on top of a hill. In this section, I focus on the context and intent of this research study; in those sections that follow, I pivot from intention to impact, from plan to action.

The Where

I conducted the whole of this research project at Rise Academy, a charter public school in Tacoma, Washington (see Chapter 3 for contextual details). At the time of the study, the school

was in its third year of existence and among the first eight charter schools to operate in the state. Throughout my research, Rise served students in grades K-3, though it planned to grow to a full K-8. The school's model rested on three pillars. The first was the belief that school should not be the place where young people come to watch old people do work. Rise Academy prioritized active, engaged learning rather than a teacher-directed model. Student discovery was privileged and there was little expectation that success looked like compliance. Secondly, the school believed in the arts as foundational, offering daily coursework in dance or visual arts and experimenting with how to integrate the arts into other classroom activities. The final pillar was the school's commitment to inclusion and holistic student supports, primarily through its partnership with a large community-based organization, Sequoia Family of Services, and the implementation of Sequoia's trauma-informed, multi-tiered approach to inclusive education. In addition to adopting a multi-tiered support system through its partnership with Sequoia, Rise Academy had made a laudable commitment to dispensing with exclusionary discipline practices.

My own relationship with Rise began prior to the school's opening, when I – through my employment at Sequoia – served as a thought partner to the school's founder as she designed the school, and later as a leader of Sequoia's direct service providers onsite. Yet, prior to the start of the 2016-2017 school year, my role shifted. When Rise Academy's founder resigned her position over the summer, Sequoia was recruited to help lead the school until a permanent structure could be put into place. In my role as Sequoia's senior leader in the state, I placed and supervised a principal at the site, reported directly to the school's Board of Directors, and oversaw the school's functioning far beyond its partnership with Sequoia. My close familiarity with the school's strengths, growing edges and goals sparked my interest in the study and gave me a clear understanding of what needed to change, and why.

The What and Why

In my very first memo, I wrote, "It's such a fascinating context. All the clichés apply: failure to launch, dream unfulfilled… here is a school community more dedicated to its mission to meet the needs of all students than any other I have been privileged to serve. Yet, it is also among those facing some of the greatest obstacles. How is it that folks continue to believe? And what will it mean if they have new ways to engage" (Research Memo, 2017). It was this discrepancy -- between much of the community's steadfast belief in the school's goal of serving every student, every day, and the very real challenges to do so successfully -- that attracted me to the project. I also discovered a second discrepancy: one between many families' perceptions and those of the school staff. Families appreciated the school's mission, while expressing clearly that their school culture priorities were order, safety and predictability. For most staff, the priorities were individualization, non-stigmatizing responses to behavior, and reducing discipline practices that historically lead to notably poor outcomes for our public-school system's most marginalized students.

These discrepancies spoke to a tension I was interested in surfacing, not only out of intellectual curiosity but because of its connection to a fundamental equity issue within our public schools: the predictably poor school experience and outcomes of far too many young people, and almost without fail, of those at the intersection of trauma, disability, poverty, and racism. In Rise Academy's daily struggle to match intention with impact, I saw an opportunity to contribute to research regarding how schools and their leaders might reshape their internal practices to reflect the outcomes they believed all students should be able to achieve. By better understanding what it would take for a community to uphold its commitment to avoiding exclusionary discipline without compromising school safety or overall student success, I hoped

to contribute to school culture and climate approaches capable of serving even the most challenged of students better. To begin, I sought to examine Rise Academy's context more closely. I adapted Mintrop's (2001) asset-based fishbone diagram (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1) by utilizing three of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecology systems to examine the factors contributing to the current state.

The How

An examination of the school's assets and needs led me to the development of my theory of action. It was a lofty mouthful: *if I provide meaningful structures* for collective learning among co-researcher participants, with special attention to the principal and family representatives, embedded in real-time data about the school's current culture and climate health, *then it will be possible to continue the school's goal of eliminating the use of exclusionary discipline practices while similarly maintaining an organized and orderly learning environment*. Represented visually, the driver diagram I created (see Figure 2 in Chapter 1) sketched the journey from its problematic beginnings to what I hoped would be a fruitful end.

As the driver diagram shows, I located my actionable space in three discrete areas. I planned to empower the school's principal, its Culture and Climate Committee (C3 – the group that signed on to serve as my co-researchers) and the staff as a whole through both individual coaching and community-powered learning events, such as the two community learning exchanges (CLEs) I convened. I hoped our monthly C3 meetings would allow my co-researchers and me to take action on school culture priorities and to reflect in a variety of ways, including through the use of one-minute essays and a PhotoVoice protocol. And, I intended to leverage existing data cycles to initiate data-driven cycles of inquiry and make progress on prioritized goals.

My theory of action was not focused on discipline practices per se; the school's commitment to not utilizing suspension or expulsion, though something I was firmly on board with, was outside of my actionable space for this project. Rather, I was interested in how trauma-informed practices rooted in a deep application of best practices from the field of mental health could inform leadership actions and change management strategies to effect change in highly disenfranchised communities. To prepare for the research outlined in my driver diagram, I undertook a rigorous literature review, as represented in Figure 4. I identified four main subjects to study: (1) trauma-informed education; (2) mental health integration; (3) leading for change; and (4) conditions for adult learning.

The driver diagram made for a snazzy looking research plan (see Figure 2). Along the way, of course, I met some surprises, and my siloed diagram gave way to a more convoluted reality. Of all the surprises my research variables met, the biggest occurred in the first three months when I learned that my primary co-researcher, the school's principal Jennifer, had participated in an ethics violation along with another member of her leadership team. This violation and its aftermath cast an unanticipated shadow on the study, revealing the need to change course, and ultimately helping to unpack meaningful learning. Because of what had occurred, rather than focusing my efforts on empowerment, facilitative coaching and reflection as planned, my stance became far more directive. As I wrote in my memos, "Any illusion I had of strengthening school culture primarily vis-à-vis [Jennifer] has dissipated. Strengthening school culture at all has given way to stabilizing it, and that requires the flexibility to change my positioning in a significant way" (Research Memo, 2017). Toward the end of my research, when Jennifer stepped away from her position entirely after struggling to rebound from the events of

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the previous autumn, I took on the helm at Rise as interim principal, further cementing my role as an active participant in the school's daily operations, rather than its guide and observer.

In this way, during the first half of my research project, as described in detail in Chapter 5, the study was preoccupied with understanding how to respond to and heal from the traumatic violation that occurred, all within the context of an already challenging environment. Many of the findings related directly to trauma and resilience: the recognition by over 60% of parents that they did not feel the school was safe (trauma), coupled with their resounding support for the institution (with 80% of families feeling strongly aligned with the school's mission and vision; resilience) or the formation of unhealthy coping skills among the faculty and staff in the aftermath of the violation (trauma), juxtaposed with their earnest commitment to restoration and healing (resilience).

While similar themes permeated the second half of my research, detailed in Chapter 6, the growing distance between the violation staff experienced in fall and their day-to-day experiences throughout the rest of the school year provided some space to gain more global insights about the nature of any healing that had occurred, poking some holes in my hitherto obsessive focus on optimizing. The resolution of the first research cycle left the community celebrating the closure accomplished by the harm circle Jennifer participated in to acknowledge the impact of her actions. This short-lived relief faded by the second research cycle, which found the school still noticeably affected by the events of the fall, triggered often yet finding purpose and hope in the act of working together authentically to bring about change.

Though unanticipated, the never-ending fits and starts that punctuated this study contributed significantly to the study's findings, and in particular to the learnings regarding the role of formal leaders in attending to trauma-impacted school environments. As I progressed, my

emerging frameworks shifted. What I began with in Chapter 2 (see Figure 5) was a simplified framework that suggested a combination of best practices and strong leadership led to healthy and equitable school culture. Surely, it was not an untrue statement. Yet, it was also no great revelation. I took a much more meaningful stab at sense-making with the second framework I constructed and presented at the end of my first research cycle (see Figure 22). This version of the framework offered value in that it homed in on healing as a cultural goal and likely developmental step in the quest for a healthy and equitable school culture. In retrospect, this may easily have been the first indication that trauma-informed education would not just be one best practice among others in my framework, but instead was of critical importance. At the same time, as I represented in Figure 36, by the time I had some space from the first cycle, I began to see that although the focus on healing may have been spot-on, the dismissal of unhealthy coping skills was a miss. Hoping to rectify this mistake by framing unhealthy coping skills as part of a larger priority of recognizing struggle, harm and trauma, I created Figure 37 which posited that the importance of making room for trauma and grief was the counterbalance to an equal preoccupation with finding, appreciating, and leveraging assets. This framework remains appropriate, but toward the end of Chapter 6, I added a critical piece: I previously knew trauma-informed education was an important element, and in my newly revised framework (see Figure 45) I finally find the appropriate location: it is the container in which everything else occurs (the big nesting box in which the other boxes are living) or the foundation of the pyramid on which it stands (see Figure 44 for my re-imagined school community-focused hierarchy of needs). Before continuing, I stop here to rename my framework and present it again.

Where to Next?

But how did these findings relate to key literature in the field? And what might they offer
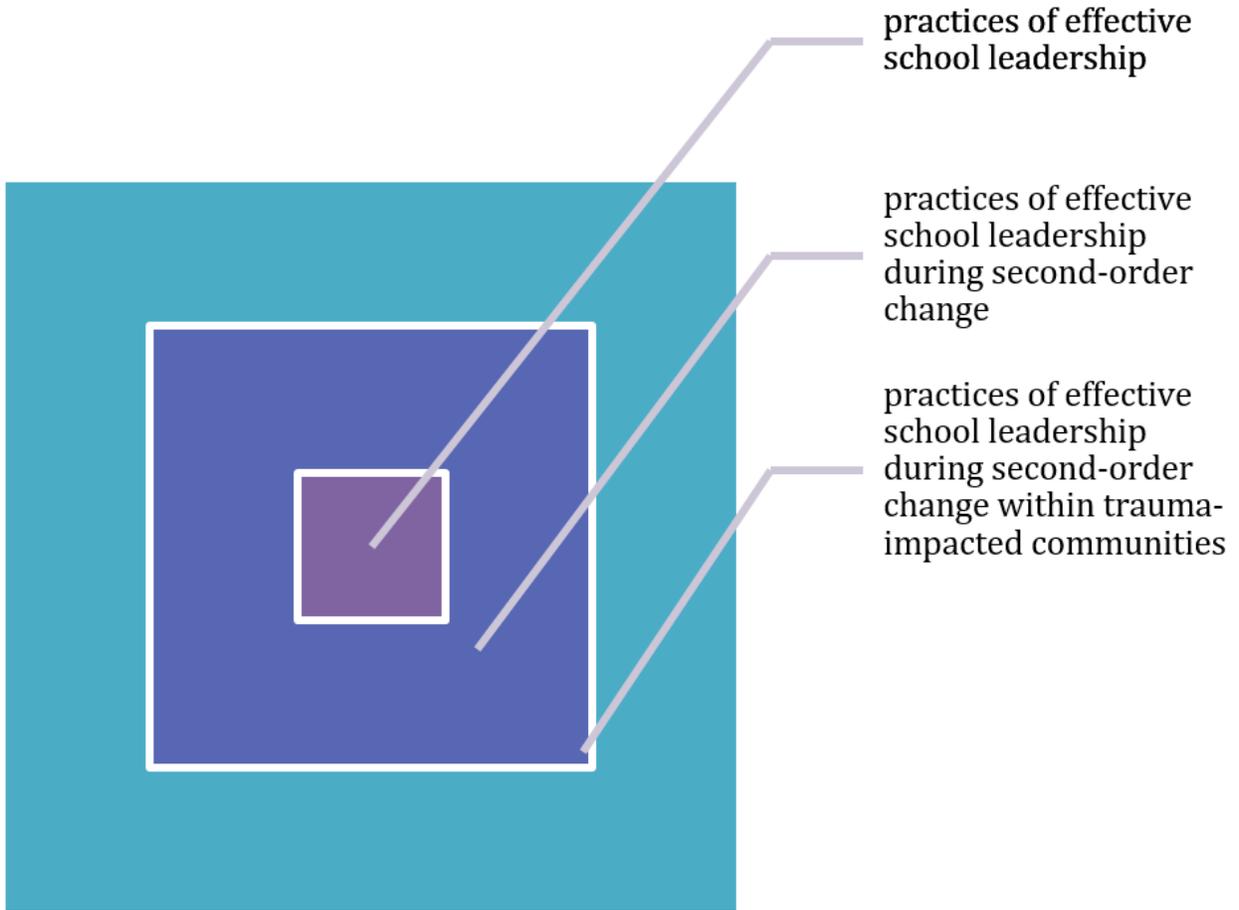
Figure 46. My framework: The nesting container of trauma-informed leadership.

in terms of an understanding of the leadership levers that facilitate effective second-order change within trauma-impacted organizations? In the next section, I discuss the location of the study within the broader context of change and leadership theories.

Speaking Back to the Research

In recasting the findings through the lens of existing frameworks and theories, I returned to the literature I had identified for review as represented in Figure 4 in Chapter 2. Specifically, I looked at the findings through the three lenses I had set out to explore: (1) attributes of effective school leaders (a broadening of my original focus on adult learning conditions, to correspond with the twists and turns my research led me through and the expanded leadership responsibilities I adopted as a result), (2) change management strategies, and (3) trauma-informed practices. I begin by discussing each one in isolation, validating my assertions through existing frames in the research. Yet, as in the framework I introduce in Figure 47, I have already identified a theory regarding the relational nature of these three categories, and this too I seek to validate or disconfirm, which I will return to at the section's end to put all the pieces together.

Practices of Effective School Leadership

It felt freeing in a way to start at the "top" of the hierarchy of needs pyramid (see Figure 45) by focusing on a community's most sophisticated needs: fulfillment and actualization. What I had already come to believe by the end of my second research cycle was my entryway back into the literature. I was doing so to test a theory I was developing: that the general school leadership skills associated with leading schools successfully would be necessary at a school with high trauma, yet not sufficient. With that, I dove back in to books and articles.

One of the factors shaping the original project design was my plan to exit my current role near the end of the study. I was hoping to utilize my positionality as supervisor and coach to the

school's principal to release increased responsibility, effectively working myself out of a role in shaping the school's culture and climate by project's end. Needless to say, this was a goal left unmet, and the principal actually predated my own exit by leaving her position in April of 2018. Because I had planned to begin in a facilitative capacity and withdraw further from there, from the start I designated the school's principal, Jennifer, as a primary co-researcher, envisioning that we would work hand-in-hand through every stage of this study. In addition to our weekly clinical supervision meetings, I scheduled weekly collaboration time and hoped to share authentically in the work and transfer much of my direct intervention to her as the year progressed. For this reason, I focused much of the initial literature review on the enablers of adult learning, seeing my role as teacher, facilitator and coach and hoping that a solid foundation in best practices would prepare me for the path ahead.

In actuality, the research took a different path and the original slice I bit off by looking into adult learning conditions widened by necessity to encompass both direct leadership support to the school and a more directive approach in my interactions with Jennifer. Any earlier visions of authentic co-creation faded away as a truer assessment of Jennifer's decision-making came to light and by the end of the first cycle she ceased being a co-researcher altogether. These shifts took me away from the strictly adult learning space and straight into action. But now further removed, I wanted to take a step back and look at the effective leadership practices that, though many may have been missing, *would* have been required for Rise to become a healthier, more just school.

After reviewing several studies regarding effective leadership practices, I positioned what Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, and Hopkins' (2006) term seven strong claims about successful school leadership as a central organizing frame in my quest to understand how

effective leadership, or its absence, contributed to the change process at play at Rise Academy or could elsewhere. To define a useful frame, I specifically focused on Claim 2, which stated that "[a]lmost all successful leaders rely on the same repertoire of basic leadership practices" (Leithwood et al., 2006, p. 6). I appreciated the authors' attention to drawing bold conclusions from across schools at different developmental stages and within different contexts, including a scan of research related to the particular leadership needs of high-poverty, high-need schools. Further attracting me to this frame, unlike others reviewed, was the specific acknowledgement of the empirical limitations of instructional leadership in and of itself, specifically noting that claim that leaders have a higher impact on student learning through their influence on staff motivation/commitment and working conditions, rather than through a laser focus on instructional leadership alone (Leithwood et al., 2006). For, even had the leader of Rise Academy possessed an incomparably strong grasp on pedagogy and curriculum, these strengths would not have been sufficient in addressing the unique needs of the school she was leading, hence the need for trauma awareness as an outer container for any meaning-making about what actually happened when a school like Rise underwent cultural change (see Figure 46). As such, Leithwood and colleagues' acknowledgement that other leadership characteristics were more likely to move the dial matched my intuitive sense of the needs of Rise Academy and of the leadership gaps that existed there. This realization helped eliminate other potential frames, including those of Marshall (2006) and Platt (2000), which while illustrative were predominantly concerned with developing a craft for tightly-defined instructional leadership. To be sure, each of these references offered useful insights, and each also acknowledged that instructional know-how, while a necessary component to effective school leadership, was not sufficient absent other traits. Yet, by locating effectiveness primarily around areas of pedagogical strength, they were ill

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suited to explain the leadership dynamics at play at Rise, where the pressing call for leadership far superseded the need for knowledge of instruction, curriculum and assessment practices.

Thus, with the Leithwood et al. characteristics as a chosen variable, I proceeded to examine several other studies about effective leadership practices against this frame to ensure I had selected an effective means for sense-making. An example of this comparative exercise with an educational text can be found in Table 17, in which I contrast the four Leithwood et al. characteristics against the 21 responsibilities from *School Leadership that Works* (Marzano, 2011). For this comparison, I selected any of the 21 responsibilities with a correlation of 0.25 or higher, ignoring those with lower clinical significance. For those of Marzano's responsibilities which matched more than one of Leithwood et al.'s characteristics, I noted them in multiple places.

Finding synergy between these two studies on educational leadership and others I reviewed, I decided to do one final check before landing on Leithwood and colleagues' leadership practices as the starting frame. To do so, I compared their analysis with studies on leadership and organizational psychology which did not find their roots in public schools, intent to see if the principles applied more broadly. Table 18 shows a comparison of attributes between the Leithwood leadership practices and my selected comparison in the organizational psychology space, Yukl's (2012) hierarchical taxonomy of leadership behaviors.

Again and now across disciplines, I found evidence that the four practices set forth by Leithwood and his colleagues could serve as an effective frame by which to evaluate the leadership practices in play at Rise during the course of the study. It was time to turn from the literature back toward my findings. Using the Leithwood et al. leadership practices, I plotted out both examples and non-examples from the findings at Rise Academy. I was hoping to see which

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Table 17

Sample Testing of the Leithwood et al. Frame

Leithwood et al. (2006) Leadership Practices	Present in Marzano's (2011) Leadership Responsibilities?
Practice 1: Building Vision and Setting Direction	Yes; change agent, order
Practice 2: Understanding and Developing People	Yes; situational awareness, flexibility, culture, resources
Practice 3: Redesigning the Organization	Yes; change agent, culture, outreach, input, resources
Practice 4: Managing the Teaching and Learning Program	Yes; monitoring and evaluation, knowledge of curriculum, discipline, order

Table 18

Sample Testing Round 2

Leithwood et al. (2006) Leadership Practices	Present in Yukl's (2012) hierarchical taxonomy?
Practice 1: Building Vision and Setting Direction	Yes; change-oriented (advocating change, envisioning change, encouraging innovation, facilitating collective learning)
Practice 2: Understanding and Developing People	Yes; relations-oriented (supporting, developing, recognizing, empowering)
Practice 3: Redesigning the Organization	Yes; change-oriented (advocating change, envisioning change, encouraging innovation, facilitating collective learning)
Practice 4: Managing the Teaching and Learning Program	Yes; task-oriented (clarifying, planning, monitoring operations, problem solving)

of the practices were more strongly in place at the school, either all along despite the difficulties or in the effort to "course correct," stabilize and heal after a difficult fall. For practices in place at Rise that I could not neatly fit into any of the four buckets, I created an additional row. These efforts are represented in Table 19.

For the most part, I could locate the influential leadership activities, and their related impacts at the site, into the four practices defined by Leithwood and colleagues. Recasting major study findings in light of potential leadership practices helped reveal the places where effective leadership may have served as a protective factor for the school, most notably so in its inspirational mission that allowed the community to continue aspiring for change even while confronted with internal and external challenges. At the same time, ample evidence pointed to leadership gaps at Rise, such as follow-through and management of the learning environment. On the positive side, I saw strong evidence of the positive impact of leaders' efforts – myself and Jennifer's – to build vision and set direction, as well as to redesign the organization. Actions such as facilitating the two CLEs had positive effects on staff and sent the message that we were building a collective vision. Similarly, the school's authentic engagement of family members helped to explain its seemingly paradoxical existence as a school many feared was unsafe yet felt aligned with and excited to support. Even in both of these areas, there were also non-examples. For instance, while the CLEs and other experiences helped unite folks around a common vision, there was great concern at the school regarding the lack of follow through, with twelve respondents individually noting follow-through specifically by leaders to be a concern during one-to-one interviews in the fall.

An obvious place where ineffective leadership may shed some light on the difficulties the school experienced was in the category of managing the teaching and learning program. Notably,

Table 19

Study Findings Cast through the Leithwood et al. Frame

Leithwood et al. (2006) Leadership Practices	Examples in practice at Rise Academy	Non-examples in practice at Rise Academy
Practice 1: Building Vision and Setting Direction	• 96% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the August CLE "set a positive tone for the year" • Over 80% of parents felt aligned with school mission, reported that they would recommend school to others • The C3-created stabilization milestones offered clarity on priorities for staff	• 12 interviewees reported lack of leader follow-through as a concern in one-to-one interviews • 15 interviewees reported lack of transparency as a concern in one-to-one interviews
Practice 2: Understanding and Developing People	• Quote from staff re: November CLE: "I'm not quite sure why, but it just felt good" (participant email, 11.11.2017) • 6 codes for "hope/hopeful/promising" on November one-minute essays • Increase of 1.2 points on a 5-point Likert scale in staff responses on the year-end SCAI to the prompt "I receive the support I need to be effective at my job"	• A net decrease of 0.2 points on a 5-point trait analysis scale in staff responses on the year-end SCAI to the prompt "Professional learning opportunities are meaningful to my work."
Practice 3: Redesigning the Organization	• High level of staff retention – 9/11 teachers continue into 2018-19 school year • High levels of parent investment in school model, recommendations to other schools	N/A – no evidence found

Table 19 (continued)

Leithwood et al. (2006) Leadership Practices	Examples in practice at Rise Academy	Non-examples in practice at Rise Academy
Practice 4: Managing the Teaching and Learning Program	N/A – no evidence found	• Score of 2.9 on a 5-point Likert on the fall SCAI by staff reporting "This school is safe"; student and family responses are low as well
Practices that Do Not Fit into the Leithwood et al. Frame Above	• Restorative circle with leader was influential on staff morale, cohesion and healing	• Boundary and ethical violations negatively impacted the community

not one of the PhotoVoice, one-minute essays or interviews held spoke to perceived strengths by leaders in managing the academic portion of the program. In addition, concerns around safety, order, discipline and other markers of an effective learning environment peaked among all stakeholders. Unsurprisingly, this was not the only of the Leithwood et al. leadership practices where deficits were found, yet it did point toward one clear deficit that almost certainly contributed to the school's continued struggles: a lack of management of the daily task of teaching and learning.

Although the frame captured much of the work successfully, it did not quite speak to the leadership efforts related to the trauma and healing the school experienced. Thus, while the four leadership practices offered some insights into what transpired at Rise Academy, they discounted the role of trauma, which is the container in my model (see Figure 46). To me, this omission demonstrated that while Leithwood and colleagues' leadership skills were necessary for a successful leader at Rise, they were not fully sufficient. Feeling stronger about where to locate these learnings for now, I decided to cast the findings again through a different lens, focusing this time not on effective leadership practices alone, but specifically on those negatively impacted by second-order change, mirroring the second level in my hierarchy of needs pyramid (see Figure 45) or the protected, well-nested container at the center of my new framework (see Figure 46).

Practices of Effective School Leadership During Second-Order Change

Leithwood and colleagues' frame served as a helpful starting place for recasting the study's findings through the lens of existing literature. It revealed both leadership strengths and deficits that likely influenced the flow of activities at Rise Academy. Yet, in understanding the unique role leaders at the school were called upon to play during a complex change process, I

wanted to return to the original literature review and the concept of leading effectively through change.

This time, I returned to one of the references I reviewed originally and one that I also cross-walked with the Leithwood et al. effective leadership practices frame from above: Marzano's (2011) 21 responsibilities. Specifically, I was interested in thinking through the research presented by Waters and Grubb (2004) regarding the unique role that four of these responsibilities play during periods of second-order change, that is change that is a break from the past, requiring both systems and cultural change. Those four responsibilities were culture, order, communication and input. I wondered: to what extent were we prioritizing these at Rise Academy, both in Jennifer's and my own work as leaders and, through distributed leadership, alongside others? The idea of looking for evidence that these four responsibilities had been shared with those in less formal leadership roles came from Waters and Grubb's (2004) research that "regardless of a principal's efforts to fulfill these four responsibilities [order, input, communication and culture], this may not change the perception that they are simply not fulfilling them well enough" (p. 5). Instead, the authors suggest that "[a]nticipating that this perception may emerge and developing shared strategies for addressing it can increase the likelihood of successfully implementing changes with second-order implications" (Waters & Grubb, 2004, p. 5).

In Table 20, I sort examples of leadership actions Jennifer and/or I engaged in to specifically attend to the four aforementioned responsibilities – culture, communication, order and input. Then, I also looked at activities designed to share responsibility with others, seeking to see to what extent this was present successfully in our project and what impact it may have had on the efficacy of certain leader actions on instilling hope and clarity in stakeholders.

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Table 20

The Four Responsibilities with Negative Leadership Perceptions during Second-Order Change

Responsibility Area	Evidence of Formal Leadership Actions	Evidence of Shared or Distributed Leadership Actions	Evidence of Impact on Stakeholders' Experience of Change
Order	No concrete evidence found	C3 members' creation of school-specific milestones for stabilization	Score of 2.9 on a 5-point Likert on the fall SCAI by staff reporting "This school is safe"; student and family responses are low as well
Culture	Holding of restorative circle with Jennifer	• Leadership in the CLE • Co-researchers' participation in the C3 • Staff members take on expanded leadership in second cycle of study • Staff-led community celebrations	• 96% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the August CLE "set a positive tone for the year" • Over 80% of parents felt aligned with school mission, reported that they would recommend school to others • Ongoing concerns about behavior/safety (see above) • Increase of 1.2 points on a 5-point Likert scale in staff responses on the year-end SCAI to the prompt "I receive the support I need to be effective at my job"

Table 20 (continued)

Responsibility Area	Evidence of Formal Leadership Actions	Evidence of Shared or Distributed Leadership Actions	Evidence of Impact on Stakeholders' Experience of Change
Communication	• Weekly clinical supervision • Teach-backs and charting of next steps • NOT example: having no clear communication around whether Jennifer was to remain in her position for weeks after the revelation of the violation she was involved with	• C3 members communicated major goals, progress between cycles and data gathered • Milestones' work around stabilization efforts	15 interviewees reported lack of transparency as a concern in one-to-one interviews
Input	• One-to-one interviews • Authentic co-creation/co-research opportunities offered to C3 • SCAI survey to all stakeholder groups	Choice of culture priorities at C3	High levels of parent engagement at C3 and in parent-run school events

Looking through the year's major activities through the lens of the four responsibilities Waters and Grubb cite as instrumental during periods of second-order change proved noteworthy. Similar to the process I used when casting my findings through the frame of the Leithwood et al. practices, to go about creating Table 20 I created post-it notes of different data points, activities and codes gathered throughout this research process and then moved them into the buckets where they seemed to best apply. Interestingly, at the end of this sorting activity, I had over 30 different post-it notes coded into the responsibility bucket for culture, whereas order was relatively untouched.

The de-prioritization of order led to interesting wonderings. First, it mirrored the lack of emphasis placed on the Leithwood et al. practice of managing the teaching and learning program, once again showing a miss in providing clear management may well have contributed to the school's ongoing struggles. Surely it highlighted my intuitive focal areas as a leader as well as my blind spots. There's no question: I spent more energy on culture than I did in order, and this showed in the results. Without a doubt, the de-emphasis of order was problematic from a leadership perspective. Yet, was there more information to be gleaned from the prioritization of culture? How did this relate to the unique context at Rise and specifically to the presence of trauma not only among students and the community but among staff themselves. Was culture overemphasized, or was this prioritization well-suited given these unique characteristics? The activities coded to fit under the communication responsibility offered insights as well. On one hand, I myself had noted the impact that effective communication was having on the perception that change was doable. To return to a memo I shared in Chapter 5, in December of 2017 I reflected, "Safety has not increased – there are still kids with ice packs in the front office every day. But I think the *sense of safety* may be on the rise. Clarity of comms on the walkie has

improved, the [noise-reducing hallway filters] create a much calmer environment, and the staff I've checked in with seem more grounded and hopeful there's some sort of overall plan (is there??)" (Research Memo, 2017). Yet, under the same responsibility area of communication, I also noted a non-example: the fact that as a leader, I could not communicate clearly to the team what would be the outcome of Jennifer's unfortunate choices during the fall. Instead, for the first few – and thus the most intensive – weeks following the violation she was involved with, uncertainty hung in the air. It was unclear whether Jennifer or the other leader involved would stay or go. It was unclear what specifically my role would be for the remainder of the year. It was unclear whether Jennifer would participate in a restorative session, how it would go, and whether repair was possible. This failure to communicate next steps in the immediate aftermath of the event was unproductive for the school and its stakeholders. I memoed, "It's the uncertainty that's killing me. I can deal with any choice at this point, but not knowing has us stuck. So unhealthy" (Research Memo, 2017). Conversely, following the restorative circle and the declaration that Jennifer would stay in her role, I memoed, "I feel a sense of calm and clarity that's been missing. Yes! We made it through that. People seemed noticeably more at ease leaving than they did walking in" (Research Memo, 2017). The ability to communicate clearly opened up the possibility of moving ahead, an enabler during Rise's complex change process.

While I found meaning in looking at the ways in which leading during change played out at Rise, there were still bits missing from the frame offered by the McRel research of Waters and Grubb. Like the Leithwood et al. frame, I struggled once again to locate specific activities related both to the harm experienced by community members at a school like Rise Academy and to the necessary work done to repair it. Unlike the Leithwood et al. frame, however, the presence of culture among the four responsibilities highlighted by Waters and Grubb did make it easier to

find a place to pile many of the activities we participated in with the hopes of repairing harm and addressing trauma. It was there, but not quite prominent enough yet. Yes, the leadership actions we took were directed at culture, but beyond that, there were specific, trauma-informed strategies that were essential to the story of this study. Even with the added layer of looking at leadership specific to second-order change, I was still missing one important container, and to look at these through an appropriate lens, I turned to one final theoretical frame, that of trauma-informed practices.

Practices of Effective School Leadership During Second-Order Change in Trauma-Impacted Communities

The recasting of findings within the four essential leadership practices identified by Leithwood and colleagues (2006), and then again through the four Marzano responsibilities with implications for second-order change processes (Waters & Grubb, 2004) provided a helpful way to sort through the evidence to look both at leadership strengths and missteps at Rise. While both were compelling, however, neither fully captured the extent to which trauma, and its counterpart resilience, came into play at Rise Academy. As such, I decided to look at SAMHSA's six guiding principles of trauma-informed care (SAMHSA, 2014). The principles are reproduced in Figure 47.

Immediately, intuitive sparks went off. Even though the two previous leadership frames I had tested were helpful in thinking through the findings at Rise within the context of other research on educational leadership, something was off. In each of those cases, I sat with post-it notes in hand trying to sort research activities and findings into stiff categories, and not always succeeding. The six SAMHSA characteristics were a more natural fit. I created Table 21 to

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SAHMSA's Six Guiding Principles of Trauma-Informed Care

1. **Safety** - Throughout the organization, staff and the people they serve feel physically and psychologically safe.
2. **Trustworthiness and transparency** - Organizational operations and decisions are conducted with transparency and the goal of building and maintaining trust among staff, clients, and family members of those receiving services.
3. **Peer support and mutual self-help** - These are integral to the organizational and service delivery approach and are understood as a key vehicle for building trust, establishing safety, and empowerment.
4. **Collaboration and mutuality** - There is true partnering and leveling of power differences between staff and clients and among organizational staff from direct care staff to administrators. There is recognition that healing happens in relationships and in the meaningful sharing of power and decision-making. The organization recognizes that everyone has a role to play in a trauma-informed approach. One does not have to be a therapist to be therapeutic.
5. **Empowerment, voice, and choice** - Throughout the organization and among the clients served, individuals' strengths are recognized, built on, and validated and new skills developed as necessary. The organization aims to strengthen the staff's, clients', and family members' experience of choice and recognize that every person's experience is unique and requires an individualized approach. This includes a belief in resilience and in the ability of individuals, organizations, and communities to heal and promote recovery from trauma. This builds on what clients, staff, and communities have to offer, rather than responding to perceived deficits.
6. **Cultural, historical, and gender issues** - The organization actively moves past cultural stereotypes and biases (e.g., based on race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, geography), offers gender responsive services, leverages the healing value of traditional cultural connections, and recognizes and addresses historical trauma.

Figure 47. SAMHSA's guiding principles of trauma-informed practices.

Table 21

Examples from Findings that Match SAHMSA Characteristics

Guiding Principle of Trauma-Informed Care	Examples from findings that speak to presence of trauma, triggers or harm	Examples from findings that speak to protective factors, assets or steps toward healing
Safety	• Lack of student and staff safety • Lack of emotional safety following the violation that occurred	• Restorative circle • Transparency around student safety concerns
Trustworthiness or Transparency	• Lack of transparency coded by 16 respondents in one-to-one surveys • An ethical violation resulting in unclear disciplinary action	• Eventual departure of Jennifer • Ongoing changes, losses and misses
Peer Support and Mutual Self Help	Jennifer's struggles to rebound or meaningfully repair	• Culture of feedback • High levels of alignment to mission and vision
Collaboration and Mutuality	Unhealthy coping skills like gossiping, venting and secret-keeping that emerge following the fall incident	• Transdisciplinary approach of model • Co-creation of C3 stabilization milestones
Empowerment, Voice and Choice	Perception of leader as hiding from staff	• Structures such as CLE and the C3 • One-to-one Interviews
Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues	Microaggressions noted by staff through their interactions with leaders	• Culture of feedback • Director of DEI and ongoing equity work, including during CLEs • Mission alignment/ commitment to disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline

match the six principles with both a recognition trauma and the presence of assets, the two balancing beams in the framework I offered in Figure 37.

I was out of post-it notes by the time I finished sorting everything that had transpired into the different trauma-informed practices. It was easy to do and left me reasonably assured that the framework I was building stood up to the test, that trauma truly was the container in which my research took place. Yet, if the work of the sort of leader poised to effect change at a school like Rise had to be steeped in trauma-informed practices, was it a step too far to say that the school itself existed within nesting containers of trauma, from the micro to the macro?

It was time for another intuitive leap. This time, I resurfaced the fishbone diagram, the very first meaning-making I attempted in this project that I captured in Figure 1 in Chapter 1. I began to cross-walk the SAHMSA principles from Figure 48 against the systems I identified in the Fishbone. Without fail, I was able to find a place for the fishbone factors within the different trauma-informed principles, as demonstrated in Table 22. If I were to believe what was emerging in front of me, not only were the leadership moves taken at Rise rooted in trauma, the context itself was as well. I was excited by where Table 22 took me and felt it more than confirmed my intuition that trauma undergirded everything I saw and learned at Rise Academy. Wishing to go from part to whole, I return below to my increasingly comprehensive framework one more time.

Putting the Pieces Together

I had set out to test the framework I proposed in Figure 46 against the existing body of knowledge. I found and triangulated evidence to support the content of the framework, but also prove that it was still incomplete. I now had a way to expand it, as I attempt in Figure 48. Going one box at a time, beginning at the smallest cube, effective school practices, and continuing through an increasing recognition of the need to buffer anxieties during second-order change

Table 22

Matching SAHMSA Characteristics with Micro, Meso and Macro Factors

Guiding Principle of Trauma-Informed Care	Examples from *the Fishbone Diagram* that speak to presence of trauma, triggers or harm	Examples from *the Fishbone Diagram* that speak to protective factors or steps toward healing
Safety	From Fishbone: Uncertainty about future of the school given charter school context in the state (Meso)	From Fishbone: Sequoia infrastructure and transdisciplinary expertise (Meso)
Trustworthiness or Transparency	From Fishbone: School-to-Prison Pipeline and Police brutality (Macro)	From Fishbone: Culture of direct communication and feedback (Micro)
Peer Support and Mutual Self Help	From Fishbone: Perverse incentives and competition among students, schools, funding sources, etc. (Macro)	From Fishbone: Bold, young, dedicated staff (Micro)
Collaboration and Mutuality	From Fishbone: School funding inequities/lack of accountability for other systems of care (child welfare, MH, juvenile justice, etc.) (Macro)	From Fishbone: Strong relationships with other schools in sector (Meso)
Empowerment, Voice and Choice	*From Fishbone: Implicit Bias…. Generational cycles of disenfranchisement and abuse (Macro)*	*From Fishbone: High Levels of Engagement from Families (Micro)*
Cultural, Historical and Gender Issues	*From Fishbone: Implicit Bias…. Generational cycles of disenfranchisement and abuse (Macro)*	*From Fishbone: Renewed attention on school bullying following U.S. election outcomes (Macro)*

practices of effective school leadership

practices of effective school leadership during second-order change

practices of effective school leadership during second-order change within trauma-impacted communities

trauma as an underlying theme undergirding Rise Academy's micro-ecology

trauma as an underlying theme in Rise Academy's meso- and macro- ecologies

Figure 48. A new, new framework.

To be honest, I was giddy. I suddenly began to look at educational gaps from the individual student-level to the system level through an understanding of interpersonal (micro), organizational (meso), and systemic (macro) trauma within American schools. Looking at the events of the year at Rise through this lens was almost instantly illuminating. Pieces fell into place in a way that had eluded me previously, possibly my entire educational career. Not only did the actions and data points I had been plotting against different frames fit naturally, but so did the contextual factors making up my Fishbone diagram. What suddenly became clear is that what had made the previous frames helpful was their increasing willingness to amplify the role of trauma in public schooling and the appropriateness of trauma-informed strategies on its leadership. But even here, I was still thinking too narrowly of trauma. The framework I had arrived at before fit, but it too, was incomplete.

Not only was trauma-informed leadership essential for a path toward healthy cultural change at Rise, the entire landscape was equally impacted by trauma, from staffing shortages (micro), to funding insufficiencies (meso) and a violent history of institutional racism and denial of basic human rights (macro). To be bold, I was beginning to believe that a deep application of trauma-informed leadership skills was a necessary component in ANY gap-closing educational effort. Though my research was nowhere near adequate for answering this question, I still found satisfaction in trying to unpack the question. What Figure 48 did was equate systemic inequalities as macro-traumas. As Black Lives Matters Co-Founder Patrisse Khan-Cullors and co-author asha bandele (2017) write of their work as activists in Ferguson, Missouri after the decision not to charge the police shooter of Michael Brown, "In our work we must always make space to confront trauma and to consider strategies for resistance" (p. 206). If I had inductively found my way back to a common theory, and there was no shortage of evidence that I might, that

meant that racial trauma and the harms caused by other oppressive structures were the nesting container in which failing public schools have lived for a very long time in this country (Alexander, 2012; DeGruy, 2009; Noguera, 2003). These schools traumatized the generations of students not deemed fit to educate alongside their peers (Collins, 2009; DeGruy, 2009; Goldstein, 2014). Far from re-writing those generations' expectations of the public system, their own children, while allowed in, were sorted out or otherwise denied access to meaningful opportunity with surgical precision, causing trauma in and of itself (Boykin & Noguera, 2011; Carter & Welner, 2013; Ferguson, 2010; Noguera, 2003). That trauma has bled into the current generation, in which the continued disenfranchising forces of systemic oppression still linger, along with newer threats, including mass shootings.

To return to my much smaller actionable space as researcher, I now saw no other possible explanation: trauma was the container in which everything else at Rise Academy was held, including leadership actions, school culture efforts and my stab at cultural change through collaborative processes. At times when the leadership of the school was not closely attuned to the principles of trauma-informed care, it either caused harm (in the event of the violation) or missed the opportunity to lessen it (such as in my delay seeking additional perspectives in the early fall, or in the lack of decisiveness around Jennifer's continued employment status). At times when we utilized the best of our expertise from direct trauma-informed work with youth and families – bringing in restorative processes, creating one-to-one opportunities for authentic feedback, spending time actively looking at issues of equity – we saw the school's resilience at its highest, as shown poignantly in Figure 42 in which staff satisfaction with their quality of teamwork boomeranged, mirroring the application of trauma-informed leadership at the school beginning with my more direct leadership support in November.

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Putting this newly emerging frame to the test, I returned to the great paradox of the study: how a school where less than 40% of parents felt that their students were safe – where many reported their students experienced stomachaches and other signs of traumatic exposure – could simultaneously have such high levels of investment and alignment. Looking at this paradox through this new frame offered insights that I had previously missed. The lack of safety at school was indeed a trigger and potential source of harm for families, yet the high levels of emotional safety, choice, empowerment and voice, trustworthiness and transparency, and collaboration and mutuality – many of the SAHMSA guiding principles – allowed for healing to occur, sending the message to families that while the needs were great, this was a system organized around lessening harm and working toward repair. For many families, particularly those with deep personal connections to the school's mission to end exclusionary discipline practices, this duality may help explain their continued support of the school even in the face of its many challenges. I then recalled a conversation from one of our earliest C3 meetings, in which a parent co-researcher shared her own experience of disenfranchisement and trauma at a public school, some twenty years ago. The parent went on to share that it was not Rise's ability to offer a differential experience that kept her there (though certainly she hoped one would come!); rather, she was compelled by what she felt was an authentic, community-wide commitment to doing better (Research Memo, 2017).

The addition of trauma-informed leadership as a filter through which to cast the findings of this study helped me to see the work more clearly and in fact helped organize long circulating thoughts and intuitions I have held. I was satisfied with the latest version of my leadership framework, as shown in Figure 48. Yet, before putting a cap on my findings, I wanted to draw the same framework again, this time with a higher level of specification, likely only helpful to

someone who engages with the research I draw upon at length, including me. I present the comprehensive version of my framework in Figure 49. At its center, the frame holds three nested leadership practices that my limited research has begun to find helpful for leading a school disproportionately impacted by trauma. From there, the last two layers radiate out, imagining an even more comprehensive view of trauma, one that looks across all ecological systems impacting American public schools. And with this comprehensive understanding of trauma, I begin to speculate about the application of trauma-informed principles across different layers of leadership, from traditional school leaders to a more balanced community-leadership model like Rise Academy's on the micro side of the spectrum, and larger, often invisible historical, sociocultural and geopolitical systems. Simply put, my research more directly implied that students and schools would likely get healthier, together – with an emphasis on healing necessary not only for students but also in the approach toward teaming with staff and families, and a careful, trauma-informed audit of the structures and policies in place to ensure they do no harm.

The framework had taken me from the very real manifestations of trauma within one school building to sweeping policy, practice and research implications far beyond my reach. I turn to some of these indicators next but return back down a few thousand feet over my pyramid, focusing not on whole system disruption but on implications specific to public schools.

Implications

Since my latest framework now encompassed the entirety of American public education both historically and by staking a claim about the relevance of trauma in its macro-organization, a logical next step was to consider the implications of my research and resulting framework on research, policy and practice.

Practices of effective school leadership: (1) Building vision and setting direction; (2) Understanding and developing people; (3) Redesigning the Organization; (4) Managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood et al, 2006)

Practices of effective school leadership during second-order change (Waters & Grubb, 2004)

practices of effective school leadership during second-order change within trauma-impacted communities (SAHMSA, 2014)

trauma as an underlying theme undergirding Rise Academy's micro-ecology

trauma as an underlying theme in Rise Academy's meso- and macro- ecologies

Fishbone factors like funding realities for high-trauma schools

Fishbone factors like the gap between growing trauma awareness and educator training

Fishbone factors like the fall incident at Rise

Fishbone factors like Rise's political position

Safety

Peer Support/ Mutual Help

Safety

Trustworthiness & Transparency

Order

Culture

Input

Communication

Empowerment, Voice, Choice

Cultural, Historical Gender Issues

Mutuality

Fishbone factors like school mission and partnership with Sequoia

Fishbone factors like ongoing White supremacy in policies impacting school children

Figure 49. The more comprehensive version of my final framework.

Implications for Research

   The identification that a trauma-specific set of circumstances was interacting with other factors at Rise Academy was in some part based on intuition. Although this project always revolved around trauma-informed care, I did not expect a connection between these principles for how schools should be designed for students with how they must be effectively led by their principals. Instead, after semi-successfully nesting the findings of this study within the frameworks of effective leadership and effective change management, something still felt off. As soon as the SAHMSA (2014) guiding principles of trauma-informed practices were introduced, a clearer picture arose. Having not initially set out to study trauma-informed leadership nor collected evidence specifically designed to support it, there is certainly much room for further inquiry and empirical studies in this area. In addition, the study was influenced by a rather peculiar incident of institutional trauma. Other case studies may help develop a clearer understanding of how trauma-informed principles apply in situations in which the trauma experienced is of a different nature. For instance, what might this concept reveal about the unique leadership needs at efforts to turn around persistently underperforming schools, where whole generations have often been traumatized, and thus expect to continue to be traumatized, by failed policies and oppressive systems? What might we learn about the ability of a trauma-informed leader to support a school experiencing an incident of community violence, such as in the aftermath of a shooting or another violent act? Does a large-scale national survey evidence any alignment between trauma-informed practices and effectively managing complex change, particularly in systemically marginalized communities? How might a similar concept apply in settings outside of K-12 education, such as nonprofits, government agencies, the healthcare sector or other organizations?

Similarly, I was left curious to think through research looking at how to better integrate concepts of trauma-informed leadership within existing leadership frames such as the Leithwood et al. (2006) frame for effective leadership practices or Marzano's (2011) 21 responsibilities. I arrived there, but through inductive reasoning and sense-making from a very detailed set of data. What might a more deductive approach offer, and – if it's something of value – research into replication and dissemination would certainly be welcomed in the field.

One of the most important assertions of the framework was that school change, and the leadership that enables it, are deeply tied to systems and policies at the macro, meso and micro levels. I turn my attention next to the implications that this may have on policy.

Implications for Policy

In addition to opening up new inquiries for further research, I began to wonder about the implications of considering trauma relevance on schooling conditions for policy, from the macro to the micro.

Macro- and Meso-policy implications. I have referenced repeatedly that my intuition largely let me to this discovery, but that may be an oversimplification. The reality is that I have spent the majority of my professional career at the crossroads between education and mental health. Yet, neither in preservice instruction for aspiring school leaders nor, sadly, in far too many of our schools is mental health integration currently emphasized. How could these concepts dovetail with preservice instruction for aspiring school leaders? It is hardly a competency area on state tests or a prerequisite for obtaining a certificate, despite potentially holding an important key about how to minimize opportunity gaps. And, more importantly, if trauma-informed leadership does hold this key, and is developed largely through intentional

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cross-training in mental health, what are the policy implications for furthering the connection between public schools and county mental health departments?

In charting its own story of mental health integration, Rise benefited in many ways from access to Sequoia's transdisciplinary team, where such integration was an explicit priority. Abstracting out, existing literature teaches several lessons that, when standardized in local policy, may help other schools bridge a similar divide. Specifically, in the expanded school mental health framework, several key factors stand out, as first reviewed in Chapter 2. After presenting the recommendations, I will link them to specific actions prioritized, or not, at Rise.

- *Addressing marginalization by reframing mental health services as central to the school's mission, rather than peripheral to academic achievement (Weist, Ambrose, & Lewis, 2006). Further called out in this area was the importance of "recruiting and hiring the right staff and providing great training" (p. 101):* Both of these subprinciples are evident in Rise's mission alignment and the strong founding mindsets shared by its young staff.

- *Promoting relational development across interdisciplinary teams:* This is highly evident at Rise, with relationships and interdependencies as established assets.

- *Building effective teams and coordination mechanisms:* While not firmly in place yet at Rise, efforts to do this were present throughout the research project, from working towards stabilization milestones to increase coherence and coordination, to hosting Community Learning Exchanges (CLEs) were collaboration, and not "turf war" were privileged.

- *Protecting student and family confidentiality without using it as a barrier to collaboration:* Here again, the partnership between Sequoia and Rise likely assisted

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in this practice, with Sequoia bringing both a deep understanding of real confidentiality laws and a strong orientation toward collaboration as its agency-wide theory of action.

- *Promoting policy change and resource enhancements:* While this fell outside the cope of the project at Rise, it certainly did present as a need, particularly in light of the recognition in the final framework I adopted in Figures 49 and 50 that the impact of trauma on different systems would necessarily interact with any change effort on the ground.

These recommendations speak to a larger need within our meso- and macro-systems. I turn again to the change effort at Rise to uncover these. In attempting to facilitate interventions focused on healing following Jennifer's ethical violation, there were several agents within my closest circle on which I heavily relied, including a number of Sequoia social workers and therapists, as well as the agency's Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, a therapist by training. These voices provided critical insights and supports in working toward restoration. Yet, in far too many schools – including those most disproportionately affected by trauma – there are no mental health experts to be found. Or if there are, the ones who are there are likely to be practicum students or interns. If trauma-informed leadership can play a meaningful role in school transformation, policy changes are needed to ensure greater cross-sector collaboration, including braided funding and shared responsibility for the welfare of youth.

Micro-policy implications. In reviewing research related to expanded school mental health, there are multiple large-scale policy implications for other schools, districts, agencies or systems interested in using trauma awareness as a lever for disruptive social change. Up to now, I've used Rise as a foil for examining these to suggest macro- and meso- level policy changes.

The story at Rise may have more nuanced, micro-policies as well. Clear school-level policies about boundaries, professional disciplinary flow charts, or policies on how to seek help if you experience microaggressions, for example, may have prevented or at least aided in responding quickly to various events in the fall. Similarly, policies about everything from family engagement to self-care leave and community norms around how to organize professional development into a community-powered learning event (such as a CLE) could help Rise memorialize some of what helped it reverse course during the year or could help another school leader avoid some of Rise's pitfalls altogether. As I began to surface possible micro-policies, I became increasingly eager to imagine the implications for practice my new framework might afford.

Implications for Practice

The research study yielded several potential implications for practice. Absent sweeping policy changes to facilitate more ready access and integration of mental health expertise onto school campuses, there still appear to be several practical strategies that may help boost schools' readiness for moving from trauma to healing without relying on a fundamental shift in the funding or policy landscapes. Once again, let's look at these through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) nested ecologies.

Macro- and Meso-practice implications. To envision large-scale practices aimed at changing outcomes for high-trauma schools or students, my natural inclination was to focus first on adult wellness and preparation. In a recent study, 89% of teachers surveyed reported that they felt schools should be involved in addressing mental health needs, yet only 34% reported that they had the skills to do so (Reinke, Stormont, Herman, Puri, & Goel, 2011). Teachers would benefit from being equipped with technical skills, as I suggest for the pre-service and ongoing

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professional learning spaces. Yet, a focus on adult wellness may provide the soft skills (emotional regulation, flexibility, willingness to assume risks) required for success. For instance, whereas no PD on trauma-informed care could, the availability of an employee assistance program to provide support or even treatment to staff members experiencing trauma or other mental health needs could provide a useful support system, priming those teachers to be more available to youth experiencing trauma, or working within the traumatized system that is American public education. Likewise, district, state or federal programs that allow for sabbaticals or other opportunities to recharge meaningfully in a career well known for burnout might increase staff retention and readiness to serve young people impacted by trauma.

Beyond adult wellness and in the absence of the sorts of policy changes I espouse above (changes which often take years to realize due to public system bureaucracies), districts or school systems without the ready means to place highly specialized mental health experts at each site might still be able to refer students out to outpatient providers or install relatively inexpensive interschool response teams capable of providing responsive supports to schools facing the aftermath of trauma. These same teams, if funded through the district for example, could serve as thought partners to leaders in the same way that shared math coaches or PBIS consultants can provide specialized support to multiple schools simultaneously. This and other efforts to integrate the growing knowledge about the impact of trauma on learning, leading and organizations can better prepare systems to address emerging needs. Yet, even in circumstances in which no larger system shows the readiness for foundational change, school leaders do have a skillset available to them if they want to increase trauma-informed practices within their building.

Micro-practice implications. In many ways, the school-level practices that my study finds carry implications for other leaders can be summarized as the middle "box" in my comprehensive framework, as shown in Figure 49. Specifically, leaders interested in weaving trauma awareness through their efforts at cultural change may wish to refer to the SAMHSA (2014) principles of trauma-informed practices:

- *Safety:* Practices that focus on explicitly increasing the sense of physical, emotional, and existential safety within their community, such as focusing on stabilization milestones, investing in authentic relationship-building and affording each other gracious space;

- *Trustworthiness or transparency:* Practices such as following through consistently, speaking difficult truths, admitting mistakes, being authentic (with staff and with families), and engaging others in meaningful work;

- *Peer support or mutual self-help:* Practices like maintaining a culture of direct communication and interdependence on others, creating formal and informal opportunities for individuals (staff and families) to gather and meet; incorporating affinity groupings;

- *Collaboration and mutuality:* Practices like a transdisciplinary approach to meeting students' needs, and the co-creation of cultural maps and priorities;

- *Empowerment, voice and choice:* Practices like frequent check-ins, distributed leadership, and casting parents as equal partners; and,

- *Cultural, historical and gender issues:* Practices like connecting interpersonal trauma to systemic traumas disproportionately impacting predictable populations, and flattening hierarchies through the use of CLEs or other strategies to engage

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stakeholders equitably (ex. – the use of image-based reflections and the option to audio-record a one-minute essay in order to access all the necessary knowledge in the room).

Together, these trauma-informed practices describe an empathetic, humanistic approach to leadership style, one that looks critically at systems and micro-cultures to ensure that they are supporting diverse individuals, taking responsibility for doing the work of remaining in critical dialogue in order to increase access and embolden inclusion. Each of these trauma-informed practices could be expanded upon much further, creating whole studies of their own. Yet, perhaps the most significant implications for practice I gleaned through this process had yet to come. They were the implications on my own leadership development and identity, to which I transition next.

Leadership Development

In Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance, Pirsig (1974) memorably writes, "The real cycle you're working on is a cycle called yourself" (p. 15). Indeed, I learned a lot about myself through this participatory action research, while purportedly working on systemic change. It was in fact difficult to decide which pieces of my leadership development to pick out for emphasis here, and as such I settled on three subthemes, following the now familiar progression form narrow to broad: (1) learning about my research identity, (2) learning about my professional identity as researcher-practitioner, and (3) learning about my personal identity.

Learning about my researcher identity. It would have been difficult to even define my researcher identity at the start of this study; it was in fact something I had struggled with during graduate school assignments. Beginning my doctoral journey, I had a hard time feeling connected to words like ontology and epistemology. Identifying frameworks to draw from was a

challenge – I remember not feeling I was adding anything of value to the extant research, instead insecurely working to try to tuck some notion I already had into a quiet corner of another researcher's work. Despite my strong belief that true expertise was rooted in experience, context and community – and, behold, the research that would have supported this (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Bryk et al., 2010; Bryk, 2015; Comer, Haynes, Joyner, & Ben-Avie, 1996; Freire, 1970; Grubb, 2009; Grubb & Tredway, 2010; Guajardo, Guajardo, & Csaperalta, 2015) – I felt intimidated by formal research. Certainly, I did not feel as though I had a part to play in it.

This same fixed, limited mindset carried with me all the way until my data analysis at the end of cycle two. Only then, in re-casting the data around as I began to play with the elements in the original emerging framework that no longer resonated (see for instance Figure 36, in which I interact with an earlier version of the emerging framework, Figure 22, that did not sit right with newly available data), did I begin to gain confidence in my ability to use evidence and the existing body of knowledge to add new research insights.

In other words, until experiencing research myself by letting go of my inhibitions to solve a problem important to me, I felt disconnected from it and unsatisfied by my attempts to learn about it (Knowles, 1977). By giving up on the notion that my success rested on "banking" as much esoteric vocabulary and theoretical content knowledge as I could, I began to generate new knowledge (Freire, 1970). In the end, I found meaning by tapping into what I know best: school leadership and trauma interventions. Cliché as it may sound, it was not in a book I never heard of or an older, likely male, likely White researcher who coined some new jargon – the researcher I was looking for was me. The findings and implications that resulted were not ascribed to some magical "missing piece" (Silverstein, 1976). When I resisted doing what I tried so hard not to do when leading change in schools – expecting to learn something from an external expert, and not

someone far more involved and in the case of Rise Academy, myself – I found my researcher identity. But research was only part of my professional identity. How had this project influenced my development there?

Learning about my professional identity. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to re-cast the evidence I collected in my research against existing frameworks. In so doing, I saw in sharp relief both some of my highlights as a practitioner, and some of my growing edges. On the plus side, I learned that I was resilient and possessed high levels of skill for fostering relationally-connected networks in my work environment, as well as strengths in flexibly adapting to the inevitable complications that arise in the public sector and in serving as an optimizer. Conversely, I was clearly stronger at the culture work than at order or standardization; I needed to continue to focus on how to quickly and assertively increase safety on a school campus; and, I sometimes let my desire to be positive and asset-based to avoid sitting in a cloud of discomfort. To capture my thinking using all the frames I examined, I created Table 23, which captures my attempt to diagnose my own leadership through the three existing leadership frameworks I incorporated most directly in creating my own: Leithwood and colleagues' (2006) second claim, about the effective practices associated with school leadership, Waters and Grubb's (2004) four responsibilities to monitor for dips in perceptions of during second-order change, and SAMHSA's (2014) principles of trauma-informed practice. After all, if my proposed framework held up these models as the basis for effective, trauma-informed education, would it not be prudent to know how I myself measured up?

Exploring the contours of my professional identity through the three leadership frameworks that most contributed to my own framework, as shown in Figures 48 and 49, was illuminating. I was able to discern that I had strengths in each of the three published leadership

Table 23

Levels of Evidence for Presence of Trauma-Informed Leadership in My Own Work

Leadership Element	Strength of evidence for presence in my own leadership	Notes
Building vision and setting direction (Leithwood et al., 2006)	Strong evidence	One of the largest assets at Rise was its mission alignment, and as its external leader much of this likely rests with me
Understanding and developing people (Leithwood et al., 2006)	Some evidence	While I made some critical errors in my conceptualization and direction with Jennifer, I also successfully supported a team with an emphasis on relationships
Redesigning the organization (Leithwood et al., 2006)	Some evidence	Throughout the year, I showed the ability to redesign the organization based on my changing assumptions and evidence about what the school needed
Managing the teaching and learning program (Leithwood et al., 2006)	Weak evidence	The teaching and learning program, while vital to Rise's success, was not an area I successfully leveraged in improving its culture. This was a leadership misstep that likely resulted from not focusing my attention to the most obvious lever for changing culture: address teaching and learning
Culture (Waters & Grubb, 2004)	Some evidence	I certainly thought about school culture often, including acknowledging the distributed leadership amongst all community members that created it, and building relationships that hoped to leverage this distributed leadership to effect change

Table 23 (continued)

Leadership Element	Strength of evidence for presence in my own leadership	Notes
Input (Waters & Grubb, 2004)	Strong evidence	There is strong evidence that I provided multiple stakeholders, traditional and otherwise, the opportunity to give meaningful input on core elements of this effort; At times, perhaps I did this too much, wanting to ensure I had ample input when the crisis at hand demanded a more assertive, immediate response
Order (Waters & Grubb, 2004)	Weak evidence	Similar to managing the teaching and learning element, above, I simply did not rightly prioritize bringing order to the chaos at Rise Academy. I recognized that there were no easy answers and that an iterative, community-powered process was needed. In so doing, I may have stood too meekly when I should have acted with authority to bring order and clarity to the site
Communication (Waters & Grubb, 2004)	Some evidence	There were some ways in which I appropriately attended to the communication needs of diverse stakeholders during second-order change. Yet at other times, circumstances (from lack of clarity about Jennifer's future to rapid transitions that made it hard to stay up to speed) interfered with the sort of intentional, multi-point communication to which I aspire

Table 23 (continued)

Leadership Element	Strength of evidence for presence in my own leadership	Notes
Safety (SAHMSA, 2014)	Some evidence	I can find evidence that I took multiple intentional steps to foster emotional safety in the building. I also attempted to address physical safety with actions such as the crisis response protocol or the hiring of additional staff, but I likely still could have prioritized safety further, including by taking a more directive stance when it came to decision-making related to the physical safety of students at school, regardless of any lofty goal we may have set
Trustworthiness and transparency (SAHMSA, 2014)	Some evidence	I missed an opportunity to build trust with the team because it took me so long to understand the leadership gaps that existed on site or to address these meaningfully. Simultaneously, I made every attempt to speak truthfully and to trust the community both with hard facts and with meaningful work to address these
Peer support and mutual self help (SAHMSA, 2014)	Some evidence	I did rely on supports from within my school and organization, my graduate mentors and dissertation committee members and my personal cheerleaders
Collaboration and mutuality (SAHMSA, 2014)	Strong evidence	Like with the element of input, above, I put great emphasis on collaboration, interdependence, and mutuality in relationships
Empowerment, voice and choice (SAHMSA, 2014)	Strong evidence	Like with input and collaboration/mutuality, above, this area was a highlight of my leadership, with both formal and informal evidence to suggest that I both genuinely believed in the power of these elements and intentionally incorporated them into my professional practice

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Table 23 (continued)

Leadership Element	Strength of evidence for presence in my own leadership	Notes
Cultural, historical and gender issues (SAHMSA, 2014)	Strong evidence	I reflect often about the public systems responsible for producing and reproducing social conditions so predictably, including by examining the ways in which these systems are rigged to lift privileged communities from marginalized ones and working to right this wrong

frameworks. Namely, I showed high aptitude in three areas of trauma-informed practices: (1) Empowerment, voice, and choice and (2) Collaboration and mutuality, and (3) Cultural, historical and gender issues. I also showed promise in the general leadership skill of building vision and setting direction (Leithwood et al., 2006), and in relationship specifically to my skill facilitating second-order change, I was also strong in Waters and Grubb's (2004) essential trait of input. On the other hand, my greatest shortcomings as a leader were in not effectively prioritizing areas I know are very important: (1) teaching and learning, (2) safety, and (3) order. To this, I attribute at least in part my over-reliance with communitarian, facilitative and community-powered change, rather than more bureaucratic one, even in circumstances were clarity and standardization are sorely needed (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Scott & Davis, 2015). I was also left wondering whether my personal identity might reveal any clues about my leadership development. I turned in that direction next.

Learning about personal identity. Whether I was ready for it or not, the school year represented in this study taught me a lot about my human self, in addition to the researcher and practitioner hats I sometimes wear. I wrote in Chapter 6 about the limits of hope and positive thinking on truly honoring the experience of individual community members in a traumatized school. In many ways, I also learned the limits of hope on me as a person. Let me be clear: I am not finishing this project any less passionate about participating in and fostering the sort of transformative discourse (the s Discourse II in the Eubanks, Parish and Smith 1997 article 'Changing the discourse in schools' that I mention in one of my research memos) needed across our schools in order to effect change: asset-based, solution-focused discourse that can help us rise above our current realities. If not for my tenacity in seeking to frame the positives, I might never have found any deeper meaning in the story at Rise beyond seeing it as "just another

struggling school." At the same time, I have come to believe that it is equally important to stop and be mindful of the reality, however unpleasant, of the current situation, examining markers of trauma deftly and honoring the experience of being stuck in a system rigged against you. While I would just as rather avoid the discomfort by filling my days with hopeful energy and busy action, without taking stock of the reality around me, I risk missing the praxis that all true liberation rests on, which exists at the intersection of action and reflection (Freire, 1970).

Not rushing through discomfort in the name of positivity was one important lesson about the limits of hope, but not the only. The other significant learning that this project forced me to recognize was that I, too, was impacted by the trauma on a macro, meso and micro level through my interaction with individual people, public systems, and social constructs. While I might be quick at reframing a challenge as a positive – memos in which I am bubbling with excitement to be, oh, taking on another full-time role (principal) or working with exhausted, taxed, extraordinary individuals (I tended only to see their resilience) – a challenge was also nonetheless *something inherently negative* that needed to be reframed to be re-spun. I deflected many of the impacts of this negative action, both because of my high levels of personal power and privilege both outside and within the organizations and systems to which I belong, and because I took painstaking, though only semiconscious, efforts to reframe even the truly negative as some sort of hidden plus. Yet, I was human. And I too was impacted. I was impacted by the interpersonal trauma caused by someone in whom I entrusted a school community I feel very connected to, as well as by the organizational trauma that taxed her and so many others before her, and the systemic trauma I bear witness to daily within an unjust society. Through the skin of my teeth, I made it through the end of the school year. But I was exhausted, and if I wanted to

continue serving in the capacity I feel honored to serve in today, I would quickly need to re-exert self-care and make way for myself to heal, as I have attempted to do for others.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by talking about the limitations of a short, small-scale research study. Somehow, that same study seems endless and exhaustive to me. I feel excited by its findings about the role of trauma-informed leadership and the impact of investing communities authentically in complex change efforts – listening and following those most impacted by a broken system. I am proud to be able to introduce a new framework (see Figures 48 and 49) into the field and I am eager to see whether it holds any implications for research, policy or practice. One thing is for sure, this project had profound impacts on my researcher, professional, and personal identities and those learnings will influence my future engagement not only with Rise, but with other schools and public systems.

Postlude

In the prelude to the very first chapter, I was rushing home from my first day of work with Whitney Houston on my mind and tongue. That night, impressed by the elements I saw working in isolation in a restrictive, nonpublic, special education school in the East Bay region of California, I vowed to take the lessons I could learn within that setting and someday bring them with me to a public school.

Until recently, I thought that I had done so when I worked with Sequoia's CEO to design an approach that allowed young people like Joseph to receive help within their schools and communities of origin, avoiding the stigma and difficult re-integration faced by students who were removed from their natural surroundings, such as Troy. With the conclusion of this research project, however, I have now identified another way in which I have brought the highly

specific, trauma-informed skills I saw work for kids like Troy into vibrant, diverse public schools like Rise Academy. Like direct intervention with students, it had been a process of fits and starts. Yet, by building off the formal body of knowledge in the field and the one I honed through my work as a trauma-informed practitioner, I was beginning to draw strong conclusions about the impact of trauma-informed school leadership. Suddenly, I had a chance not to take the content I had learned at Sequoia to help schools include difficult to serve kids, rather, I stood a chance to translate some of what I had learned from working at the intersection of mental health and education for the betterment of educational systems more broadly.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284**
www.ecu.edu/ORIC/irb

Notification of Continuing Review Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Lihi Rosenthal
CC:

Matthew Militello

Date: 7/11/2018
Re: CR00007057
UMCIRB 17-001474
Disrupting the Pipeline

The continuing review of your expedited study was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 7/11/2018 to 7/10/2019. This research study is eligible for review under expedited category #6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Document	Description
Rosenthal_Dissertation Proposal.docx(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Rosenthal_FocusGroupProtocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Rosenthal_OneMinuteEssaysProtocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Rosenthal_PhotoVoiceProtocol(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Rosenthal_SCAIParentSurvey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Rosenthal_SCAIStaffSurvey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Rosenthal_SCAIStudentSurvey(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Rosenthal_StudyConsent.docx(0.01)	Consent Forms

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

IRBDDDDD705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORGDDDD418
IRBDDDDJ781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORGDDDD418

APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Fits and Starts: One Elementary School's Journey
Toward Trauma-Informed Leadership
Focus Group Protocol**

Introduction

Thank you for taking time from your busy schedules to meet with me today. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group interview and will limit the time to one hour.

My name is Lihi Rosenthal. I will serve as the moderator for the interview. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. The interview is part of a study to assess the culture and climate at _____ Academy and make improvements that allow each and every student to be successful here at school.

Disclosures:
- Your participation in the study is <u>voluntary.</u> It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The interview will be <u>digitally recorded</u> in order to capture a comprehensive record of our conversation. All information collected will be kept <u>confidential.</u> Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the focus group data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The interview will be conducted using a semi-structured and informal format. Several questions will be asked about both the individual knowledge and skills gained and the organization practices used. It is our hope that everyone will contribute to the conversation.
- The interview will last <u>approximately one hour.</u>

Interview Questions

TURN RECORDER ON AND STATE THE FOLLOWING:
"This is *Lihi Rosenthal,* interviewing a focus group at _____ *Academy* on *(Date)* for the Disrupting the Pipeline study."

To begin the conversation, please introduce yourself and describe your connection to _____ Academy. Start with first person to the right and continue left till all participants have introduced themselves.

Following this, the questions themselves can begin. The questions are organized into three subcategories: role, referral process and student services, and discipline.

Role
6. Describe your role and how long you have worked here.
7. How is your role connected to the larger goals of the school?
8. How effective do you feel you are able to be in this role?
9. What do you think would make your role more effective?
10. What kind of support do you get in your role (including from leadership/supervisor/PD, etc)? Is it enough?

Referral Process and Student Services
4. How do you determine that a student is struggling academically, and how do you refer them for support?
5. How do you determine that a student is struggling emotionally or behaviorally and how do you refer them for support?
6. How do you tell whether interventions are effective (both for academics/behavior/SE)?

Discipline/School Culture
4. How is behavior handled at this school?
5. Do you feel that it is effective? If not, how do you feel it could be more effective
6. How would you describe the school culture? What improvements, if any do you think could be made? (This includes relationships between students, between students and staff, between staff, and between the school and the outer community)

APPENDIX C: TRAUMA-INFORMED MATRIX (TIM)

Building Trauma-Informed Schools: Key Domains

For each category listed below, please mark one of the following options:	Not in Place	Somewhat in Place	In Place
SUPPORTING STAFF DEVELOPEMNT			
Training for staff in understanding and responding to symptoms of trauma			
Training in vicarious trauma/burnout and supporting self-care			
Ongoing trauma-related consultation and support			
CREATING A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT			
Clean, well-maintained, accessible classrooms and common areas			
Adequate monitoring of classrooms and common spaces			
Clear policies for violence and bullying that are understood by staff and students			
Clear expectations and routines and clear plans for transitions			
Staff responses are consistent, predictable, and respectful			
Staff use praise and reinforce positive behaviors			
Staff work to identify and reduce potential triggers for children and parents			
Designated safe spaces for children to go to when feeling overwhelmed/triggered			
Clear crisis prevention/management plans that include de-escalation techniques			
Cultural background of students is reflected in artwork, language and materials			

For each category listed below, please mark one of the following options:	Not in Place	Somewhat in Place	In Place
ADAPTING POLICIES			
School regularly examines and adjusts policies and procedure in light of trauma principals (e.g. understanding safety, choice, control and empowerment)			
School identifies procedures and policies that are potentially triggering or re-traumatizing to students (leaves them feeling, anxious, vulnerable, out of control)			

INVOLVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES			
Children and families have input into school rules, policies, practices, and programs			
Families are partners in decision-making around child needs and plans			
Families are educated on making referrals to school and community-based supports			
ACCESSING AND PLANNING SERVICES AND BUILDING SKILLS			
All school-based assessments (educational, functional behavioral, psychosocial) consider history of trauma and its potential impact on learning, behavior, testing results, and diagnosis			
All individualized plans (IEPs, behavior plans) include trauma-specific components when applicable (e.g. triggers, trauma-related responses, trauma-sensitive supports)			
School maintains a holistic view of students and facilitates communication within and among service provider systems			
School offers trauma-specific individualized services			
Staff consider the relationship between culture, trauma, and recovery and use interventions that are considerate of cultural background			
School builds and maintains connections with community-based agencies with expertise in trauma and can provide in-service trainings and consultation as needed			

APPENDIX D: PHOTOVOICE PROTOCOL

Fits and Starts: One Elementary School's Journey
Toward Trauma-Informed Leadership
PhotoVoice Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in the Culture and Climate Committee (C3) and volunteering to participate in the Disrupting the Pipeline study. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this important work!

My name is Lihi Rosenthal. I am the principal investigator for this study. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. These PhotoVoice submissions are part of a study to assess the culture and climate at _____ Academy and make improvements that allow each and every student to be successful here at school.

Disclosures:
- Your participation in the study is <u>voluntary.</u> It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The photos you take will be saved for further analysis. All information collected will be kept <u>confidential.</u> Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The entire process of taking a photo and captioning it should last <u>approximately ten minutes.</u>

Process

For each meeting of the Culture and Climate Committee (C3), volunteer participants are asked to:

1. In advance of the meeting, take a photograph that represents your response to the prompt, "What does Unconditional Education Look Like?"
2. Bring your photograph with you, either in print or on a digital device, to the next C3 meeting. Please bring or send a copy to the Principal Investigator, Lihi Rosenthal.
3. At the meeting, you will be asked to:
    a) Caption the photograph.
    b) Send or give a copy of your photograph, with the caption, to Lihi Rosenthal. Photos may be sent to (510) 326-3844 or rosenthall16@students.ecu.edu.

APPENDIX E: ONE-MINUTE ESSAYS PROTOCOL

Fits and Starts: One Elementary School's Journey
Toward Trauma-Informed Leadership
One-Minute Essays Protocol

Introduction

Thank you for taking part in the Culture and Climate Committee (C3) and volunteering to participate in the Disrupting the Pipeline study. I appreciate your willingness to participate in this important work!

My name is Lihi Rosenthal. I am the principal investigator for this study. I am conducting research as a graduate student at East Carolina University. These one-minute essay submissions are part of a study to assess the culture and climate at ____ Academy and make improvements that allow each and every student to be successful here at school.

Disclosures:
- Your participation in the study is <u>voluntary.</u> It is your decision whether or not to participate and you may elect to stop participating in the interview at any time.
- The essays you create (through writing or by recording you speaking) will be saved for further analysis. All information collected will be kept <u>confidential.</u> Any information collected during the session that may identify any participant will only be disclosed with your prior permission. A coding system will be used in the management and analysis of the data with no names or school identifiers associated with any of the recorded discussion.
- The entire process of writing or speaking your response and sending it to me should last <u>approximately two minutes.</u>

Process

Every other month during the Culture and Climate Committee (C3), volunteer participants are asked to:
1) Take one-minute to respond to an essay prompt.
2) One-minute essays may be:
    a) Hand-written
    b) Typed and emailed/texted
    c) Voice-recorded and sent
3) The essays will be in response to one of the following three prompts:
    a) One example of our school culture is…
    b) At Rise, every child is…
    c) My ability to influence the school culture at school is…
4) You will be timed as you complete this assignment by Lihi Rosenthal, the principal investigator. She will notify you when time is up.
5) Please send or give a copy of your one-minute essay to Lihi Rosenthal. Submissions may be sent to (510) 326-3844 or <u>rosenthall16@students.ecu.edu</u>.

East Carolina University

**Informed Consent to Participate in Research
Information to Consider Before Taking Part in Research
That Has No More Than Minimal Risk**

**Title of Research Study: Fits and Starts: One Elementary School's Journey
Toward Trauma-Informed Leadership**

Principal Investigator: Lihi Rosenthal under the guidance of Dr. Matthew Militello
    Dr. Militello: Institution, Department or Division: College of Education
    Address: 220 Ragsdale, ECU, Greenville, NC 27858
    Telephone #: (919) 518.4008

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this participatory action research study is to investigate the ways in which a diverse group of co-researcher participants can organize for a common goal: creating a healthy and inclusive school culture, one free of exclusionary discipline practices (suspension and expulsion) and rooted in the principles of strengths-based, trauma-informed care. To this end, co-researchers, functioning as a Culture and Climate Committee, will conduct and analyze a variety of data collection processes to guide the school's culture work. This group, composed of administrators, teachers, mental health specialists, non-instructional staff, and families, will be led by the principal investigator. The findings of this study should provide useful lessons in the implementation of trauma-informed systems.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?
There are no known reasons for why you should not participate in this research study.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?
You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?
The research will be conducted at your school. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is approximately 45 minutes per year.

What will I be asked to do?
If you agree to participate in this study, you may be asked to participate in one or more surveys, interviews or focus groups. Interviews and focus groups will be audio/video recorded. If you want to participate in an interview but do not want to be audio recorded, the interviewer will turn off the audio recorder. If you want to participate in a focus group but do not want to be video recorded, you will be able to sit out of field of view of the video camera and still be audio recorded. Survey, interview, and focus group questions will focus on the school's culture and climate.

In addition, at each Culture and Climate Committee, you will be asked to provide a reflection regarding your views of the school's culture and climate. You will be able to use photographs, audio recordings, video recordings, or written reflection. All tools will be provided for you.

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We do not know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We do not know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

Will it cost me to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:
- Any agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the North Carolina Department of Health, and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The information in the study will be kept confidential to the full extent allowed by law. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the data collection and data analysis process. Consent forms and data from surveys, interviews, and focus groups will be maintained in a secure, locked location and will be stored for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. No reference will be made in oral or written reports that could link you to the study.

What if I decide I do not want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?
The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator, Lihi Rosenthal, at 510-326-3844 or at rosenthall16@students.ecu.edu.

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am – 5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC at 252-744-1971.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?
The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

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- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

_____

Participant's Name (PRINT)   **Signature**   **Date**

Person Obtaining Informed Consent: I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

_____

Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)   Signature   **Date**