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JLER is focused on providing a multidisciplinary forum to provide a broad range of education professionals an avenue to share scholarly knowledge in the area of Equity and Leadership in K-20 education.

JLER aims to publish peer-reviewed manuscripts that add to the body of knowledge and focus on research and practical applications to practitioners of K-20 education and affiliated institutions. To achieve this goal, the journal seeks to promote research in elementary, secondary, and postsecondary institutions through articles on advocacy, equity, mentoring, cultural proficiency, diversity, community engagement, and the academic, personal, and social experiences of students; professional issues focused on equity for faculty and staff; and the regulatory policies impacting such institutions.

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FOREWORD: UNDER ATTACK AND COUNTER VOICES FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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As the voices of ignorance continue to attack democracy and social justice, we will continue to serve as a platform to counter those perspectives through the Center for Leadership, Equity and Research (CLEAR). Activism, anti-racism, and advocacy for the oppressed will continue to be the mission. We embrace Critical Race Methodology and Praxis that remain the driving epistemologies for the stories, research genres, authentic narratives, and counterstories of those who have been largely marginalized, racialized, and underrepresented.

Through *JLER*, we are keenly aware of the realities and challenges of today's America. We also see the resistance and ambivalence around us, both from friends and foes alike. Simultaneously, we are determined to continue working on changing the reactionary mindsets and passive, and often destructive, roles through empirical data dissemination and action research projects. *JLER* and CLEAR will continue to provide a forum for those who "*do* diversity, equity, and social justice" despite the resistance, complicity, and barriers facing them.

In this volume, the authors engage readers in thoughtful discourse regarding some of the timely and pressing issues in a racially and culturally divided society. The collection of articles includes a rich account of educational phenomenon coupled with valuable insights that engage all who are serious about their intentional efforts and strategies to cope with the challenging realities around us. Join us in the journey to dismantle educational inequality.

Mica Pollock and Colleagues provide a phenomenological analysis of educators' lived experiences in light of the dominant anti-diversity in educational settings especially related to race and gender/sexual identity that ultimately affect learning and teaching outcomes. They point out that educators' "recent experiences with *talking* about race and LGBTQ lives, with many emphasizing threatened punishment by critics for discussing these topics" (p. 6). Their findings reflect that "While some educators enjoyed support and freedom in race and diversity-related discussion and learning, other educators described intensive restriction effort emanating from local, state, and national pressures" (p. 6). These alarming trends may "suggest that the nation may be heading toward two schooling systems: one where children and adults get to talk openly about their diverse society and selves, and one where they are restricted or even prohibited from doing

so" (p. 48). This call to action transcends educators and administrators to embrace all participants in society both locally and nationally.

Using a duoethnographic approach, **Danielle Ligocki and Tim Monreal** share their experiences and roles as educators and parents with school-age children in public schools while tensions and emotions are high all around. While their vision revolves around advocacy for public education and its promise, their "inquiry took a reflective nature as we worked to gain clarity into and highlight the differences between the pushes and pulls we feel given the intersections of our personal and professional roles" (p. 59). They state that "our vision of [our children's] education goes beyond 'academic' success, for we also see ourselves as cultural and political workers, committed to a critical, anti-colonial, and democratic project of public schooling" (p. 60). Their contribution has immediate implications for not only advancing civil discourse but also pragmatic action needed to advance freedom and empowerment for all participants in society's social and educational institutions.

Rebecca Covarrubias and Colleagues offer data-driven actionable lessons gained from mentoring programs at Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs). Focusing on *servingness* as a multidimensional framework, they illustrate how Hispanic Serving Institutions "can shift from merely *enrolling* to meaningfully *serving* students holistically" (p. 75). To do so, they argue that there is an urgent need to critically examine "how institutional structures facilitate or inhibit servingness" as educational leaders seek to improve success through adequate mentoring. They identified six structural challenges to servingness that must be overcome to promote a sense of belonging for historically minoritized students which can be achieved through "*implementing high-impact mentoring practices*."

Talisa Sullivan and **Peter Flores** explore the marginalization of minoritized students in U.S. society and its educational system that is in need of a structural redesign. They view the intentional implementation of ethnic studies approaches as helpful for affirming the intellectual cultural, social, and historical being of all students in schools. They further argue that "demographic and cultural differences require culturally competent educators capable of leading change through *praxis"* (p. 95). Accordingly, through social justice leadership and inclusive pedagogical approaches, students see themselves represented in the process, and included are their own stories that reflect the "complete truth of their cultural and ethnic imprint within the history and fabric" of the American democratic institutions, such as schools.

In her *testimonio* as a Latina school leader, **Carmen Ponce Beck** cultivates her cultural heritage, social capital, and unique perspectives about how to engage "the people in her charge to imagine a compelling future for the organization that would guide their efforts" (p. 105). She illustrates and details a set of experiential strategies that would guide improvement efforts to transform schools and the academy. Grounded in the power of authentic *testimonios* and storytelling, Beck's account can have far-reaching implications for all leaders including educators from historically minoritized populations.

David Sandles provides an eloquent and powerful review of the recently published book by Rene Guillaume & Edna Martinez, *Bounding Greed: Worklife Integration and Positive Coping Strategies Among Faculty of Color in Early, Middle, and Late Career Stages at Comprehensive Universities*. Sandles points out that the authors "Guillaume and Martinez artfully craft an instructive template for faculty of Color in coping with the distressing culture of many comprehensive universities and the achievement of work-life balance" (p. 124). Capturing the main premise of Bounding Greed, Sandles pointed out that the contributions in this edited book chronicle authentic and rich testimonios that amplify how "considerable difficulty and an often

unmitigated microaggressive strain, faculty of Color experience a wave of personal and professional challenges that leave many disillusioned and emotionally traumatized" (p. 124.). As a faculty of Color himself, Sandles has interacted with this book and meaningfully identifies with the various themes and domains that are steeped in the realities of universities and the academy at large.

Yet again, readers of this profound edition will find a thought-provoking collection that have pragmatic values for teachers, educators, and leaders whose vision and mission are grounded in antiracism, diversity, equity, and social justice.

Finally, on behalf of the JLER's entire team, we are grateful to all partners for preparing this issue as well as the contributors, reviewers, and everyone who assisted in the production of this rich edition.

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SUPPORTED, SILENCED, SUBDUED, OR SPEAKING UP? K12 EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE CONFLICT CAMPAIGN, 2021- 2022

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Pre-released publicly in May 2023 on schooltalking.org, with the journal's permission. Correspondence concerning this submission should be addressed to micapollock@ucsd.edu.

ABSTRACT

Across the country, effort is underway to restrict discussion, learning, and student support related to race and gender/sexual identity in educational settings, targeting schools with state legislation and politicians' orders; national conservative media and organizations; Board directives; and local actors wielding media-fueled talking points. To date, few analysts have yet explored in detail educators' lived experiences of these multi-level restriction efforts and local responses to them. In this article, we analyze 16 educators' experiences of 2021-22 restriction effort and local responses, with an eye to potential effects on student support and learning. Educators interviewed emphasized

their recent experiences with *talking* about race and LGBTQ lives, with many emphasizing threatened punishment by critics for discussing these topics. Context mattered tremendously: While some educators enjoyed support and freedom in race and diversity-related discussion and learning, other educators described intensive restriction effort emanating from local, state, and national pressures. Respondents also indicated that responses from local district leaders, school leaders, and other community members amidst such multi-level restriction efforts were crucial in effecting restriction or protecting the ability to talk and learn. Data from this interview study suggest that the nation may be heading toward two schooling systems: one where children and adults get to talk openly about their diverse society and selves, and one where they are restricted or even prohibited from doing so. The fate of our nation's teaching, learning, and student support is up not only to the nation's teachers, principals, and superintendents, but us all.

Keywords: censorship, restriction, leadership, teaching, race, gender, LGBTQ

Introduction: A Nationally Networked Effort to Restrict Learning

Since January 2021, politicians have filed over 300 bills in 45 states to restrict students' ability to talk and learn in school about race, racism, gender, LGBTQ lives, diversity, and history. Twenty-eight laws are now passed in 17 states to limit race- and LGBTQ-related learning (Young, Sachs, & Friedman, 2022). Between July 2021 and June 2022, politicians and inflamed local critics have tried to ban over 2,500 individual books from libraries or classrooms in 32 states, often books about racism, with protagonists of color, or with LGBTQ characters (PEN America, 2022); PEN America has now tracked over 4,000 such instances of banned books since July 2021, affecting 182 school districts in 37 states and millions of students (Meehan & Friedman, 2023). To date, approximately 150 districts nationwide have introduced local measures to limit race-related learning (Alexander, 2022). Legislation also increasingly seeks to restrict LGBTQ-related learning and support to youth, with 23 anti-LGBTQ bills just in 2022 (Young, Sachs, & Friedman, 2022) and over 30 introduced in early 2023.

These efforts are part of a nationally networked effort to restrict diversity- and inequality-related discussion, learning, and student support in educational settings— while inflaming Americans to battle public schools and one another. Indeed, in a 2020-21 study, Pollock, Rogers, and coauthors (including Kendall and Reece from this paper's research team; 2022) came to call this effort a *conflict campaign:* a strategic, purposeful effort to anger people about public schooling overall, via a coordinated attack first on a caricatured catchall vision of "Critical Race Theory" in K-12 public schools-- motivated in part to gain political power (see Background, below).[1] Simultaneous with state legislative efforts, national networking fueled by powerful conservative entities (media, organizations, foundations, PACs, and GOP politicians) has purposefully worked to inflame and equip local critics to target local teachers, schools, and boards over a caricatured, imagined proliferation of "Critical Race Theory" in K12 schools, with talking points, "toolkits," and trainings-- while increasingly targeting LGBTQ-related support and talk as well (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2023). Attacks on educators and students in national conservative media, state

legislatures, and local districts and schools have since attempted to curtail a vast variety of discussions and student supports engaging issues of race/racism and also gender and sexual identity in schools, including by targeting "antiracist," "equity," or "DEI" effort; accurate and inclusive teaching about inequality throughout U.S. history; use of student-chosen pronouns or school bathrooms; and even "social emotional learning." At this writing, Florida governor/presidential hopeful Ron DeSantis' administration had even banned a pilot AP course in African American history – and the College Board deleted content from it, potentially affecting learning opportunities nationwide.

Advocates, journalists, and some scholars have described the conflict campaign's legislative onslaught and local restriction activity (Lopez & Sleeter, forthcoming; TEDx Talks, 2022; UCLA Critical Race Studies, n.d.; White, 2022). New national research is starting to show overall trends in educator experience (Rogers & Kahne, 2023; Woo et al., 2022, Woo et al., 2023; see Prior Research, below). A recent nationally representative survey noted that "About one-quarter of teachers reported that limitations placed on how teachers can address topics related to race or gender have influenced their choice of curriculum materials or instructional practices" (Woo et al., 2023, 1). Another national survey of principals in 2022 noted that half had experienced local efforts "to limit or challenge" teaching about issues of race and racism, or work on LGBTQ+ student rights (Rogers & Kahne, 2022, ix).

To date, however, few analysts have yet explored in detail educators' lived experiences of these multilevel threats to learning and local responses to them. In this article, we seek to offer such analysis of 16 educators' experiences of *2021-22* restriction effort and local responses, with an eye to potential effects on student support and learning.

For this article, we interviewed nearly twenty educators from across the country to deepen our findings from a prior "conflict campaign" survey of 275 educators, the majority of whom described experiencing 2020-2021 anti-"CRT" action and restriction of race- and diversity-related learning (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022). We interviewed all initially willing survey respondents, who were mostly teachers and several district-level administrators. We asked a basic research question: *How, if at all, have educators (as of spring 2022) continued to experience and respond to any efforts to restrict K12 teaching and learning about race, racism, gender, and LGBTQ+ and other minoritized experiences*?

Building here on an analytic framework attending to "colormuteness" in schools, we share initial patterns in educator experience regarding a key conflict campaign goal: limiting *talk* of race and also LGBTQ lives in schools.[2] Educators interviewed emphasized their recent experiences with *talking* about race and LGBTQ lives, with many emphasizing threatened punishment by critics for discussing these topics. Context mattered tremendously: While some educators enjoyed support and freedom in race and diversity-related discussion and learning, other educators described intensive restriction effort emanating from local, state, and national pressures. Respondents also indicated that responses from local district leaders, school leaders, and other community members amidst such multi-level restriction efforts were crucial in effecting restriction or protecting the ability to talk and learn.

We label four educator *talk experiences* amidst such multi-level pressures. Some educators described 1) being *supported* by education leaders and communities to keep talking about race and diversity in efforts to support student learning and well-being, essentially sheltered locally from larger campaign forces. Conversely, educators working in states and communities where politicians or loud critics were attacking race- and LGBTQ-related efforts to support students described 2) being *silenced* into ending talk about race and LGBTQ lives at work, and 3) being *subdued* into muting such talk. Finally, some educators described 4) *speaking up* to insist on talking about race, racism, and LGBTQ experiences in society and schools in order to support students, despite restriction efforts. In each case, educators noted how limiting *talk,* dialogue, and communication about real issues of race, gender, and sexual identity could reduce support to students themselves.

We emphasize that educators were not confined to single types of talk experience. This article presents a typology of experiences, not of educators (Stapley et al., 2022). We also note throughout the identities of educators responding and particularly the racialized and political demographics of their work locations, as educators themselves (educators of color re their own identities, and all educators re local demographics) often discussed these factors as central to their experiences along with state context and national trends.[3] We call the broader context of nationally-fueled, state- and locally-enacted effort to restrict and punish race- and diversity-related talk, learning, and student support "the conflict campaign."

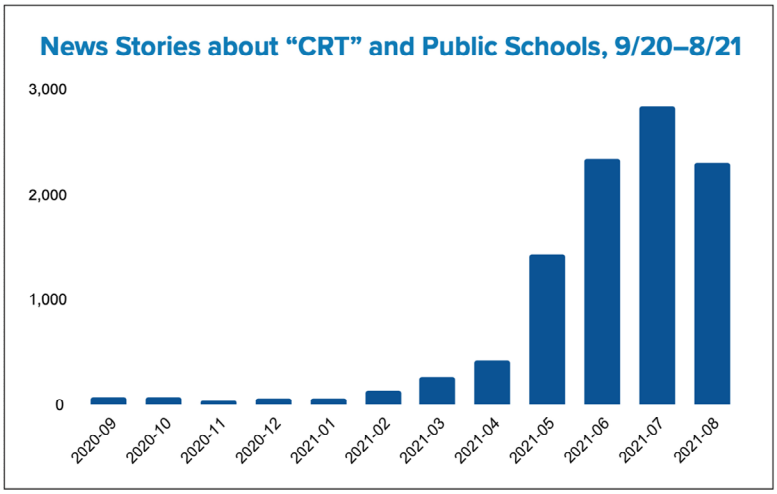
Below, we first offer background on the 2020+ conflict campaign, building on prior research (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022) and recent work by others. We then share a theoretical framework exploring how silencing race and diversity-related talk in schools risks limiting youth support. We then discuss our methods for investigating educators' experiences via follow up interviews, and our findings about four versions of educator experience.

Prior research on the conflict campaign to restrict race- and diversity-related talk in K12 schools

The summer of 2020 and its nationwide protests denouncing police brutality sparked increasing K–12 education efforts to discuss and explore issues of race and racism in U.S. society. As one example (Matschiner, in progress), "equity directors" were hired in many of the nation's largest districts, to help lead increased student-facing programming and professional development on race and diversity. In Spring 2021, a backlash from politicians, conservative organizations, and conservative media coverage targeting imagined "CRT" exploded along with explicitly restrictive state legislation efforts, ballooning from around 50 state bills filed by GOP legislators in 2021 to over 135 filed in 2022 (see PEN America Index of Educational Gag Orders: http://bit.ly/3ZDtsPn).

Figure 1

(from Pollock & Rogers, et al, 2022)



Bills first particularly sought to prohibit K12 discussion of a cut-and-paste list of so-called "divisive concepts" taken from a Trump executive order. Some such prohibitions caricatured actual teaching (imagining that teachers might tell students to agree that "one race, sex, or religion is inherently superior to another race, sex, or religion"), while others prohibited exploration of realities or concepts regarding racism, inequality, or gender and sexuality in U.S. society (e.g., whether the nation was shaped by racism in its founding; whether teachers in early grades could discuss LGBTQ lives). Freedom of expression organization PEN America has called these "educational gag orders," "a sweeping crusade for content- and viewpoint-based state censorship," and often pointedly, "a more general assault on discussions of systemic inequality" to "shut down important conversations in the classroom." As examples of restrictions on race talk,

> Minnesota's HB 3301, for instance, [proposes] to forbid teachers from requiring that students examine 'the role of race and racism in society, the social construction of race and institutionalized racism, and how race intersects with identity, systems, and policies.' …it is now illegal in [North Dakota] for public K–12 teachers to include any instruction suggesting that 'racism is systemically embedded in American society and the American legal system to facilitate racial inequality.' Language of this type...has spread widely in 2022 (Young, Sachs, & Friedman, 2022).

Analogously, PEN America has tracked ballooning higher education efforts to restrict attention to race and DEI– and in K12, lawmakers' efforts to censor discussion of LGBTQ lives, for younger children but also K12. "Twenty-three anti-LGBTQ+ bills that would censor classroom speech have been proposed in 2022, compared with just five in 2021" (Young, Sachs, & Friedman, 2022), and 2023 legislative efforts ferociously target LGBTQ youth and trans youth specifically (Shin et al., 2023).

Beyond state bills and orders, *local* demands fueled by national networking and conservative media have also ballooned since 2020 to restrict purported "CRT" and race- and

LGBTQ-related learning, including through book ban efforts (PEN America, 2022), local demands for policies to restrict curricula (Alexander, 2022), and direct intimidation of educators attempting to talk and teach about race, diversity, and inequality (Yochim et al., 2023). Our research on such localized, nationally-fueled efforts between September 2020 and August 2021 (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022) focused on race-related anti "CRT" restriction campaigns and found nearly 900 school districts across the country (serving 18 million students, 35% of all K-12 students) experiencing local anti-"CRT" restriction effort through summer 2021, as covered in local media. These conflict-ridden districts were racially and ideologically diverse, in states with and without restrictive bills. Most (one in two) were "Racially Mixed and Majority White Districts" (50–84.9% White students), often in politically contested areas. The strongest predictor was whether the district had experienced rapid decrease in white population (18+%) over the last 20 years. As inflamed local actors wielded nationally shared strategies and language to battle districts and school educators, we called the virally spreading anti-"CRT" conflict campaign "a national campaign made real in part through local critics of schooling enacting state and local trends" -- "many local wildfires, one fire" (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022, vii).

Our report found that by the fall of 2021, conflict campaign experiences of local, state, and national restriction efforts had left many educators afraid to discuss issues of race and diversity at all. In the summer and fall of 2021, a majority of the 275 educators surveyed reported experiencing a newly hostile environment for discussing race, racism, racial inequality, and gender or DEI (diversity, equity, inclusion) issues more broadly. The majority of survey respondents and all but one of 21 district Equity Directors interviewed by a research team member (see also Matschiner, in progress) noted personally experiencing efforts to restrict learning on these issues in 2020-21, in places with and without state-level legislative efforts. Teacher and district respondents described a heightened level of "attack," "intimidation," and "threat" from legislation, "outside orgs," and local critics, particularly sub-groups of highly vocal parents sometimes fueled by politicians. Our data showed alarming trends toward censorship and self-censorship of race/diversity talk, core to what First Amendment experts call "the chilling effect," spilling into all kinds of localities. A white, Jewish female teacher in Ohio described "faculty terrified, confused, demoralized" by looming bills even in a largely liberal, majority students of color, demographically stable district. A white female teacher in a majority white, moderately changing, conservative-leaning district in Colorado (no bills at the time) said that "We are avoiding any topic that could potentially be incendiary. We're afraid to teach anything about race [Frederick Douglass]; my colleague said she's afraid to teach the Bill of Rights."

Survey respondents also indicated that responses from local district and school leaders amidst such multi-level restriction efforts were crucial. Some described leaders that actively supported the freedom to learn: In a liberal-leaning, rapid-change, racially mixed New Jersey suburb (without state bills pending at the time[4]), a white female teacher described how "We were encouraged to reflect and grow [through] discussions about race and racism," while in a large, predominantly and stably BIPOC liberal city in Pennsylvania, even with a state bill pending, another white female teacher noted that "We [kept] learning how to teach in a culturally responsive

manner…actively trying to dismantle prejudice." Some indicated leaders importantly attempting to clarify teachers' existing rights, such as a district equity director, a Black woman in a Southern state with legislation brewing, who described supporting local teachers in her liberal, rapid change, racially mixed/half-white district:

> They are so afraid that anything they do is going to be critical race theory, right? Like if I even speak about someone being Black, right, that's CRT….they're looking to us to kind of say, "can I do this? Can I not?"

In contrast, other respondents described administrators "cautioning" or quietly abandoning "DEI" efforts, or actively censoring specific texts. A white female North Carolina teacher (in a state with legislation advanced but vetoed by the Governor in September 2021) noted at that time, "Our superintendent attended [PD] and told us to advise kids to 'ask your parents' instead of try to show evidence to a child whose family swears the Holocaust didn't happen… we are scared to get in trouble and I have avoided subjects I usually would've taught because I don't want to be accused of indoctrinating."

Other administrators were passively leaving teachers unclear about their right to teach about race, diversity, and basic history in places where state bills *or* local critics threatened such work. In a rapidly changing, racially-mixed/majority white, politically contested district in New Jersey, a white male teacher called for "a clear and direct statement" from leaders to avoid "chilling" teaching and learning in the face of local pushback (New Jersey had no bills filed at that time, though it has since):

> In May or June 2021, efforts were underway in [our district] to attack teaching and professional development that addresses systemic racism, sexual education, texts and teaching that represent members of the LGBTQIA+ …Efforts were led by parents, many of whom are associated with parent groups on social media. Other individuals from outside our community came to join the fray. These parents and their allies in this effort have taken to board meetings and other community forums to deliver incendiary remarks, often not grounded in the reality of classrooms or curriculum, to attack teachers and their freedom to deliver instruction on topics that are meaningful to students, and that are politically (but not educationally) contested today. These parents and allies have also filed freedom of information requests from our school administrators demanding access to emails, as well as years worth of lesson plans. …
>
> Educators are left wondering what they can or cannot do in the classroom, often feeling like they now have to ask permission before addressing any "controversial" topic, or choosing to avoid it altogether….Without a clear and direct statement from district leadership or union leadership, many educators are concerned about the "chilling" atmosphere this will have on teaching and learning.

Finally, educators surveyed indicated how such unprotected "chilling" of talk restricted youth support itself. Teachers reported efforts to restrict basic availability to students of books featuring Black or LGBTQ characters; keywords core to youth support programming ("'diversity' 'social justice' & 'inclusion'"); and learning about "Anything suggesting systemic racism or

oppression of any group." Many indicated they would avoid making "controversial" topics like "race" or "race & gender" available to students in class dialogue.

New research is demonstrating more recent educator experiences amidst multilevel pressures to limit learning -- and the importance of local leaders specifically in shaping local teaching and learning opportunity. A 2022 Rand survey found "1 in 4 teachers told to limit class talk on hot-button issues" by school or district leaders in 2021 (Belsha, 2022, re Woo et al., 2022, p 19). A next RAND study (Woo et al., 2023) noted that a quarter of teachers reported reshaping their teaching and curricular choices due to state *and* local, formal and informal "limitations placed on how teachers can address topics related to race or gender." While teachers reported their own responses ranging from resistance to compliance, "Teachers perceived that limitations placed on how they can address race- or gender-related topics negatively affected their working conditions, and they worried about limitations' consequences for student learning." Study authors recommended explicitly that "school and district leaders should provide teachers with the appropriate guidance, resources, and supports to address contentious topics in the classroom and message their support for teachers" (Woo et al., 2023, 1).

Research also is showing leaders themselves under fire. Rogers & Kahne (2022) noted that in the 2021-2022 school year, half of principals surveyed nationally described experiencing localized pressures from often small groups of "conservative" parents and community members to restrict learning and dialogue about race, gender, diversity, and current events. Particularly in politically divided "Purple" communities and secondarily "Red" (predominantly Republican) communities, school leaders also were getting pressure from their own district leaders to limit such work. While district leaders in Blue communities were proactively supporting such work, "Purple" and "Red" communities' principals accordingly were often limiting both teacher professional development and student support efforts on race and diversity, even amidst spikes in student harassment:

> Almost a quarter (23%) of principals in Purple communities report their school board or district leaders took action to *limit* teaching and learning about race and racism — more than in Red communities (17%), and far more than in Blue communities (8%). Conversely, Principals in Blue communities are much more likely than principals in Purple or Red communities to report that their school board or district leadership acted to *promote* such teaching and learning. (19)

Finally, a new nationally representative survey study on district leaders (Jochim et al, 2023) has found that nearly a third of district leaders across the country themselves "reported verbal or written threats against educators about politically controversial topics" in the 2021–22 school year (along with book ban efforts), with such "controversial" topics including basic racialized and LGBTQ experiences in our society, along with COVID policy. Such threats were notably most common "in historically advantaged districts (i.e., low-poverty districts, suburban districts, and majority-white districts)." Bluntly, half of the district leaders surveyed – and particularly, in districts serving predominantly white students – reported that along with COVID issues, political

polarization around LGBTQ inclusion and teaching about race "was interfering with their ability to educate students as of fall 2022."

Forthcoming research is exploring recent restriction efforts targeting Black school-level educators (Moore, forthcoming); equity officers, most often BIPOC professionals and particularly, Black women (Matschiner, forthcoming); and teachers attempting to serve students of color more successfully after attending external professional development (Wells et al., forthcoming).

For this article, we set forth to supplement such work and our own 2020-2021 findings (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022) through 1-1 interviews with willing survey respondents, asking, *How, if at all, have educators (as of spring 2022) continued to experience and respond to any efforts to restrict K12 teaching and learning about race, racism, gender, and LGBTQ+ and other minoritized experiences*? In much of our data, educators discussed efforts to continue or discontinue *talking* about race, and secondarily about LGBTQ-related experiences, in attempts to support students. We thus next briefly discuss a framework from prior literature focused on *limiting talk in schools,* specifically about race. Such scholarship turns attention to how active refusals to discuss race and diversity-related realities in K12 settings can limit student support efforts – a key consequence of the conflict campaign.

Framework

Prior scholarship on *colormuteness* (Pollock, 2004) explored the consequences of K-12 educators actively "muting" their own school talk about race (vs not "seeing" race, as connoted in the typical term "colorblindness.")[5] While some speakers choose for antiracist reasons to avoid discussing race in a specific harmful way, "colormuteness" generally limiting race-related talk can limit supports for children of color particularly, as situations harming students in schools and beyond (e.g., graduation, discipline, and achievement patterns; inequality of opportunity) literally cannot be named, discussed, and remedied. In next work (2008), Author 1 demonstrated how efforts to limit policy language about harms to students of color in schools also can limit efforts at supporting the children of color discussed. Author 1 then marshaled hundreds of examples of educational research demonstrating how to support students, people in schools must attempt to accurately and thoroughly discuss real issues of race and diversity, with student support in mind (Pollock, 2017).

Indeed, most curricular traditions focused on supporting students of color or LGBTQ youth emphasize the need to try to thoroughly discuss real issues and experiences of diversity, inequality, and harm in society, and in schools themselves, in efforts to support students (Kumashiro, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Lopez & Sleeter, 2022; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Khalifa et al., 2016). Education research also indicates that pursuing such accurate and inclusive discussion in classrooms of the full range of American histories and lives, particularly the experiences of those long disserved by unequal opportunity systems, is essential to supporting both young people of color and white students (Gonzales et al., 2021; Sleeter & Zavala, 2020; Wells & Cordova-Cobo, 2021). Researchers have pointed out that deleting discussions of race, gender, LGBTQ lives, and broader diversity from classrooms and school climates more broadly harms students by denigrating

the identities excluded and making lived experiences impossible to discuss (Steele & Cohn-Vargas, 2013). Many identity-based student-driven clubs seek pointedly to counter classroom silencing through extracurricular activities inviting inclusive discussion of real lives (Kendall, forthcoming; Poteat et al., 2017). Recent research reviews have emphasized that silencing discussions of/critical thinking about history and society leaves all students underequipped (Lee et al., 2021; National Education Association & the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, 2022). Such scholarship turns attention to how muting, refusing, limiting, and deleting school talk about real experiences of race, diversity, and inequality can hurt students tremendously.

Today's "conflict campaign" efforts to restrict such talk in schools can be seen as backlash to more K-12 educators *attempting* to talk about such issues more thoroughly, accurately, and compassionately – a long-term goal for some and for others, a more recent response to activism demanding that schools finally discuss and remedy inadequate opportunities and harmful climates (Matschiner, in progress) while supporting more thorough societal understanding of racism historically and now (Hannah Jones et al., 2021; Kendi, 2017; Kendi, 2019). The conflict campaign is in part a direct backlash to efforts to support minoritized and all students better – a pointed example of how local education activity is so often shaped by broader political and racialized forces, often ultimately harming minoritized students particularly (Oakes et al., 1998; Diamond, 2022).

In much of our data in 2021 and again in 2022, educators described a mix of local, state, and national pressures seeking to restrict efforts to talk and support students in their districts, schools, and classrooms. We thus came to ask of our data *how* (and whether) educators were experiencing efforts to restrict their talk at work, and how they were responding to these pressures.

Methods

For this paper, we returned to our 275 survey respondents (Pollock, Rogers et al., 2022) and invited follow-up interviews in spring 2022 with all who had indicated on the survey that they were willing to do an interview or focus group. Data here tap almost all respondents who scheduled an interview with us after repeated attempts. We sought to learn as of Spring 2022: how, if at all, were educators experiencing and reacting to restriction efforts *now*?

Data from 18 conducted interviews to date did not actively sample educators in places with restrictive state laws. We went with the willing who responded to repeated interview invitations. We decided to focus this paper on interviews from educators working in public school systems, not independent schools (1 respondent) or charter networks (1 respondent); we thus focus here on 16 out of our 18 interviews (Table 1). Of our 16, 10 were currently working in states with either laws passed or bills actively pursued/pending at the time of our interview. Three were working in states with laws/ executive orders restricting instruction on issues of race, gender, or sexual identity, and one teacher networked with teachers in a state with bills filed [RI] while working himself nearby in one with no current bills [CT]. One Colorado educator (in a state without active gag order legislation) worked in a district starting to enact board-level restrictions after a board election "flipped" board members to "anti-CRT" campaigners.

As in earlier work (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2021, 2022), we notate each respondent's local district demographics as we share their words, noting the existence of state policy action; district racialized enrollment; and local voting patterns.

We sent each participant an email invitation, reminding the participants that they previously completed a survey for the Conflict Campaign report and that we were conducting confidential follow-up interviews to the survey. If participants were still interested in an interview, they were asked to choose from three potential interview dates and times. We sent two follow-up emails to each participant; four additional participants (beyond our 18) did not make it to the scheduled interviews.

Many of those who agreed to interview were *key informants* (Emerson et al., 2011) who had offered particularly detailed stories on our survey. We interviewed all willing respondents in Spring 2022, for a total of 18 as of fall 2022. In just one case in the fall of 2022, we interviewed an educator who belonged to the same organizational lists as those surveyed but had not filled out the initial survey. Interview respondents were mostly teachers, with several district-level administrators and Equity Directors (EDs).

Table 1

Interviewee Demographics[6]

Interviewee	Race	Gender	Role	State context at time of interview	District % white	District % change	District voting pattern
1	Asian American	female	teacher	Maryland, no legislation	majority students of color	rapid change	liberal
2	white	male	district admin	Washington, DC, no legislation	majority students of color	NA	liberal
3	white	male	teacher	New York, no legislation	majority students of color	unavailable	liberal
4	white	female	teacher	Ohio, bills pending	predominantly white	moderate change	liberal
5	woman of color	female	equity director	Colorado, no bills at the time	racially mixed and majority white	rapid change	contested
6	white	female	teacher	Virginia, executive order issued	predominantly white	moderate change	conservative leaning
7	Black	female	equity officer	North Carolina, 2 bills pending	racially mixed and majority white	rapid change	liberal
8	white	male	teacher	Connecticut (no bills at the time) and Rhode Island (bill pending)	both predominantly white	unavailable	both liberal leaning
9	African-American	female	equity consultant	Midwestern metropolitan region, in a state with bill pending	racially mixed and majority white	unavailable given metro region	unavailable given metro region

10	white	female	teacher	New Hampshire, with law	racially mixed and majority white	unavailable	contested
11	white	female	teacher	Indiana, multiple bills introduced but defeated at the time	racially mixed and majority white	rapid change	conservative
12	Black	female	teacher	Missouri, bills pending	racially mixed and majority white	unavailable	liberal
13	white	female	teacher	California, no legislation	majority students of color	rapid change	contested
14	white	female	teacher	Kentucky, with law	racially mixed and majority white	minimal change	conservative
15	Black	male	DEI director	Michigan, bill pending	predominantly white	unavailable	conservative leaning
16	man of color	male	teacher	North Carolina, 2 bills pending	racially mixed and majority white	rapid change	liberal

In our unstructured interviews, which typically lasted up to one hour on Zoom, we asked a combination of informal questions to explore any recent experiences of efforts to support or restrict learning (we took care not to presume that restriction was happening). We sought to explore the heterogeneity of experiences and to gather *palpable* data (Small & Calarco, 2022), meaning detailed stories that respondents felt illuminated various experiences of pressure or support. We also sought to understand the specifics of local community interactions over learning about race and diversity in school.

In initial open coding (Lofland & Lofland, 1995), we saw immediately how many examples involved struggles over talking about race, and secondarily LGBTQ lives, in school. We thus started coding data to name the variety of talk experiences that educators were describing. We noted a mix of educators speaking on these topics without much hindrance, speaking no longer, speaking less, and speaking up more actively. Respondents often indicated how such experiences of talking affected student support efforts, as communicating could mean making a book's discussion available to students, or not; continuing or discontinuing an effort to discuss and address an issue harming students, like racial discipline disparities; use or prohibition of posters made by students to communicate inclusion activities to peers; and more. Many noted how a primary targeting of race talk was morphing into a campaign to restrict gender and LGBTQ talk simultaneously.

We thus started to code more categorically (Luttrell, 2010) for these four types of recent, repeated educator experiences with talking and communicating locally about race and secondarily gender/sexuality in student support efforts. We first named these types of interviewee *response* to their situation (e.g., teachers "stepping back" vs "stepping forward"), but we then noted that most stories actually described behavior by the leaders *around* interviewees. Educators' own responses to pressures to talk less about race and also LGBTQ lives depended not just on their own agency mobilizing local "backup" for such work (Pollock et al., 2022b), but also particularly on whether

local district and school leaders provided guidance and support to protect students' and teachers' ability to speak, learn, and act re such issues in our society. That is, as *leaders* reacted to localized, state, and nationally-driven restriction pressures, educators "below" them were being:

- *Supported* (in locations where leaders and communities continued to clearly support race talk and LGBTQ talk efforts, teachers and administrators were continuing dialogue on such issues)

Amidst stronger restriction pressure, often due to leadership's own restriction efforts or weak responses to others' pressure, educators were being:

- *Silenced* (ending specific forms of discussion about race or LGBTQ realities, through restriction by higher-ups and also via self-censorship)
- *Subdued:* (continuing more softly in race talk and LGBTQ-related talk, while also muting and diminishing their own talk)

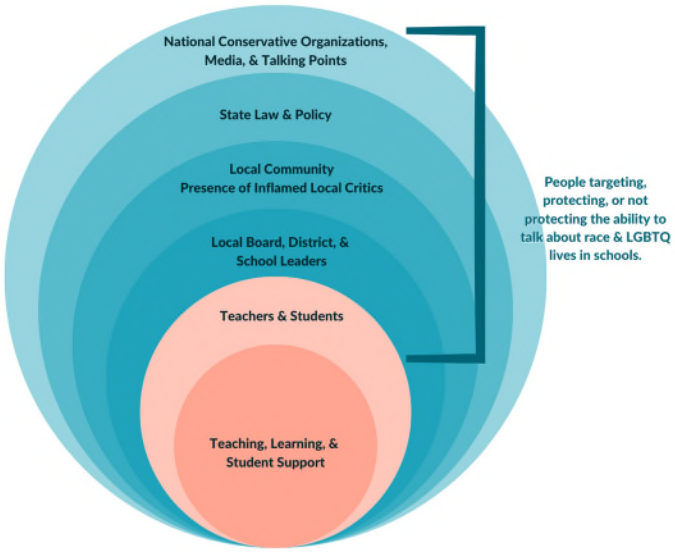
Conversely, some educators experiencing restriction pressures were explicitly taking leadership roles themselves in schools, districts, and communities, and modeling:

- *Speaking up* (insisting in so many words on the right to talk and learn about race and also LGBTQ lives, despite restriction efforts).

Each form of talking or not talking about race or LGBTQ issues at work was linked to supporting or not supporting students themselves.

Respondents repeatedly demonstrated how educators' abilities to talk and communicate for student support were shaped locally by their own and local school/district leaders'/community members' reactions to shared national pressures, local agitation, restrictive or supportive state law/policy, and local community politics. We thus came to think about multi-level system pressures in this analysis, with teaching and learning existing within broader contexts of support or threat (Figure 2).

Figure 2
Multi-Layered Restriction Pressures



Overall, participants described local actors navigating both local and state environments amidst a national campaign. Many respondents noted explicitly how national campaign talking points were repeated locally by inflamed activists; many also emphasized how state legal contexts provided pivotal threat to or support for race/diversity talk. Respondents also often explicitly noted local communities' political as well as racial demographics, summing up whether communities or districts were "supportive" (often summarized as "liberal") or "conservative" (often framed as threatening to race/diversity talk), and how "white" these contexts were. Many also emphasized the role of vocal minorities, local parent and non-parent community members described as intimidating, loud, frequent, persistent, typically "white," "conservative," or "Trumpian" individuals or small groups, fueled by national media and state politics to attack local learning. Leaders' local responses to all of the above then helped restrict talk or support it – demonstrating leaders' own pivotal role in multi-level pressures operating simultaneously across connected levels of systems (Woulfin & Allen, 2022). Finally, educators of color described particularly aggressive restriction efforts targeting them personally (see also Woo et al., 2023, Matschiner, in progress). We thus notate educators' own race and gender, their locality's political and racial demographics, and the context of state legislation as we share educators' experience stories.[7]

Given the field's need to rapidly understand educators' experiences with the conflict campaign, we emphasize rapid response in this contribution, versus insisting on a much larger sample that would afford substantive demographic analysis. We seek to meet Small & Calarco's (2022) metrics for rigorous qualitative research by pursuing depth of understanding through

detailed, concrete stories about "specific instances involving specific people in specific settings at specific moments in time" (2022), and through "followup" with known 2021 survey respondents versus seeking quantity of new interviewees. We also consider this a *temporal* case study, prioritizing analyzing experiences among K12 educators *at a particular moment in time* amidst a rapidly accelerating national phenomenon. We seek here to contribute initial patterns and rich data examples to the field in a rapid response manner for next consideration by other researchers.

We now share four forms of local *talk experience* our interviewees described by spring and fall 2022. The first ("supported") occurred in work/community environments actively enabling race/diversity talk. The next three ("silenced," "subdued," and "speaking up") occurred in work/community environments where efforts to restrict such talk were more pervasive. We present findings for this paper in the form of stories illuminating each talk experience, with additional patterns and educator examples to be shared in forthcoming work.

Findings

Some 2022 interviewees echoed a finding from our 2021 survey-based report: educators continued work to explore and discuss race and diversity (and get better at teaching about these topics) if local leaders and community members supported this amidst local, state and national pressures. Community pressure contexts differed tremendously amidst a shared national conflict campaign. For one, only some respondents described working in state contexts where politicians were actively threatening race- and LGBTQ-related work with bills and executive orders. Respondents also described living in local communities either relatively free of inflamed activists or roiled by their restriction efforts. Within such differing contexts, interviewees said, supports from district leaders, school leaders, and local communities were necessary to sustain race- and diversity-related teaching, learning, and student support. We thus analyze throughout respondents' discussion of local, state, and national contexts for their work, and of local leaders' pivotal role in determining education's fate within those broader contexts. We begin with several examples showing what it looks like now to work in a place where colleagues, community, and state alike back up the effort to learn to talk about race, racism, identity, diversity, and history (Pollock et al, 2022b) – or at least, do not openly restrict it.

Supported

Some educators pointedly compared state contexts of support and law, comparing states that seemingly allowed free inquiry to states that clearly didn't. As one Asian American female teacher in Maryland (a state without active legislation) put it in noting a recent district "anti-racist audit," "we're not like Florida":

> Interviewer: does Maryland have any like, legislation that's potentially going to be passed, around restricting efforts around race --like CRT, like that kind of stuff like some other states do?
>
> Teacher: I don't know. I don't know if our anti racist audit was by the state or our district just wanting to do it. Um, I know there's nothing saying we can't. You know, we're

> not like Florida….there's nothing saying we can't…. I don't know if there's anything saying that we have to.

Her words indicated how local district activity also mattered. This teacher's district was liberal with a majority of students of color, with a recent rapid drop in the white population. The teacher indicated that *within* her state, activity in her "liberal area," "school system," and "specific school" combined to allow and support learning and dialogue to continue and even expand:

> So our school system …. is really pushing hard for …more of that kind of teaching. So we at our specific school hired a diversity and inclusion curriculum coordinator, and we also piloted a new course specifically about diversity in STEM. We also have – I guess we're being encouraged to include a lot more diversity and equity lessons into our curriculum all over all the subjects… so I think, for us, we live, obviously in a fairly liberal area of Maryland – we're getting support and encouragement to add more discussions about race and equity, all of it.

The teacher noted how these district "supports" and "opportunities to talk" and "increase … their discussions of antiracism" in system "trainings," "audits," and "professional development" had grown in response to "The George Floyd murder" and protests, then continued because people in local schools "wanted to" have these "opportunities":

> It was definitely the George Floyd murder and then the protests that happened afterwards, because it essentially happened during virtual learning… the effort to make it something that we talk about really started then. ….Our school system, the whole county is going through an antiracist audit, and each school got to kind of figure out how they wanted to increase (...) their discussions of antiracism. We did some professional development, our school has an equity team … the whole system has an equity team. And they hold trainings and things like that. So it just, it became a lot more prevalent and there were a lot more opportunities to talk about these issues.

While emphasizing support from "the whole system," the teacher also noted the importance of school-level leadership in keeping "diversity and inclusion" work going if some unsupportive "community response" arose in their local "liberal area." She emphasized school-level "support from our administration" to protect teachers' efforts to "talk," while noting this might be harder in "neighboring counties":

> Teacher: The reason I feel we get a lot of support from our administration is because our principal chose specifically to create a job position called diversity and inclusion curriculum coordinator, and it's sort of his job to (...) filter some of the community response to what we're doing. But like I said, we live in a pretty liberal area– I think most of what we're getting is support.
>
> Interviewer: yeah, has there been any, like, complaints or things like that at any school board meetings at all that you're aware of?
>
> Teacher: no, not for us in [our] county…….In the neighboring counties there were (...) I feel like we have a lot of people, we can go to – well, besides the diversity and inclusion curriculum coordinator. The equity team that we have, I've been to enough of

> their trainings —I actually know a lot of them enough, that I can say "hey, I wanted to talk about blah blah blah in my class, how do I do that?" and they would send me resources on how to do that.

Other respondents emphasized the importance of district level support while more indirectly noting the absence of state level restriction effort. A white male district-level administrator in Washington, DC, indicated how proactive district support allowed local teaching on race issues to proceed uninterrupted, notably in a highly liberal location that long had served mostly students of color (with a small recent increase in white students) and did not have state politicians at all. This administrator had clicked "no" and "NA" regarding any restrictions on our 2021 survey. Now, he noted that new district standards (in process for several years) actually highlighted Critical Race Theory as one framework students could learn about in studying racism in history and social studies. The district also had tapped free *1619 Project* resources from the Pulitzer Center in their exploration of deepening instruction on U.S. history. He explained, "I think from DC residents, I think this is fairly well in line with what people have been asking for."

The administrator noted that the national conflict campaign still affected DC, describing "just flying below the radar… of some of the national political operatives." Still, he also noted that the effort elsewhere to "leverage" "CRT" as a "cultural wedge issue to gin up support for the Republican base and maybe steer some white suburban voters back to the Republican Party in advance of the 2022 midterm elections," was "not really a calculus that affects DC." Further, the administrator suggested, the majority of local teachers themselves were on board with discussing race in society:

> The majority of the students that we serve are black or brown, right, and that's also true of the majority of our teaching force. And so, I do think that there's --not from every teacher, certainly-- but I think the majority of our teachers are knowledgeable about some of the kinds of issues of how race has impacted American history or world history, and how multiple perspectives need to be taken into account.

Still, the administrator also described the role of explicit district encouragement supporting teachers to talk about these issues, noting, "One of the things that that our team has tried to do is to be really clear with our teachers and school leaders that we want teachers to engage in the kinds of conversations that, you know, help students unpack … the full history of our country." Through a monthly professional development newsletter, he added, "we try to reinforce and support teachers" in "engaging in conversations about … potentially controversial issues." A current events section had offered resources supporting teacher dialogue on the Ukraine, the white supremacist massacre in Buffalo, "racial violence," and January 6 ("they're going to need to talk about this tomorrow… at school… we're like right in Capitol Hill"). Also, through local partnerships with museums and universities, the administrator said, teachers "have a lot of access to professional learning to build their own knowledge, skills, about particular issues, but also how to engage in the kind of conversations that we're asking [them] to do":

> I think we've tried to– from the district level, reinforce for teachers like, "this is important for you to talk about, we want to support you [in] talking about it, we want to

> give you the right resources so that you can feel comfortable in doing that." And so you know…I can't say that every teacher in [the] district totally feels like they have exactly all the support that they need, but I think that's the goal that we are trying to strive for.

Still, the national conflict campaign was threatening local learning, via Fox News-fueled intimidation amplifying critiques by "a few parents":

> There was one of our elementary schools, who did some kind of antiracist training, …and then … got some pushback from a few parents and ended up on Fox News. … I think there was some, like, nasty messages sent, or maybe even death threats sent to some of the staff members in regard to that.

The administrator added that his team was considering how to "help teachers prepare for the kind of backlash" other people were "getting in different locations" after "movement ….in the direction of equity and racial justice." He hoped backlash didn't become "physical violence":

> I think we've started talking about, like, do we need to start having a conversation with our teachers?.....sort of like, [you're] in perhaps the front lines of, like, civil rights work at this point, and there is some degree of danger…that can exist. And so, how do you take steps to protect yourself? You know whether that's just from a social media standpoint, you know, turning things to private or … turning off replies and direct messages…And I know some colleagues in the states have…. removed email addresses from websites, to prevent people from harassing them, you know … we'll just reflect on the idea of like, well, *I might get attacked for this*. You know, [in a] rhetorical sense but maybe even beyond that. …. I think that's something that we're starting to think about. How we might prepare teachers …even just psychologically, or with the tools to try to navigate that if it happens.

He noted that in such "harassing," "that is 100% their intention… to get people to self-censor as much as possible." The understandable teacher "knee jerk reaction" to such intimidation, he said, would be "I'll just avoid this." And to "push them past that initial reaction," he noted, district supporters could say to teachers,

> Alright look, you're going to expect this to happen at some point, right, and be ready for it. And here's some strategies and approaches to think about, so that … you don't just stop. Because … we know it's important and our students deserve it.

Some district leaders thus proactively protected teaching, learning, and student support as a national conflict campaign catalyzed local threat. Educators in other locations described both district and school leaders sustaining and even expanding work through continued professional development as well as school-level "equity" roles and "programs." In predominantly BIPOC, liberal New York City, a white teacher had checked boxes indicating no restrictions in 2021. Now (after two short-lived, now-dead state bills), he noted that recent effort to discuss race and "sex and gender" more fully was "in full swing" and supported by a district "department of education mandate kind of coming down from the top, and every school is participating":

> I've certainly noticed more this year programs being rolled out that focus on these issues, what's being called, you know, CRT in the media. We…have sort of an equity liaison now, it's a role that didn't exist before in my school. We're having more

> lessons…periodically geared towards students, but there is some talk about professional development sessions, for you know faculty as well… related to issues of sex and gender and race and social emotional learning and all that.

Such leadership could help sustain and invite learning even in politically contested communities. The teacher added that in his school's neighborhood with "multimillion dollar houses" including "lots of students" "from you know conservative families" in this "blue city," "I haven't noticed any censorship, nothing is becoming missing from our libraries." Indeed, students in his school were getting the opportunity to analyze the conflict campaign itself:

> Some of my colleagues, for example, in their government classes are discussing… some of these issues that are happening around the country, like the library censorship. The Don't Say Gay bill in Florida. So like, we're discussing those issues but we're not really seeing them, you know, at our doorstep. We're talking about it more as an academic exercise.

Other educators noted how a supportive local "community," "district," and school "administration" could make a difference in blunting threatening state legal contexts. A white female teacher in a predominantly white, moderately changing liberal district in Ohio had noted in 2021 how even as "politicians" who "presented two Ohio House bills" were targeting "any text or conversation portraying slavery as anything EXCEPT a betrayal of our country's founding principles," "Our district supports our increased DEI efforts. My colleagues and I have been moving forward." Now, she described her community standing behind an antiracism resolution, even in a state with bills pending to restrict learning:

> I feel like I'm really lucky, because I'm in a supportive community, district. I have supportive administration. Five miles down, that's not the case in other districts. If I worked in a district where I do have to take certain books off my shelves, or I do have to completely rewrite an entire unit, I think I'd be at a point where I'm like, I'm not doing this anymore. But because I'm here and I do have that support, it makes a world of difference. Yeah, I'm very lucky and I know it.

She also noted how in a state with draconian pending bills, even a few local parents emailing repeatedly to voice "national opposition" could threaten learning. Yet experienced professionals with a "supportive community" could overall keep pursuing ongoing teaching improvement. She noted that "I work very hard to create, like a quality curriculum that engages and honors all students….. And to be fair, it did make me like, audit my curriculum very carefully. Am I using unfair language? Am I being too one sided, in this particular activity, or whatever? And I think that was good. I probably needed to do that":

> How should we examine our curriculum in the face of this national opposition that's occurring? … almost every time I get a parent email, I'm like, look at this one. And [a colleague is] good about, like, bringing me back down. Like, that's one person. All you have to do is respond to these questions. My principal was awesome, too. So … I stress less because I know that they will both …like, help me be okay.

Supported, she thus continued to improve her teaching about race and diversity, vs. ending such efforts. In other locations where local or state restriction effort felt fueled by threat of punishment *without* backup from a "supportive community," we found educators experiencing two next forms of pressure and reaction. Often, respondents commented on how local leadership did *not* back up their efforts to keep pursuing student support, such that they were:

> *Silenced* (Leaders and teachers were ending race- or LGBTQ-related discussions in reaction to restriction pressure).
>
> *Subdued* (educators were continuing in race/diversity talk while also muting it to avoid punishment, often given leaders' cautions or lukewarm protections).

We end with examples of educators themselves taking on leadership roles in schools, districts, and communities and modeling *speaking up* – insisting in so many words on the right to learn and talk about race and diversity, despite restriction efforts.

We first describe educators silenced and pressured to no longer discuss race issues or LGBTQ lives.

Silenced

In states with formal legislation "going after teachers," some district or school level administrators helped effect restriction locally. On our 2021 survey, as one example, a white male teacher from a majority white, conservative, substantially changing district in Tennessee had described how after passage of a state gag order, "As a social studies department we were told we cannot say things are racist [or that] it was sexist to keep women from voting." In Idaho, where a new state order signed April 2021 prohibited public schools from compelling "critical race theory" and barred funding for prohibited speech, a white female educator working in higher education described how:

> PD…with tribes have been halted…a tribal leader was told that there will be no more "culturally responsive teaching stuff' in their school. Teachers… have felt they need to change their curriculum if they teach about critical thinking & social justice …. Particularly any curriculums that teach Native American histories/Black history.

In 2022 interviews, respondents described other ways district and community actors contributed to silencing race and diversity talk, including in states without active restrictive legislation. Board members were one such crucial actor. Flipping school boards to anti-"CRT" members has been a major goal of the conflict campaign (Pollock & Rogers, 2022). On our 2021 survey, a Colorado Equity Director (ED)--herself a woman of color, in a contested, rapid change, now half white school district —had described "outside orgs who are trying to flip board seats this November. Parents are 'leading' some of the efforts. We also have boards in the city who have actively banned CRT." When we interviewed her in 2022, she noted how a newly flipped anti "CRT" school board was trying to restrict "talk about racism" via detailed curricular review:

> [The Board is] wanting to look at every curriculum adoption, with a fine tooth comb. And you know the social emotional learning curriculum, they're looking at that with a fine tooth comb –because it talks about racism and microaggressions.

The new board had immediately "mutually parted ways" with an equity-oriented Superintendent and was now "telling principals that have equity teams at their school level that they should rename their teams, they're not equity teams any more." Now books and entire subject discussions intended to support children felt "on the chopping block" for deletion:

> We've got, you know, CORA requests around what books are in our libraries. Wanting to know how many copies, if they're in circulation. So I do think that next, social emotional learning is also on the chopping block [as if] "CRT."... [and] They said we should not be teaching anything but reading, writing and math in elementary school. No social studies, because we're "indoctrinating." And no science, because that is also "indoctrination."

She indicated that in combination with this newly flipped board, local conflict campaigners prompting such shutdown of work through record requests and board complaints were just "very loud" and fueled by more national organizations, as opposed to a "big" group:

> They feel big, but I don't think they're that big… when I look at the board meetings online it's the same nine or 10 people that show up [to complain about] critical race theory– you know, anti equity… it's the same folks and I'll give them 15 tops. And … a lot of them aren't from our district. FEC United, I don't know what that stands for, is a part of this, the "Foundation of Tolerance and Racism" [[sic]] is a part of this. So they send their representatives every single time. But it doesn't feel very big, they're just very loud.

In the ultimate silencing, she was leaving her position to take care of her personal stress level – and to avoid getting fired personally, which she anticipated was next:

> I do not want to be fired and I know that's the next move. [The former Superintendent] was my direct supervisor and the only cover that I have, and now…I have to feed my family. … They will probably pull back the equity policy, and they will probably dissolve this department…. It's a mess.

In states with officially restrictive policies, educators described how state policy and national conflict campaign tactics combined with local Board, district, and school-level directives to silence race and diversity talk with students.

In our 2021 survey, a white female teacher from a largely white, conservative-leaning, moderately changing community in Virginia had described local targeting of "Critical Race Theory" via "opinion pages of the paper … filled with letters to the editor about our children (white) ... being treated poorly and made to feel bad about their skin color." The situation made her "Unsure what I am allowed to say and teach." In 2022, she described what it felt like to now have a tip line to the Governor. We note that since the new Governor's election, Virginia also now had a January 2022 executive order barring "inherently divisive concepts, including Critical Race Theory" (Exec. Order No. 1, 2022). The school board also helped effect these state restrictions:

> …as far as race, they said at the school board meeting that we are not to do CRT and we're not allowed to do *The 1619 Project*. Which I then went out and read, because I was like "Okay, I need to know what I'm not"… and …But they have not come to the point where they've….. where they're observing us to see. The Governor has set up a tattle tale

> line, so that if a parent thinks that their children are being taught something that's inappropriate or you know makes children feel bad about their color or whatever, that we get that it can be reported…. It's one more step in my thought process, 'Is this how I wanted to teach this subject?'
>
> I'm part of middle school, so studies for our curriculum is Civil War and Reconstruction… [and I want] to be honest. And so, everything that I do as I --like in my lesson, I'm thinking, is that the way I should phrase?…. it is *somebody's going to take that wrong.* For the first time this year I was like, should I even include parts of those lessons? Which breaks my heart.

She noted how local context exacerbated state restriction power. The norm in the district was already "tipped towards …don't discuss race, don't discuss gender." In combination with state-level regulations and now a "tattle tale line," plus school board prohibitions, local "people" were seemingly "wanting to restrict" a diversifying population from ever exploring history more "honestly":

> I would say that the people who are wanting to restrict, and basically what they're saying is, "we just want to keep it the same as it's always been… we don't want change"…. ….They are the people who have lived here forever who, you know, have family that goes back 150 years. And, that it's mostly people who have moved in. ….that have different ideas, …who would like to see a little bit more honesty.
>
> …[in] Virginia …our history is so tied up in slavery, and … the Jim Crow era and [segregation], and there's so many historic events ---and yet, if you look at the list of what we're to teach, it's barely touched on.

Despite already "barely" teaching race issues, school-level administration was also now explicitly starting to urge teachers to limit teaching further beyond "parameters":

> I've always been lucky to work …somewhere with administration that is pretty… you know, loose, about "these are what you have to teach, how you want to get there is up to you." And for the first time… In the last couple of years, it's a little bit more and more each time. "Yes, this is what we want you to teach but we don't want you to go outside of parameters"… like, "teach just this." And I'm really afraid that I'll do something wrong.

She also indicated that amidst broader state pressures, necessary "guidance" and "clear policy" from district-level leaders was lacking. She had seen just one effort of strong district leadership regarding a book ban effort ("The books were all either by people of color or people who have multiple or, you know, varying genders," she said). "Luckily, the school division said, 'we have a procedure in place, we will review these books, we will report back,'" she described, saying that all but one targeted book remained on the shelves. Yet in this same district, overall, leadership was not backing up teachers for the classroom conversations about race and diversity that students were initiating "on a daily basis." She hinted that the overall situation was "losing" the district some "staff":

> I would say that the district has not provided any guidance…. um, other than what we hear at school board meetings, you know. "We don't teach this, we don't teach that, we

> don't encourage this, we don't." But there's nothing that's –there's no clear policy. I kind of feel like the superintendent's office thinks it's just going to blow over, and so they don't want to make policy. But I don't think they're right. I don't think it's going to blow over, I think it's going to stay for a while… All the discussion about race and about sexuality and things that we never really-- I mean they were there, but we never really had to like address on a daily basis. And we are…. we are losing staff.

Other educators described how multi-level pressures combining state policy pressure and local parent activity tapping national talking points affected local district and school leaders' actions. A district equity officer, a Black woman in a liberal, rapid change, racially mixed/majority white district in North Carolina, had talked on our survey in summer 2021 about recent conflict campaign activity in her district:

> House Bills, FOIA requests, a website set up by the lieutenant governor for parents to report on indoctrination; parents asking for their students not to do SEL lessons; questions about CRT and SEL to principals…No real response. The district wants to do an equity campaign to explain what equity is.

We then interviewed her in June 2022. At the time, North Carolina had two bills under consideration, including one seeking to restrict public K-12 schools from any instruction on sexual orientation or gender identity in K-3 curricula and to enforce parent notification of any pronoun changes for students; it had passed the state house/senate and was pending. She also described in more detail the "indoctrination website" run by the lieutenant governor of the state, where anyone could "report people":

> I've heard I'm in there. It's so big. That is, no way I can find myself… it's like 1000 pages because …you can send any complaint that you have that you feel like your child is being indoctrinated.

Her interview indicated how local conflict campaigning *in* this state context, and local leaders' capitulation to those campaigners, made a tiny vocal minority of angry "white people" seem far larger than it actually was. She noted first how a failure to speak up for students of color in race-related learning had led to the current moment also emphasizing LGBTQ focused restrictions:

> It is the exact same people who organized around CRT that have now organized around LGBTQ. And … you know, there's a lot of people who are aware about the "don't say gay" type stuff, but who were quiet when a lot of the CRT stuff was happening. And … if you had spoke up and like squashed it then, they may not have had the momentum that now….To me that's the evolution of it.

She then described ongoing efforts to silence race related work in the district. For one, "Any company that we partner with, they do these like background checks and ….that's when CRT will come up, like, oh this organization wrote this about CRT." Local agitators were also aggressively wielding national talking points, including in meetings where she and other women of color were visibly representing the District. "The Proud Boys come to our board meetings," she

said, adding of one meeting, “when I looked around it was just four people of color and we were all females in the district”:

> We used to hold board meetings at schools, sometimes, and …we had one at a school and the Proud Boys came. And there was a Black Lives Matter flag and an LGBTQ flag, and they were like shouting out like, “why are those flags bigger than the American flag?” and, “Black Lives Matter is racist!” and ….things like that.

Some local parents also had recently objected to a district “equity audit,” even while students joining focus groups and taking a voluntary survey had their parents’ permission. “They act like they are speaking for this vast majority of parents, ‘we don't want this for our kids in this district,’” she said. But when she had reviewed her survey’s details, “[with] middle and high school parents [it was] less than 1% of parents, [who] didn't want their kids to take it”:

> And I said, “and so we are dancing for ….1%?!” And I said, “and what about the voices of the 99%?” Like we never lean into them, we always lean into this less than 1%, and let them dictate what we're going to do. (….) the reality is, they *don't* speak for all parents, they speak for a minority of parents. They're just well organized, that's what it is.

Asked about the small number of parents leading local campaigns to shut down such work, she mused, “They're all white people.” “What drew them in… it was like talk about masks and talk about vaccines,” she added, “…[and then,] ‘Oh, and that CRT stuff too’”:

> What we also realized is that some of them don't even have kids in the district. So when I say they're well organized, what they do is they go around from state to state, board meeting to board meeting, grabbing those few parents and making it look like, “here again, there's so much more of us.”

She added that loud intimidation by these “few parents” had a real effect because the local board capitulated to them. “Anytime I see people who are really about equity, BIPOC, they’re like ‘we have been *waiting* to have these conversations,’” she explained. However, she said, local parents “in favor of equity” “haven't spoken up a lot,” possibly due to “just assuming that everything is okay” and not fully “understanding” campaigners’ “internal” effects on the district. She noted how amidst national and state-driven pressures, a previously “supportive” “board” was currently saying “no” to “the work” as a way of “comforting” this tiny localized minority at the expense of “99% of families” in the district:

> I felt like we had a board that was overall, supportive of the work. But I felt like it just was always “no, we have to… no, we can't do this.” I just, so, felt like the comfort of white people was always on the table…..if it was just you know, “let's make it palatable for different groups of white parents,” okay I don't have a problem with that. But when it's at the *expense* of Black students, Latino students, LGBT students, and parents who are *for* all of that [equity], then it's like…what are we even doing at this?

She also described how her own district colleagues were starting to “shut down” even her own district professional development work supporting leaders simply “to learn how to connect with their student groups.” Higherups had cut short one PD experience she led after a colleague reported, “someone said they think that you think they're racist.” She mused that this was perhaps

an “out” for district colleagues who were “looking for a way to get out” of starting such work in the first place. Her own superintendent had even refused recently to let her show a video titled “Things that white people don't know” (featuring a Black woman “just talking about like some elements of Black culture that people just don't understand”) internally just to the leadership of the district. “I wanted to show a snippet of the video …so that we could kind of have a discussion around ‘so were you aware of that,.... how do we address that?’” she said. “And ... all that was seen by the superintendent was the title and she was like ‘No. We can't watch it.’”

District administrators above her had also asked her to stop meeting with Black parents discussing improvements to student support, “until further notice.” (“They told me not to meet with [the] parents anymore,” she said bluntly.) In a ripple of silencing, she added that teachers acting as school level “Equity leads” were also starting to silence themselves given a perceived lack of support above them in the face of local intimidation:

> Equity leads… expressed… like there is no support. Like we are going back to our schools to do the work, and no one is accountable. So we're just trying to do this by ourselves…. there was also that people were scared….[by] what was going on on the outside. People were afraid to lose their jobs. People weren't sure that they were going to be supported by the district. They were afraid parents were going to, like, send them these crazy emails.

One teacher in her district had been smeared in a “conservative newspaper” after attempting some anti-racist professional development in his school. She noted the need for support “above” both him and herself, saying, “when stuff like that would happen, … I have to wrap support around the staff, they have to know that ‘I support you, I have your back.’” While higherups at the district expected her to convey support to teachers for them, she noted, teachers needed to feel “that everyone *above* me supports them.”

Looming multi-level threat without broader district or Board “support” left local teachers not teaching race related materials out of fear, she said. She described how at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year, “the social studies teachers were concerned…to even like, join in with equity stuff. … They have been censoring themselves”:

> The equity leads go back and do PD in their buildings…they may …say, you know, use these resources to discuss… Black Lives Matter in school at the beginning of February. And you know, teachers [are] just being like, “I'm not going to touch that, mmm.” Because they don't know what's gonna happen….. like they'll get like this onslaught of emails from people. They have seen people go like straight over everyone's head and go straight to the board. (…) The [teacher] whose name and everything got sent to this conservative newspaper, they have seen that happen. Nobody wants that, you know. So now you Google his name and that's what comes up, right? They've seen that ...That's what I think that they're concerned about.

She also noted effects on students themselves, whom she talked to in her district capacity. “When the Proud Boys came… to one of the high schools….The kids … felt like after it happened, the district said nothing. …‘we were scared and y'all said nothing,’” she voiced. Students had

described teachers too afraid to support students even in experiences of peer harassment, "like racial comments that are said, or homophobic comments … and how teachers don't say anything…because of everything we just discussed."

In the ultimate silencing, this equity officer too had just resigned from her own job, "given everything." She added, "[I was] told…'we don't want you back' type of thing." She concluded by emphasizing the simultaneous role of districts and parents, in her case inside a restriction-leaning state:

> I'm one of many equity officers across the country who has resigned or been not renewed, or …. that position has been terminated or whatever. …..A parent said to me, "I think we've been too quiet." …And I think that parent was processing how …the 99% have *not* spoken up. …For me, the conclusion is, can't sleep on this stuff.

Educators described how when local parents supportive of race talk and LGBTQ-support talk were "quiet" and districts did not explicitly "support," local decisions prioritized loud, sometimes tiny minorities of critics – and board meetings themselves became dominated by people seeking to silence race and gender/sexuality talk via national or state tactics of intimidation. One white teacher who worked in a predominantly white, liberal-leaning school district in Connecticut, a state without active bills at the time, had a large personal educator network in another predominantly white, liberal-leaning community where he lived in nearby Rhode Island. (Rhode Island had a failed bill in 2021 and more introduced in February 2022.) In his 2021 survey, while describing both districts, this teacher had described teachers "[fearing] being the next one to be attacked publicly for teaching about race. [Some] avoid these topics because of this." In his 2022 interview, he described more specifically how in Connecticut, a few "concerned" parents had been asking questions at board meetings about whether some books were anti-police. But in Rhode Island, state politicians pushing state bills, plus "national groups" shaping such legislation and inflaming individuals, differently shaped the teaching context:

> We have a representative who was introducing bills saying we cannot talk about divisive concepts in schools. We can't talk about —basically now, we have our own form of the "don't say gay" bill here in Rhode Island…[and] networking across the state of Rhode Island … certainly seems like it's coming from, you know, higher sources or national groups.

Inflamed local individuals helped effectuate this broader state and nationally networked threat. On his survey in 2021, this teacher had mentioned a man in this Rhode Island community calling for firing teachers, making a "FOIA request for any district staff emails w/ words 'race, racism, George Floyd, critical race theory,' and offering a resolution to the school committee to prohibit the teaching of 'divisive topics'" (this later failed to pass). When we spoke to this educator in April 2022, he clarified that the man was continuing to "stir the pot" in the RI district's school board meetings, calling for limiting learning on both race and now, gender and sexuality, particularly transgender experiences. "And concerns about curriculum…materials being used in the classroom":

> One person in particular for over a year now has spoken at every board meeting … One of his latest tactics [is] you know, try to draw attention and make a very bold statement. So, he read excerpts from the book *Gender Queer,* [that] has been a topic of a lot of book bans. He said this book is available in the [RI] high school library. And then he had giant posters made up with some graphic images from the book and had people holding them up behind him as he was speaking at the meeting, which is televised. And *very* focused on …stirring the pot, getting people to just hear little sound bites and not telling the whole story.
>
> And the school committee in [RI], for example, it said, "we've heard you come and talk about this one book now for three months, but we've asked you to fill out the form that [formally raises] a concern about a book…And you haven't filled out the form, but you keep coming back." And so …he just wants to stir the pot. He did the … freedom of information requests and asked for—It would have amounted to like, you know, 10,000 documents, with …a long list of words, so any emails or documents containing these words like "Race. Racism, George Floyd."... You know, on and on and on and on….And he will not stop. And he has a very committed following.

The teacher described how the local conflict campaigner also was wielding media to pressure restriction and target individuals:

> [He writes] letters to the editor just about every week, and he's calling for the firing of various staff members in [town], including the superintendent, assistant superintendent. And [he] keeps repeating things that are lies, basically, or not the whole story, and he just keeps repeating them. And he has people that believe everything he says, and he's gaining traction sort of across the state as well. Like he's connected with other like minded people from other towns in Rhode Island. All the meetings are very intense. ….it's more like what you might see on the news…just really negative and really draining, I think, on the school committee members to participate. ..It's just a lot of nonsense and [misinformation]– you know, not portraying accurately what's really happening in schools.

He noted how these multilevel pressures touched down at the teacher level, as fear of "being called out" "personally" by the loud individual or his allies in this broader context was making educators "just afraid" to talk in class or share books with students:

> Teachers, I know, in [the RI town] are just afraid. Like there's a culture of fear now, and now– who's going to be called out next, if you say or do something wrong or somebody finds a book in your room that somebody finds objectionable. And he makes it very personal and does personal attacks on teachers and administrators….where's that's not happening in [CT] where I work.

In a fear context, a lack of proactive "administrator support" in the Rhode Island district particularly left teachers "afraid" and not able to "teach what I want to teach":

> There's certainly teachers that come to those board meetings, and you know support each other. But they're also … definitely afraid …..like I've had teachers say, "I wish I was working in your town [in CT] and I'd be able to teach what I want to teach." And I think

> that's part of it, too. In [CT] we do have a history of teachers who have a lot of autonomy, and in general administrators support teachers, you know. I don't think there's been a history of, like, teachers being thrown under the bus. You know it may have happened here and there, but it's-- in general I think teachers feel supported.

He described further how his Connecticut district administrators sent "strong messages of support" to educators and explanations to the public, such that "I don't feel like any [CT] teachers feel sort of threatened by anything that's happening":

> The one thing that maybe has made a difference [in his CT district], is that leadership really has sent strong messages of support and done a lot to sort of, say, this is what we're doing, this is why we're doing it. This is what we're doing when we train teachers, and what we're talking about in a staff development, or, this is what these committees are doing. And they have websites and they explain – "this is why we're committed to this, this is why it's important. And we support diversity/equity/inclusion." And I don't know if that's happening as much from the leadership in [RI].

Still, he also described how relatively supportive school level leaders could still waver amidst restriction efforts, themselves threatening student support. In his Connecticut district, one parent had "objected very strongly to" the book Ghost Boys being used by a teacher, possibly representing state or town police families "defensive about any kind of anything associated with Black Lives Matter, I guess." And at his own school, which was "close to 95% white, I'd say" and felt "much more homogeneous, you know, racially, economically" than the district in Rhode Island, his principal had just prohibited a sign made by students for a student-sparked "Alliance for Acceptance" club he advised:

> To get [the club] started, we made some posters and printed them out in color. …[saying] this is what we stand for… learning about diversity and educating ourselves and others about diversity. And then we put some symbols on the flag, like the Gay Pride symbol. One student has a disability so there's a disability flag, symbol on the poster, and a few others. But one of the symbols was the Black power symbol, like the fist. And so, just two weeks ago, there was a parent in the school for a PTO meeting, just like the first time they actually had it in person. And the parent saw the poster and had a problem with the Black fist, said it was a divisive symbol, it's anti police and it's associated with Black Lives Matter, and that it should not be hanging on posters in our school.
>
> So I thought we had the support of our principal….but I was disappointed. A couple days later he sent an email saying I had to take down all the posters, and the club should design their own logo and not use any other symbols on the logo.

The teacher pointed out how the administrator's "censoring" of inclusive language translated into educators' inability to "teach about" acceptance itself with students:

> So I was not happy with that. And my co advisors and I, we drafted a letter that we're planning on giving to the principal…can we sit and talk about this more and have a conversation? Can we maybe invite this parent in to talk about misconceptions? and, like our club is all about learning and educating ourselves around this topic. And if we're going

> to not have symbols on our poster that– how can we teach about them? And acknowledging that, yeah, we could make improvements to our poster, certainly, but we shouldn't be censoring it.

The teacher emphasized how a school leader had caved to just "one parent's" critique:

> It concerns me that basically one parent who had a concern, and to them this symbol was divisive, and without any dialogue whatsoever the decision was made, we need to take down all the posters. So, that's troubling because up until now, I would have said, my district is really doing a great job.

Multiple educators in 2022 described both school and district leaders silencing efforts in reaction to a "vocal minority" of campaigners attempting to restrict, often describing small groups or individuals that were frequent, loud, and sometimes highly organized by state or national organizations in leveraging a broader restrictive threat. In a multi-district, overall racially mixed/majority white Midwestern metropolitan region in a state with bills under consideration, an equity consultant, an African-American woman, described how a district had halted a summer pilot on teaching literature, explaining their cancellation as "because we're getting too much pushback":

> One of my larger districts … had pulled together a culturally responsive instruction around literacy. And they had six or seven Freedom of Information requests from [a state-focused conservative research organization]. So it frightened them and their teachers, and there was a lot of pushback from their community now… [one] group, lot of shakers and movers, mobilized and they told [the district], "no more, I don't want my child looking at those books."

She described her region as combining districts with "old money wealth" and "diversity" that were "always in war with each other," but she explained that it was still just a "small group of people" locally leveraging a broader wave of restriction effort. "What I think is scaring people is the frequency" of "opposition," she said:

> I think the better metric is the frequency. A small group of people that have coalesced, but they frequently come to the board. They're frequent in their levels of putting up the opposition. They'll come to the board -- they'll hear about a curriculum meeting, they'll voice their concern about that. If an issue happens at a school they rally very quickly.

She described these "frequent" critics as, "I would say upper middle class…and higher class white people, pretty much Trumpite you know. …And …they seem to be organized and scripted. And very much it's like, "don't let anything go by without you saying something about [it]" -- lodging that kind of opposition. So I think that's what scares … the schools." District leaders were also "scared" and stepping back, she said; one superintendent was now "abandoning" and "disowning" her own DEI support efforts.

Others described district and school leaders effectively discontinuing efforts through local "silence" about prior "DEI" efforts. In New Hampshire (where two bills died, but an amendment was signed into law by the Governor in June 2021), one white female teacher we surveyed in 2021 had described her district "going silent" on "DEI initiatives" that had previously been celebrated:

> Since parents began to protest “CRT,” attack my work and a new law was passed about not teaching people are “inherently racist” the district has basically gone silent about [equity and diversity initiatives “ramped up” in 2020] …This put a huge sad dark cloud over my effort to support DEI initiatives in my district and beyond. Many people just don’t want to touch it now so the extremists are in a sense winning.

In 2022, educators notably described higher-ups going silent like this on efforts to support students of color in states where restriction legislation was pending, as well as passed. A white female teacher in a rapid change, conservative, racially mixed/majority white district in Indiana (a state where multiple bills were filed by January 2022, then defeated, later rekindled) had described on the 2021 survey a combination of state and local pressures, noting how the “state's attorney general moved to enact legislation, parent complained to school boards.” She had noted back then how local leaders started to “pull away” from key “terms”:

> There's been no real response (as far as I'm aware) by any higher-ups in my corporation, but I have noticed a pull away from using terms like "culturally responsive" and "social-emotional learning." I think what they've settled on to refer to everything related to those terms/ideas is "brain aligned teaching" (insert eye roll…)

She also had indicated that she was limiting topics she discussed in class, saying, “I’m scared!...I have more anxiety about teaching certain things.”

When interviewed in spring 2022, she described how her principal had just halted previously supported work on remedying racially disparate discipline. In 2021, educators had received a grant to address racial disparities in a school and district where Black students were over-disciplined (the school was “15% Black but 85% of your office referrals are black,” the teacher said) and underrepresented in "gifted” classes. To avoid “backlash” in the current moment, her principal “shut down” the work:

> Part of our data showed a pretty noticeable difference in the race of students who were sent to the office– predominantly black and brown kids, and so we were attempting to revamp our PBIS system through a culturally responsive lens. …Some teachers and our behavior Dean did a bunch of PD, and you know came back with all these really great ideas. And our principal kind of shut down– he did not want us to use the term “culturally responsive,” because he didn't want questions, he didn't want backlash. He was just like, “that's not what we're going to call it, and we're not going to come at it from that lens.” …It was really hard to create change and get people on board when we were not allowed to have certain conversations.

This teacher detailed how her principal “is non confrontational and I don't think that he wanted to ruffle feathers and cause conflicts.” Yet her administrator’s silencing of “conversations” was ending an effort to support students themselves:

> We eventually got to the point where we were like “OK, what can we call it? Like we're just going to rename it.” And he's just like, “We're not doing that. No.”

She herself also was experiencing pressure from some local parents inflamed by a sequence of national campaigns. “From what I've seen in the board meetings, it was mostly about masks,”

she said, adding, “in my classroom … the way it started it was unrelated to curriculum, but they got mad at something that happened, and then they kind of like ramped up into questioning my curriculum…that was like antiracist type inspired.” In her rapidly diversifying district, she had been on a learning journey to teach about race more skillfully (“I used to teach [about] Native Americans seven years ago, when I taught first grade, and it was like bad”). Since the Floyd protests, she had been actively preparing herself to be able to discuss race and racism: “all the white people, we were really like, *How to Be an Antiracist* and like I did all of it, I was like ‘yeah, I'm totally in guys,’” she said, noting additionally of her school, “I might be the only one who is pushing the boundaries or who's even thinking about it… I don't think anybody is doing it.” She was now shutting down this learning out of fear of “mistakes” that now felt more fatal professionally:

> I make a lot of mistakes, and I think that's part of what I'm supposed to be doing is making mistakes, and learning from that. I think that's something that's hard for teachers, because sometimes, like, you don't get to make mistakes. Like one mistake and you're out. And so that's what's scary – people don't acknowledge that, like I'm still learning how to be the best teacher.

She was ending discussion opportunities for her students simultaneously. In class recently, she had chosen not to prepare students for talking about race and identity before an American Revolution unit. She also was retreating from her previous efforts to prepare to answer questions that students had about LGBTQ families and LGBTQ terminology. One student had asked recently what “transgender” meant, leading to a 10-minute straightforward discussion about gender (“it wasn't like I was like ‘okay guys today we're going to talk about transgender’ and whatever, it was a situation that happened”). Some parents had become upset, arguing that they didn't think it was a teacher’s place to explain those things and that being transgender was against their religion. After some back and forth with the parents, she finally asked her principal for backup. The parents met alone with the principal, but she never heard anything about the exchange, leaving her unclear about what she could now do safely. The situation had scared her enough that she decided to not talk about such topics further in class. The teacher described her overall retreat amidst this combination of pressures, where local parents could “threaten legal” and administrative support remained unclear:

> It's so hard, because I feel like all it would take is for one really bad thing for [the principal] to be like…not one bad thing that I would do, but like one parent to really, really, really be angry and like threaten legal…. For basically my career to be over.

Given her principal’s lack of guidance in the face of silencing pressure from multiple levels, the teacher now described her plans to talk only “reactively” about race in class:

> But…I don't know, I *think* if I continue to use the standards to support my curriculum decisions he's gonna trust me. And I found ways to--not be sneaky about it, but to not make it like overtly “today we're going to talk about race.” I will just choose a text that has this as a theme kind of, and it will kind of naturally lead to these conversations.

> And if I'm like, "this was student-led, they asked these questions, and I was just there as a facilitator,"…I think that I could be more reactive, if you will.

Some teachers thus waited with increased trepidation for students to start discussions, instead of starting dialogues themselves as professionals. At these moments, educators stepped back to no longer talk as openly or proactively as before. We called this version of talking, getting *subdued.*

Subdued

Some educators described hiding or "pausing" their own student support work in reaction to active shutdown from above. The equity director from the contested, rapid change, racially mixed district in Colorado described how after "our Board was flipped after the election" and an equity-focused superintendent left, "I paused the equity work with our volunteers, because it felt really disrespectful to their time, not knowing what direction these [newly elected Board] candidates were going to go in, considering how they campaigned." Later in the interview she also indicated that open "equity" work had essentially "stopped since the election":

> There's a lot of stuff that's…being moved underground….So we are embedding the work in places where it's harder to find it. So when I leave and even when this [equity] office is closed, the work can continue. So it's like, it's gone underground, it's …but…. yeah…In essence, the work has been stopped since the election.

Other teachers described how without supportive local leadership, the conflict campaign could subdue talk even inside supportive states. A white female teacher who described her California community as "becoming more Hispanic" (the district had been very rapidly changing and was now 20% white, and politically contested) described local critics now using national conflict campaign "buzzwords" targeting any talk about race or ethnicity in education as unacceptable "CRT":[8]

> I had a colleague recently say that they had assigned a Sandra Cisneros poem, and the parent called and complained that she was teaching CRT. This was in Language Arts, it wasn't even in a history class. But they came with the "CRT." To me that tells me that they're watching stuff and hearing these kind of buzzwords and just …going after teachers.

She noted how even inside a state that actually was starting to require ethnic studies, localized "conservative" reaction to "demographic changes" mixed with local anxiety over "critical race theory" was creating "a lot of pushback" and increased fear about "going there" in discussing race-related topics in history:

> I feel like my school is um… We don't even talk about it. You know, it sort of feels like I have to be careful. It's a pretty conservative area that's definitely–there's some demographic changes. It's becoming more Hispanic. I see a lot of pushback. There's anger. I don't know… I think it's "afraid"… The teachers won't even talk about it.
>
> In fact, I was telling my principal that I was interested in doing ethnic studies because it's mandated 2025, we got to do it for a semester, and he didn't even realize that the law has been passed. So I think that people are avoiding. They don't want to get in

> trouble or pushback from parents. You know what I mean? I've heard colleagues say things, like in my department, like "I just don't even want to go there," you know. Some people will–like I will–but… I won't say "critical race theory" or anything, I'm just teaching history and just covering stuff and the kids can hear the facts and then have their own opinion about it, you know. But it definitely feels like it's touchy. It's pretty conservative… and… yeah.

Without a public message of support from "leadership," she said, other teachers in her school were refusing to discuss current events (including the January 6 insurrection) and self-muting even regarding racially explicit student-student harassment in their own school:

> The teachers are afraid to piss anyone off, so they just … avoid talking about things, because they don't feel that they would be supported or defended if the parents were to complain.

Asked what would be most helpful to teachers feeling such intimidation, she noted,

> I think if there was maybe a message from our leadership that we are able–that those things are okay to talk about. When you know that your leadership is pretty conservative and that the powers that be in the community are as well, it's just kind of this no-go zone. But maybe if [leadership was] vocal about it– like "it's OK!"

As here, some educators were subdued through administrative failure to clarify that talk was "OK." Others were subdued when administrators directly cautioned them to now try to avoid specific subjects. Texas is a state with a law passed in June 2021 barring *The 1619 Project* and teaching of various race-related concepts, while enforcing the teaching of all sides of any "controversial" issue. In a conservative, majority students of color (47% white) Texas district where the percentage of white students had rapidly decreased, an elementary teacher noted on our 2021 survey that district counsel had been cautioning to avoid "controversial" issues altogether:

> We were told verbally during a PowerPoint presentation with the district counsel that we should avoid any controversial issues.... My colleagues are shying away from teaching anything in history or social studies that could be offensive.

Some spring 2022 educators similarly described a higher-up cautioning them to avoid race-related talk and learning in official restriction states. In a racially mixed/majority white, contested district in New Hampshire, for example (a state where the governor in June 2021 signed into law an amendment banning the teaching of specific concepts), a white teacher had clicked "no" and "NA" on most questions about restrictions on our survey in 2021. When we interviewed her in April 2022, she described "something put out by like the head of schools in New Hampshire who did say we should basically not talk about it [critical race theory]." She actually googled the state's current legal situation during our Zoom interview to find out its formal status.

Her interview indicated how local actors, including a school leader in her "more suburban area –mainly white, middle to upper class," had *effected* the state restriction context. She described how a parent in her school had complained after a white educator's poorly communicated tease of a white student, where the student went home feeling "bad" about being white. The principal had then cautioned staff in a staff-wide memo, which the teacher paraphrased as saying, "'if you don't

have to bring race into it then don't bring race into it'." The teacher added in our interview, "Like, how do you do that if you're teaching about American slavery?!" She now called it "weird" to get a "newsletter" from the administration, "That essentially was saying…. don't make white kids feel bad for being white." She added, "Like I don't want my kids to feel bad for being white, but I also don't want to not talk about truths of history because of that":

> I think mostly people are upset, mostly people are like…this is silly! Like, …how are you supposed to teach history …and then even people who don't generally teach history were still kind of like, that's not right. And I think the [school's] director was also kind of agreeing with that. But she's like, "this is sort of the mandate that's come down from the state, because we don't want angry parents calling us saying that we're saying their children are racist basically."

She added that the director's cautions about "the mandate that's come down from the state" asked educators to talk in more muted ways in class, including about overtly racist historical events:

> All she sort of clarified was, like, try to, like, keep your personal opinions out of it. Like I said, probably most of our staff is pretty liberal… But like, I don't really feel like it's a personal opinion that slavery is wrong.

This teacher noted that even as "I feel like people kind of kept just doing what they were doing," "maybe, people just are feeling more cautious, like, 'should I say this, or should I not say.'" She said she herself planned to persist in talking about race, noting that she was experienced enough to do so: "I don't think it's an issue as much for me because I sort of just naturally --- well….I've been trained to do that."

Other teachers indicated how their own experience in diversity-related teaching had them "cautiously" subduing rather than fully silencing such work. In 2021, an experienced white female teacher in a demographically stable, racially mixed/majority white, conservative district in Kentucky– a state with pending legislation at the time – had admitted that "I may reevaluate some of my text selections in my English classes. We are a single-income household … I cannot risk getting fired because of the books I teach." By spring 2022, a law was passed demanding alignment with prescribed ideas about race, sex, and history, after a governor's veto was overridden by the legislature in April 2022. She now elaborated:

> I very intentionally choose a pretty diverse set of authors for the text sets and mentor texts that I choose for my class. And that's true really of our whole English department, the school. I do think that I am going to be a little bit more cautious about the way that I word things, because even though it's not to the point that I'm willing to change my curriculum, I am not also not trying to invite problems in my life. So I think I'll be a little more cautious about how I talk about certain issues.

She now detailed her fear of even having a visible display of books "supporting perspectives of" LGBTQ/students of color, while she said she was not quite taking such books away:

> I do worry a little bit because if you look around my room, very visibly you can see, books that are …You know, supporting perspectives of the LGBT community or students of color …I mean I'm not going to change my books or my curriculum. I'm going to try to be a little more cautious but I will be honest, it does worry me. Like… it's something that I now have in the back of my mind that I didn't really worry about before.

She indicated that an experienced teacher could stay the course somewhat in discussing issues of race and diversity despite such fear. In contrast, she said, new teachers or teachers beginning to discuss such issues for the first time were far more likely to fully self-censor given potential threat of repercussions. Such teachers needed experienced colleagues and "supportive administrators" to back them up as they built skills in talking about race and gender:

> I think that where we will see the impact is on our young English teachers coming into the profession. I worry about English teachers not having supportive administrators, not having, you know, colleagues in their department, who can take some of the heat for them so that they're able to make those kinds of choices as well. So I worry about that, about how it's going to transform the kind of education that students get moving forward. And to be honest with you, the last month has been really difficult…the legislation came out of our last legislative period--not just in the way that it impacts education, but the way that it impacts all kinds of things.

Even as she was "a little more cautious" in her particular district, she herself was now thinking of eventually leaving the state:

> I'm not feeling very hopeful right now. And I also don't feel very hopeful about wanting to remain in this state after my kids grow up. I don't feel like it's a safe place for all people. And so I'm not sure if I'm the kind of person who stays and fights or if I'm the kind of person who peaces out, you know. I guess I'm about to– I'll be learning that over the next decade.

She mused more on how critics "examining everything you do…and say" linked to a statewide teacher shortage:

> There aren't a lot of advantages today to go into teaching in Kentucky…because you can make more money elsewhere, you don't have to deal with people wanting to examine everything that you do, everything that you say. You don't have to deal with any of the negative stuff. … and that's too bad, because we do have a teacher shortage in our state.

While this teacher was negotiating passed law, some educators were feeling exhausted even in progressive areas within states with pending bills, if they had to spend substantial time negotiating with even one parent "questioning" "everything I do." The Ohio teacher working in a moderately changing liberal district (what she called "a very, very, very white community"), had said on our 2021 survey that in a state with bills pending, "We have to spend personal time fighting against their attacks on honesty in education." Now, in 2022, she explained this draining of time even in a "pretty supportive district":

> This is the first year I've had significant pushback from a single parent, because we are in a pretty supportive district. So I feel like I'm lucky that I only have one parent, but she's pretty persistent. (…) I wouldn't call it censorship…. this particular parent isn't trying to remove certain texts. She just questions everything I do, and like my intentionality behind all of the things that we read and discuss. But I would say censorship isn't happening in our district. Like it is in some others.

The teacher described the time both teachers and school leaders sank into interactions with even one such parent, versus teaching:

> She emails me and I have to share. Curriculum overview, she wanted daily lesson plans. And I said that was unreasonable. And so I don't do that. She asks for justification, I answer those questions. And there's a certain point where I tell my principal, I've done a reasonable amount. And I'm done. And he sort of takes over.

Ohio had bills pending restricting teaching of specific race-related texts or concepts and also any instruction about sexual orientation or gender identity before third grade. This teacher said that since educators might now "say something that could get the district in trouble legally," local administrators also were spending substantial work hours reviewing responses to parents to "make sure that we're not saying anything that could make the situation worse":

> Our union got involved because of how much extra work certain parents were asking teachers to do… like, a parent emails, you respond. And then the administration wants to help draft emails back, to make sure that we're not saying anything that could make the situation worse, or say something that could get the district in trouble legally, or something like that. ….and there's a point where it becomes too much. And then administrators take over and meet with the parents…. So …we don't have to change our curriculum, but we've been told that we do have to share anything that they asked for. But we don't have to make any changes based on their opinions of what we share.

This teacher added that while a "lot more" community members supportive of diversity efforts went unheard, an "extreme minority" monopolized educators' time:

> I would say they're an extreme minority in my district. And they are very loud and persistent. And despite– I've answered every single question, at length. My principal's met with her, or superintendent has met with them, like…. and it just, it doesn't matter what we say, or [what] I feel like ….she's still going to be very, very vocal all the time. And it's only one parent. And the problem is, I know that there are a lot more community members and parents who are supportive of these things, but we don't hear from them. We only hear from this really small group of parents.

She noted that in her classroom teaching in this context, "I've been a little bit more careful because I have, I know, eyes on me." She was continuing more work in a club "outside of the classroom," keeping conversation about "increasing diversity and inclusion in our school" going more for the subset meeting outside of class:

> Yeah, so I'm a little bit more careful about what we talk about specifically in my class. But um, that [student antiracism club] group allows for more targeted work outside

> of the classroom, so students who are interested in fighting those things, or increasing diversity and inclusion in our school, can do that, have the opportunity to.

Some educators thus continued dialogue about diversity and inclusion only with the willing.

Other 2022 educators described taking on leadership roles in their schools, districts, and communities and explicitly *speaking up* to counter restriction effort with an insistence on the educational right to talk, learn, and read about race and diversity. Essentially, they were modeling the supports other educators wished were available.

Speaking up

On our 2021 survey, many educators had called for leaders and supporters to more proactively protect learning through public guidance and messaging, saying that "Educators need to hear from school/union leadership clearly/explicitly what their freedoms are to address topics" and that leaders should be "Really talking about what it is that we're doing" to the public, in educators' own terms. Some praised district administrators who were explicitly offering what we have elsewhere called "system backup" (Pollock et al., 2022b), as in "an emailed affirmation of our right to discuss controversial issues in our classrooms"; "language and reassurance" for anxious school leaders; and district statements "stating local values." 2021 educators also noted the importance of community members speaking up to support, noting that "the presence at board meetings of 'anti-CRT' voices may not be representative of the community at large." "We gathered students, parents, and teachers to speak at the board meeting on the harms any resolution on CRT would cause. The board elected to take no action on the resolution," said one teacher. After local "Letters to the editor," said another, "The school board responded by approving new vision and mission statements that included equity for all students."

2022 educators described other successes in speaking up, sometimes articulating explicitly the types of supports for talking that leaders themselves needed to protect race and diversity-related work amidst the conflict campaign.

In the diverse Midwestern metropolitan community, with a state bill, the Black equity consultant who had described local critics as a "frequent" "white" "small group of people that have coalesced" to ban specific books and PD described how she had started to focus on supporting local educators to keep talking, more clearly than ever, about what they were actually doing:

> So they called me, and I worked with their departments. And I said, "so let's look at what the pushback is saying." And so what we did was, we held sessions around the school district to talk about what they *were* doing. I said hmm, first help them understand what critical race theory is, but lean heavily into what *you're* doing, which is culturally responsive teaching. And so I said, so let's pool our support.

She emphasized supporting leaders to learn to publicly articulate their goals and efforts, in order to "persevere" as critics were "creating a lot of fog and distraction and fear." "I have to really support districts that are really holding the course," she said, "because it will be very easy for them

to abandon it." "It's shifted my practice," she added. "Before, it was just getting people to understand the work. Now, it's getting people to understand and persevere through the work."

She described coaching local leaders to "articulate five talking points about this work that you want to always be able to come out of your mouth." She also urged the leaders to use the unions as bulwark, noting, "I think the thing really protecting teachers and their right to teach what they need to teach in their classroom right now, is our union." Pending restrictive legislation was also "really what's driving" educators' anxieties, she said; one teacher had told her recently that "I really want to leave this profession, because I have to have the freedom to teach in my classroom." She called for both unions and local leadership to back up teachers "vulnerable" in such a context, even wishing that the two major unions would combine their strengths rather than work separately:

> It's the system that's pushing down on [teachers], and they know they can't fight it as an individual. They need a *system* that can say, "I'm standing behind you, this is what I stand for." And that's why I think…. I said to [my supervisor], "do you think we could bring the unions together and talk with them about ways in which they support?" … because both the NEA and the AFT have been vocal advocates… if [these two unions] came together, I think they'd have as loud of a voice as the opposition, and they [could] really support their teachers. Because right now, our teachers feel very vulnerable. That's the piece that concerns me particularly with a shortage of teachers, you know.

Leaders too needed to combine forces to persevere, she said, "to build the network" of educators supporting each other to protect the teaching, learning, and "DEI work" they believed in. Otherwise, the risk was that "We could have leaders flee for the hills, you know."

In Michigan, a district director of diversity, equity, and inclusion, a Black man, described how in his own "majority white area, I think 80% white" (his district was indeed predominantly [90%] white, and conservative-leaning), some people just had "reluctance" about DEI work, while "a very small minority of folks … are like loud about like the resistance," adding, "you know, the national –all the stuff you hear out there, it happens here too." "National" "resistance" was echoed locally by "the same seven or eight people that show up" at monthly board meetings, which he called a "very small minority of folks that are loud." The group had named themselves over COVID to fight "mask mandates," then "CRT and DEI," and now, he said, "LGBTQ …is kind of at the forefront right now."

On his 2021 survey, this educator had noted the state context for such local agitation:

> The senate GOP members for the state of Michigan introduced a bill to ban teaching CRT and anything deemed "Anti-American." They outlined plans to reduce funding for school districts caught teaching such content after an investigation.……Social studies teachers are stressed out, and questioning whether the lesson plans covering various history projects will be attacked. I respond to several phone calls and emails a week addressing CRT concerns from community members. I am concerned about these groups going around and creating faux hysteria about CRT. They are purposefully lumping anything that has to do with DEI, Cultural responsiveness, SEL, under the CRT umbrella.

"We are battling misinformation. People rely too heavily on one source of information. In particular Fox News," he had said in 2021, concluding,

> I understand that this is just the next thing for the GOP in particular to create faux outrage about. It will pass. And we cannot let it deter us from the work of creating inclusive spaces where ALL feel safe, welcome, and loved.

When we spoke to him in 2022, the "faux outrage" had not yet "passed." He said that local educators now needed support even for offering students voluntary "choice" of books with "LGBTQ characters...books that our students can see themselves reflected in, books that offer them windows into other perspectives and experiences." He was trying his best to "wrap supports around those educators who are leading" such K12 learning:

> I have had to reassure all of our social studies teachers like just do your job, you know ..[and if] you get any trouble, do reach out to us and let us know so we can address it from our end, which we have not been great at honestly. [In] one instance, the teacher resigned. Another teacher went through some stuff, because things were posted on Facebook about what she was teaching in a class [he described her teaching about "The Harlem Renaissance and folks expressing themselves and being free in who they are."]. And I think a lot is outside of my power -- I can't go after somebody on Facebook, but I did talk to the teacher that was targeted and make sure she was okay. And you know, encouraged and affirmed the work she was doing.

Local youth were starting to organize as well, and he was ready to attend board meetings to support:

> We've had folks at the board meeting attack …groups at our schools that support the LGBTQ youth there. So again, just trying to wrap supports around those educators that are leading it, and just trying to…re-emphasize to our board, you know, like –that stuff hurts these kids. And so now we are hearing inklings of the next board meeting, some of these LGBTQ youth will be showing up in a public comment to … speak out against stuff…and I'll be there to support them and let them know that they have a right to exist.

We noted that crucially, this leader "wrap[ping] supports" around educators and youth "below" him in his system himself felt backed up locally as a leader when speaking up, by higher-level leaders "on board" with "DEI." "Our Board is you know, on board with the DEI work," he said. He also mentioned a "community foundation in town that I can lean on [and] bounce ideas around, so I never feel like I'm doing it alone. And you know these folks also come with encouragement …every time we meet."

Other respondents cited state standards as backup for their ability to keep teaching on race and diversity issues, even as local and state-level conflict campaign activity threatened their work. In North Carolina, a white female high school social studies teacher had described on our 2021 survey a state-level website for parents to "snitch" on teachers," in combination with "social media attacks, threatening emails, threats of job loss or fines" and "Parents demand[ing] cameras in class [to] see if teachers are indoctrinating." In early May 2022, with two bills pending to restrict teaching about gender and sexual identity, a different middle school teacher in North Carolina, a

man of color, now noted that in his liberal, racially mixed/majority white, rapid change district, he was seeing "pushback based on the current climate in the country," adding that "I have not ever experienced pushback like I have":

> I see a lot of the similarities in what's happening in places like Texas, in Florida and Georgia. "We don't want you to bring this stuff up to our kids." Now, the children are curious. They want to know everything. "Tell me this, tell me that. Why do they do this? Why did they do that?" So, the curiosity is still there. But I've noticed in parents …that there's some pushback against not just teaching about race and equity, and gender equity and racial equity in the schools, but also, about even science.

In this moment, he said, the state standards could help educators continue to discuss key issues with children:

> In North Carolina… both in social studies, and in science…you follow the standard course of study. You teach the concepts, the terms… the State tells us what to teach. And that's what I've done for 17 years. …[in] the standard course of study for social studies in North Carolina…you do teach about the civil rights era. You do teach about slavery. You do teach about Reconstruction.

Still, he described how the effort to fulfill standards was becoming much harder amidst the conflict campaign. Even in the fairly "progressive" area where he taught in North Carolina, "it's almost like we're getting hidden messages from the children from their parents. 'How are you doing this? Why are you teaching this way?'" He also noted parents "not knowing …what Critical Race Theory is, because you don't teach that in middle school… but they think that's what we're doing. I don't know where they get this impression." Conflict campaign activity was also threatening adult learning in his district. He served as a school "equity leader," trying to spark conversation about student support issues including belonging for Black students ("they are not comfortable from the time they walk in the door until the time they get on the bus and go home"). He described "conservative" pushback he'd experienced personally after the district had asked school equity leaders to try a "21 day …reflective practice of, you know, how much exactly do you know about equity? How much do you know about race? How much do you know about community and all this?":

> I ran that practice with our teachers, and a conservative blogger slammed me, accused me of teaching CRT to the students. Accused me of trying to, you know, … trying to make everybody woke. And I mean it just came out of the blue, I mean… I've never been challenged by someone before on something, because I pride myself in knowing the content…[and] I didn't know we were there, you know, being in one of the so-called more progressive areas … It was a shock to me…The blog is going around the community. And our school was somewhat villainized because of it. …[and] it was shocking to see the response of the parents. Parents whom I've worked with. …. the mentality has changed.

He also mused, "You know, just like America is browning, our educational institutions are browning, and parents don't like it." Still, he said he was going to continue to lean on the state standards to back up his right to explore "differences" in ideas and lived experiences:

> Most of the censorship hasn't succeeded. Thank goodness…again, … the politicians that we have are from a more progressive open bent. But there has been a tremendous amount of pressure on limiting, restricting books that relate to gender and gender equity, and the LGBTQ community. ….Again, those more conservative parents, who just like in those other states, who don't want their kids -- they don't want that discussion in the classroom. They don't want to talk about it …You know, in looking at all the stuff on the news, I can only say that it's gonna make [children] think and they don't want them to think. They want them just to, you know, to revert back to this default of what their ideals are. And that's fine when you're at home. But again, there is a standard course in the state, North Carolina, and it allows for different explanations and explaining differences in people. It does allow for that.

Other teachers were speaking up through collective organizing in response to both state and local restriction effort. In his 2021 survey, the Rhode Island-based white teacher had said explicitly that,

> The most important lesson I've learned is to speak up. Remaining silent when others are attacking educators is no longer an option. I've also learned that there are many people in my community who want to support teachers in the teaching of race, racism, and other uncomfortable topics. Joining a local organization gave me the resources and courage to speak up.

Referencing "Don't Say Gay" style legislation now being introduced in Rhode Island, he described "various groups across the state that are trying to network…our sense is that the other side is very well organized now, and so we need to be organized ourselves to kind of prevent these things from happening." He also was joining a "Stand Up for Racial Justice" antiracist organization, noting,

> Getting involved in this work has been really wonderful in many ways. [I'm] just kind of telling myself, "well, being on the sidelines isn't really going to help, so what am I going to do?" And so this was something that I could do. … it's a little scary at first, but it's really worth it.

Other teachers were joining organizing outside of school. A Black teacher from a racially mixed/majority white, liberal district in Missouri, a state with many bills filed, defeated, and filed again, explained that in class, "even the most innocent thing we say to them, it's easy to be misconstrued as 'Oh, they're trying to indoctrinate.'" So, she met with adults and youth "outside of the system" to talk about race issues:

> So I have to do a lot of my work outside of the system….they've made it to where I almost have to put on all this armor just to do work. And … The average [teacher is] gonna say forget it because they have enough going on in their lives. As if I don't.

She also noted that out-of-class workarounds for talking more openly about race were actually normal to her as a Black educator in a state like Missouri:

> It depends on what state you're in. See for me, I'm like--OK, here's the thing as a Black woman. I'm used to having to do something different. I just am. I think a lot of our

> white progressive educators … who are shocked, being told they got to do something different, like –people are not used to being redirected…White people are not used to having to be regulated, which is why there's so much pushback with those masks. …Whereas, we're used to that. So for me to sit here and tell you I'm going to work outside the system? That sounds normal to me, and what people have always had to do. …As a Black woman, I'ma have to work around it. … I gotta figure out how to work around in a way that's safe for everybody, that's safer.

Such "work around" effort was "tactical because it is wise," she noted. "You don't take a wound where you don't have to take one."

In her generally supportive, liberal district (in a "very, very, very white community") even inside a restriction-leaning state, the Ohio educator (a white woman) was also using her advisor role in an extracurricular club space to talk openly with students about looming state bills:

> There's other things that are happening in our district outside of my classroom. So I'm an advisor for a [student antiracism group]. And it's another teacher and a collection of students who are working on different antiracism efforts outside of class. So we have a speaker series, we have movie nights, we bring students together and learn about these House bills and like activism nights, how you can make calls, email, write, testimony to testify at the hearings. So outside of the classroom, a lot more around that is happening. And our district also made diversity, equity and inclusion a part of their continuous improvement plan. So the administration is organizing professional development around that focus. So it is happening specifically in our district, as well as in my classroom.

While emphasizing the supportive district and school administration she benefited from, the teacher also noted the importance of additional backup from larger collectives:

> There's a group called Honesty for Ohio Education. And our student group has been working with them directly since the fall. And they sort of helped train our students on how to write emails, how to draft testimony. And they've been awesome.

The teacher also noted that students deeply resentful of censorship efforts were themselves getting active:

> They're pissed. They think it's ridiculous. And it's hard for them to wrap their heads around why politicians would be using…the lives of children who identify as LGBTQ to like, gain political clout. That's hard for them to understand. And so that's why we have so many students interested in this activism work.

The Colorado Equity Director also described powerful local community organizing beginning to call for recall of the flipped school board members who were trying to restrict learning:

> Our [community] group that has started challenging some of these folks, they show out in force and there's a lot of them. And I know that they're going to push for recall this June, and I think they'll win.

Finally, some educators were speaking up by talking directly with local critics about their efforts to discuss race and diversity in schools. The white male teacher in New York City believed that adults as well as youth needed to be engaged in dialogue *about* talking about race in school:

> I've found that there are students who bristle a bit when …things like CRT come up or, you know, things that would be considered a democratic or left wing talking point. But they're not automatically turning off to it. They raise a skeptical eyebrow but… they want to know more, they want to understand well.

Educators, too, needed more dialogue about race discussions, he said. The educator described how colleagues who had also "bristled" when they felt an "implicit bias" PD facilitator "pigeonholed" teachers into a single perspective were welcoming antiracist programs "rolling out" in a more dialogical way. He said that while the anti "CRT" wave was fueled by a "right-wing" "vocal fringe…that worry that [efforts to discuss race] is indoctrination of children, some communist takeover of education," a pro-antiracism wing also needed to discuss antiracist work more. "There are people, I think, who have legitimate questions that, if only. …a sane calm dialogue could be had, I think could be brought around, to understand what's trying to be done."

At the same time, the North Carolina teacher (working also as a school "equity" lead in his somewhat "progressive," racially mixed/majority white, rapid change district) noted that dialogue might not work with those people on "the other side" who tended to "scream louder." Those trying to restrict learning in his district, he said, were "people who are typically conservative Republicans and very staunch Trump supporters. You know, we don't have that many here. But again, those people are loud, and they don't mind, you know getting out there and just screaming in the wind":

> Great teachers are in it because they love to teach children. But people who are trying to draw attention… they're louder than we are. That's why you hear so much on the other side. They're louder. …I personally believe there are more people who …are willing to go with a more open approach. But that minority of people who don't are loud, and they will scream, and they will scream louder.

Further, he noted, race division locally was getting very ugly, requiring louder "voices of reason." Otherwise, he said, "you're gonna lose an argument":

> We've had Klan marches. Never in [our] county have we had Klan rallies and Klan marches and people coming down and complaining about Critical Race Theory and trying to demonize. White people ….we've never had that before, because it's just not the community, but it's happening now. …And you know… we got to go through [this] for the next couple of years. …. we need to be louder, voices of reason that are not quiet. We need to, you know, ***show*** our reason, and be bold with it, and say, hey, you know, this is what I believe. This is what I think will work. And let's work together to get to a common solution that can help our children.

"The context of it all that we're living in is a lot," he concluded. "And …we are the caretakers of education in the future. And it's a responsibility."

The Missouri teacher emphasized the need for local educators to be "protected" from state politicians' restriction efforts particularly, noting, "I mean, we have an Attorney General who's

sue happy– Eric Schmidt just sued every school district in our State. And now he's running for Senate, isn't that lovely– sued every district in the State." Simultaneously, she also described her tactics for engaging the vocal minority of white community members trying to leverage such restriction energy to restrict learning via school boards near her. She shared her theory that after years of white families ignoring "Uncle Ben" saying racist things at the dinner table, Uncle Ben now falsely thought he was empowered to shut others down:

> You and I both have enough knowledge to know that the school boards don't represent a huge chunk of people. It's just who shows up, it's getting your people out. But see, in their minds they represent this huge majority because they were allowed to win. That's the cost of ignoring Uncle Ben…. Uncle Ben thinks everybody's like him.

She then described her own way of inviting ongoing dialogue with inflamed parents who tapped "Fox News talking points" and accused her of "indoctrination," a type of leadership and engagement she said her own district was not modeling:

> [there was] this parent who was like…"Well, you know, I looked at all these readings that you're offering. And this sounds like a Liberal, you know, liberal leaning class." …And then, of course, you heard all these Fox News keywords, you know, like [mimicking] "Oh, indoctrination!" [and] "you know we're showing all these…minority kids, victimhood!" ….And .. … I said [to the parent], "You know, I have a variety of voices in my curriculum." I said, "What concerns me, is that I've received pushback after week two of one reading, and as it was a message that you were not comfortable with, [you say] 'indoctrination.' Okay, so you want me to present like Thomas Sowell and other [conservative perspectives] to these kids, and I don't have a problem with it, because I do have Thomas Sowell in my curriculum. But you don't consider *that* indoctrination."

She joked that "I'm a poor indoctrinator, because I'm putting out my lesson plans every week along with the readings, along with every prompt that I'm asking." She described sitting down with white parents to actually talk through their concerns and what she as a teacher was doing to engage many perspectives, which she described as effort to engage, not "comfort white people":

> When I go to contentious School Board meetings, I sit down with those parents, and I speak to them…I was at one school board meeting in a [nearby] school district … one of those places where people have …said things [like] "you're sexual groomers." …. So I go there, and this man walks up with the anti-CRT pamphlet. …You're a white man, and you walk up to me with the "anti- CRT"?! That takes some guts, right? … just takes some guts. … [and] he's like, "This is what's going on in our schools?!" [And] I said, "Well, sir, you and I aren't going to agree. I'll listen. Let me ask you a question. What bothers you about public schools?" And so we sat down and talked.

The parent had admitted to her that "Hey, my kid was failing. I was trying to get in contact with folks, and no one got back with me." "I said, 'Let's walk through some things that you can do to advocate for a child in a healthy way,'" she recalled, adding, "Hmm. Do you know, CRT was

never brought up again in that conversation?" She continued to describe the importance of talking with parents, even angry ones:

> Here's the thing—people have used "CRT" as the mask for what's really wrong. I want to get under that mask. And when I get under it– like I said, that parent never talked about CRT again. He talked about what was wrong with his child, and why he was scared. That's where the healing takes place. And too many–too many of our school districts have opted out of healing their communities, and decided to avoid conflict.

She continued to describe how "hard" it was to step into these conflictual dialogues, after several years of disconnection with parents over the pandemic and now, "CRT." She was doing work now that her district should have led earlier, she said:

> In our fight for this with CRT, we've been very cowardly. We have to be willing to take on conflict and to heal our communities. I told one school district three years ago: Your parents seem to be angry. Let's get everybody together and talk about this. [They said,] "We'll take care of it in the fall. …" I got the very "school" answer. Now all those folks are elected to your school board who are anti-CRT. But if you took care of it in the fall… Imagine if we had tried healing early on. A lot of these conversations would look different right now, but they don't because we avoided it.

She added,

> I just kept talking to these parents who were considered the enemy. (…) By the end of our conversation CRT didn't come up. Hmm. …. The concern *was*, "I wanted to advocate for my child because I was scared, and I didn't know how to." These people who really are pushing this, like our lawmakers in Missouri–and I want everybody to differentiate them from these parents–our lawmakers helped with this, and I have confronted them about this. I said, *"How dare you run on this?"*

She asked the interviewer if we had children, and then continued:

> What if I told you your children were in danger right now?... What if I told you something right now-- *"It's gonna happen to your kids!"* You would jump into *mode*. [As if speaking to politicians], You have emotionally gaslit these parents, and you weaponized it politically. You're monsters for that. You did the worst thing you could do to a parent. You told them their child was in danger. And I said [as if speaking to school district], "Hey, we were in the middle of Covid. We're in the middle of all this stuff that they don't understand, and they're trying to understand. And in school you're not talking to them on top of it. You [didn't] even try to talk them down. So these people came in as opportunists and did your jobs. And now here they are." I try to build a bridge.

Discussion and Conclusion

Data here suggest that amidst multi-level efforts by politicians, media, organizations, and inflamed individuals to restrict learning, the nation may be heading toward two schooling systems: one where children and adults get to talk openly about their diverse society and selves, and one where they are restricted or even prohibited from doing so. Today, actual and threatened

restrictions on school talk increasingly are stopping many adults and young people from discussing and *learning* to discuss, in schools, race and diversity issues in our society and shared lives.

Contexts for talking and learning differed tremendously across the 16 educators interviewed here. Some educators and their students enjoyed support and freedom in such discussion and learning, in states without active legal restriction efforts and in some supportive communities within restriction-leaning states. Other educators emphasized local fear of restriction efforts emanating from state legislation and orders, national media and organizations, school board directives, and local actors wielding national talking points even as individuals or tiny groups. Respondents described how throughout these system levels, as higher powers threatened punishment, local people helped *effect* restriction, or conversely, protected the ability to talk and learn. The role of local school and district leadership was pivotal: In some states, the silencing intended by state politicians and policy was *achieved* as local leaders cautioned teachers to obey vague provisions, emailed teachers about avoiding topics, or failed to articulate teacher/student rights to teach and learn. Even in states *without* active bills or laws, some local leaders buckled to inflamed local people exerting restriction pressure. In the absence of backup from "supportive administration," teachers also cautioned and censored themselves. Conversely, local leaders and teachers could keep working to protect learning even in a state with pending laws or orders, particularly *if local communities and colleagues actively supported them.*

Fear pervaded this data. In many cases discussed here, people in systems anticipated broader punishment (e.g., from a state tip line, a law or pending bill, a school board, or media shaming or "legal" action triggered by inflamed local critics), and in sensing no available protection, shut down work proactively. Educators described such silencing or subduing as caused by official policy (a passed state law; a Board decision to not renew a superintendent or ED), by pending policy (restrictive bills filed or likely Board actions on people's minds), and by unofficial policy (a principal's quiet cancellation of programming to address racial disparities; a district that no longer wanted to "touch" inclusion work). Yet bravery hummed in this data too. Throughout the data shared here, educators described the daily work needed and occurring to protect the basic ability to speak and learn with students and colleagues.

Respondents repeatedly demonstrated how local *leaders*, enmeshed in varying state and local contexts amidst a national campaign, played a pivotal role in how restriction efforts proceeded or didn't. Respondents lauded superintendents broadcasting public messages of support for learning, district staff telling "equity leads" about resources and providing empathetic listening, and principals engaging with angry parents for exhausted teachers. They critiqued leaders who silenced or subdued talk through their own prohibitions, cautions, or passivity in the face of broader restriction effort. Crucially, they also emphasized the importance of leadership taken up informally across systems, such as local organizations that publicly signaled being "on board" with DEI efforts; experienced teacher colleagues who stood ready to matter-of-factly discuss teaching efforts with peers and parents; consultants who helped superintendents prepare talking points to engage community critics; and teachers who talked patiently with angry parents themselves. In a form of distributed leadership (Diamond & Spillane 2016), "leaders" with and without formal titles

thus protected talking and teaching through their efforts to keep trying to talk, teach, and learn, in roles throughout systems. But some educators here stood up for teaching and learning largely alone.

While we do not have sufficient data for formal claims about demographic trends, we note informally that the overt support stories highlighted here came from "liberal" communities, both predominantly BIPOC districts and a predominantly white district, while overt restriction stories of both silencing and subduing came not only from politically contested "Purple" communities (emphasized in Rogers & Kahne, 2022) or "rapid change" communities with declining white students (emphasized in Pollock & Rogers, et al, 2022), but also from conservative and even some liberal districts where respondents said leaders succumbed to white and particularly "conservative" critics' demands.[9] Notably, we did not yet tap many stories of local leadership overtly protecting learning in states with draconian law, or in "conservative" strongholds; it is possible such work is occurring quietly, without "fanfare" (Cohn, 2023). Next research should prioritize exploring such educator experiences.

Respondents also often indicated that a broader majority – notably, a white majority in many districts here – remained troublingly silent as small groups of largely white and highly "conservative" inflamed people targeted learning. (While nonwhite critics were quite possibly also demanding less discussion of LGBTQ lives or even race, this dynamic was not noted explicitly by these respondents and requires additional research.) The phenomenon of bending to a highly vocal minority -- "dancing for one percent," as one educator put it -- demands deep reflection today. Recent research indicates that the majority of U.S. K12 parents actually show "widespread agreement for students learning about the experiences of people of color" and (particularly when older) LGBTQ experiences as well, even while they have diverse views about how to discuss such issues (Polikoff et al, 2022, p. 16, 27). While respondents described largely BIPOC communities and some predominantly white more "progressive" communities actively protecting such learning, respondents often explicitly framed the critics trying to shut learning down as particularly loud white people *enabled* by more silent majorities, ranging from single "loud" individuals to small groups lodging "frequent" "opposition," to local Proud Boys and "the Klan," to inflamed state politicians themselves. In many cases here, further, educators described formal leaders locally reacting to the feared threat of restriction, triggered by this white, extremely "loud," sometimes *very* small minority threatening to catalyze potential punishment by state governments, legal power, and conservative media. In reaction to threat from this "1 percent," as one educator put it, some local leaders were shutting down talk and work preemptively. Without strong leadership on Boards, in districts, and in schools backing up the need to keep trying to engage issues of race and diversity, the combination of restriction pressures could cancel conversation for both adults and youth.

Crucially, many respondents described limiting both talk *and student support* in reaction to national, state, and local pressures. In a restriction fractal (a pattern that repeats in an ever-smaller size), a bill or executive order might try to censor conversations with students across the state; a district lawyer or school leader in a community with specific pressures might caution

against "bringing race into it" in class. Threatened by a government "tip line" or a new school board, an Equity Director might end improvement conversations with Black parents. Threatened by pending law or local frequent complainers wielding national talking points, a principal might end a program to remedy racial disparities or take down a student poster with a race- or gender-related symbol. A single teacher might proceed more cautiously or stop discussing The Bill of Rights, or skip discussing racialized history in a lesson, or rethink available books. Each restriction of talk restricted both educators' own learning and work, and *student support efforts* engaging realities of race and diversity– such as an equity program sent "underground" by a school board, a superintendent no longer pursuing professional learning on teaching literature, or a teacher just hesitating to even answer students' race or gender-related questions.

Amidst national, state, and local pressures, then, local people's actions combined to support or constrain local students' and adults' opportunity to learn. Educators working in systems with supportive leaders, colleagues, and communities together kept learning going. Educators working in places with less protection from leadership and community watched proactive student support efforts cease, found themselves talking far less about society at work, watched professional development get canceled, or hesitated before even countering harassment or allowing classroom books visibly "supporting perspectives of the LGBT community or students of color."

All of this is today's chilling effect – with dire consequences for students themselves.

Respondents made clear that *where* one works fundamentally shapes support or punishment for talking – and so, how one supports students at work. Respondents noted that it was far easier for leaders themselves to protect student support efforts when entire communities were themselves "liberal" or "supportive," or, of course, in states without restrictive legislation. Often, supportive leaders themselves were described as having vocal support from other colleagues, Boards, and community members where they worked. Educators in less-supported places described the chilling effect otherwise in action, often combining state legislation or local "conservative" populations with top-down silencing, administrator cautioning, self-censoring, and overall fear often sparked by a leadership vacuum in the face of inflamed local critics. Crucially, respondents also emphasized that in such a punishment context, without protective leader behavior, only the most supported, experienced, or brave colleagues could keep *learning to improve* in discussing and engaging these issues at work – a deeply concerning outcome in a nation that truly needs educators to keep improving on just this craft.

Educators interviewed here thus called repeatedly for local education leaders *and* broader communities to speak up more to protect learning and improvement effort in their systems. Educators indicated that amidst restriction threats, both leaders and teachers cannot be left alone in insisting on children's and adults' right to talk and learn about race and diversity in schools. Today, student support will rely on how district leaders, school leaders, teachers, *and the full communities being served by public schools* speak up to explain, justify, continue, and improve their student support efforts in reaction to both local and external pressures to restrict talking and learning.

Conclusion

We thus ask open questions in conclusion. Since the field already agrees that dialogue and learning about race and diversity is of course a necessary part of student support in a diverse democracy (Lee et al, 2021), how might the quieter majority of parents, communities, students, and indeed researchers add support for educators in all locations to *keep learning* to talk about such real experiences in U.S. society in efforts to support young people? Might such a call to *keep learning to talk effectively* in schools and districts about the realities of race, inequality, history, gender, and sexual identity, with student support as goal, successfully neuter efforts by some to restrict talk and "ban" learning altogether? How might the field support leaders to keep trying to support learning in communities where bills are pending or supportive majorities are silent? Who might support teachers and youth directly in communities where leaders themselves are not willing to protect learning, particularly in the seemingly "conservative" and contested communities where talk restrictions are particularly threatened? In the months and years to come, how will the field protect teaching and learning in the increasing number of states where restrictions are legally enforceable? And in locations of all kinds, might more people simply show up *to* talk as restrictions loom, to collectively back up educators' and students' ability to talk toward supporting young people better in schools? As the teacher in Ohio, a state facing deeply restrictive bills, put it,

> I wish that people, more parents and community members felt compelled to actually do something– not just to care about it, because I know that they do– but to actually email, make phone calls, attend city council meetings, attend school board meetings, and say, "We support these efforts," so that the school board isn't just hearing from the opposition. I wish that more people felt compelled to do that.

The fate of our nation's teaching, learning, and student support is up not only to the nation's teachers, principals, and superintendents, but us all.

Endnotes

[1] The 2021 survey results discussed in this piece were first analyzed in our self-published report released in January 2022, "The Conflict Campaign: Local Experiences of the Campaign to Ban 'Critical Race Theory' in Public K12 Education in the U.S., 2020-2021" (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022). Authors 1-3 gratefully acknowledge coauthors of that original January 2022 Conflict Campaign report, particularly John Rogers. Some of the key findings of that self-published report appear here to lay the groundwork for our 2021-2022 interview findings.

[2] We have considered any possible ableism in the term *colormute,* 20 years after its first use. While retaining the word "mute" to describe an "inability" to speak would be archaic and problematic, "colormuteness" describes actively *muting* speech and indicates that "muting" race talk is often an active choice, not an "ability." So, we retain the term for today, while acknowledging potentially harmful misuse. Here, by the shorthand term "talk" we mean dialogue and communication in any form and in any language, including written communication, as in the book *Schooltalk* (Pollock 2017).

[3] We utilized the following demographic categories as in our 2022 report, and we use them in this paper as well (Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022, p. 52):

> "Using the most recent data from the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), we place school districts into three groups of districts that serve roughly equal numbers of K–12 students in the United States. Majority Students of Color districts enroll 0–49.9% White students. Racially Mixed and Majority White districts enroll 50% to 84.9% White students. Predominantly White districts enroll 85% to 100% White students."
>
> "Minimal Change districts have experienced less than a 5% decline in White student enrollment; Moderate Change districts have experienced between a 5% and 9.9% decline; Substantial Change districts have experienced between a 10% and 17.9% decline; and Rapid Change districts have experienced more than an 18% decline in White enrollment."
>
> "We used the percentage of the 2020 Presidential vote that went for Trump in each Congressional District as a measure for the partisan lean of communities surrounding school districts. We labeled school districts 'Liberal' if they are located in Congressional Districts where less than 40% of the vote went to Trump; 'Liberal Leaning' if between 40% and 44.9% voted for Trump; 'Contested' if between 45% and 54.9% voted for Trump; 'Conservative Leaning' if between 55% and 59.9% voted for Trump; and 'Conservative' if more than 60% voted for Trump."

[4] State-level bills still pending fail at the end of the calendar year and have to be reintroduced to be considered again. We thus indicate here whether bills were filed and actively being pursued at the time when data was gathered.

[5] See endnote 2.

[6] We list interviewees in the order we share their words in the Findings section. Race and gender are listed in the language used by interviewee. Legal context describes the status of interviewee's state at the time of their interview, according to PEN America records. In the "no legislation" states, a failed bill may have died quickly, before our interview, without followup. "No bills at the time" can reflect a state where some bill activity was postponed or later restarted. See endnote 3

for an explanation of the remaining categories listed in this table. In a few cases where we chose not to specify demographics to protect anonymity, we say “unavailable” and describe these demographics in Findings as the interviewee did. NA in the % change column means no drop in white students.

[7] See endnote 3 for these categories.

[8] See Pollock & Rogers, et al., 2022, on repeated caricatured talking points about “CRT” shared via conservative media and organizations’ “toolkits.”

[9] Future work should also explore the proportion of “historically advantaged,” “low-poverty districts,” and suburban districts among the “majority-white districts” restricting learning, demographic factors emphasized by others (Jochim et al, 2023). We did not explore income level or urbanicity here, nor delve deeply into teachers’ specific discipline or grade level as researchers are starting to indicate is necessary (Polikoff et al, 2022).

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FREEDOM DREAMING THROUGH WAKING NIGHTMARES: A DUOETHNOGRAPHY OF EDUCATION SCHOLARS NAVIGATING PUBLIC SCHOOLING AS PARENTS

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ABSTRACT

As advocates for public schools, public school teachers, and the promise of public education, we experience tension related to our roles as parents of school-aged children. While our vision of both schools and our own children's education goes beyond "academic" success, a struggle arises at the intersection of our personal and professional roles. With that in mind, this paper discusses the tensions we experience as both teacher educators and parents. Our inquiry took a reflective nature as we worked to gain clarity into and highlight the differences between the pushes and pulls we feel given the intersections of our personal and professional roles. This tension is even more palpable at a time when being critical of public education, even in a loving and productive manner, only feeds its critics and further burdens its exhausted and alienated teachers.

Keywords: Teacher preparation, higher education, lived experience, critical theory

PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the tension(s) we experience as teacher educators and parents of school-aged children attending public schools. While we consider ourselves advocates for public schools, public school teachers, and the promise of public education, we are also parents

who are working to ensure positive educational experiences for our own children. However, our vision of (our children's) education goes beyond "academic" success, for we also see ourselves as cultural and political workers, committed to a critical, anti-colonial, and democratic project of public schooling. In our current moment when schools, students, and teachers are feeling the effects of a three-year pandemic; when books are being banned and curriculum is being challenged; when teachers are under an enormous amount of pressure to "control" and "manage" their classrooms (Au, 2007; Vassallo, 2017) and ensure that students pass standardized assessments, it is incredibly difficult, yet increasingly important to explore the intersecting tensions and potentialities between being an advocate for teachers, but also being an advocate for our children. Thus, in this paper, we use duoethnography to analyze our own, and each other's experiences as teacher educators, parents, and community members "that dream for our future/present, alternate nows, [and] elsewheres, that give us the capacity to share intense love, joy, desire, happiness, creativity, as well as rage and fury" (American Educational Studies Association, n.d., para. 2).

The rest of the paper is as follows: We begin with a brief discussion of our positionality, which is followed by a review of the literature in order to frame this inquiry. Next, we explain our theoretical framework, grounded in critical theory and pedagogy, before describing our data sources and methods. We then share our findings and discussion. We end with some closing thoughts that summarize our work and help to move the discussion forward.

POSITIONALITY

We are discussing positionality first, as the layers of our identities are precisely what informed this inquiry. Because each of us have experienced life as K-12 teachers first and then moved into roles in higher education where we prepare future teachers, we have a critical, yet complicated view of teachers and teaching. However, as parents of children who attend K-12 public schools, we have an additional element of identity that complicates the way we experience education on a daily basis.

Prior to her role in higher education, Danielle spent 11 years teaching junior high school. Eight of those 11 years were spent teaching in an area with a large population of historically marginalized students, which is where she developed a much clearer understanding of how inequitable formal education really is. It is at this point that she developed a commitment to social justice and equity in schools, as well as an understanding of how deeply embedded harmful inequities are in the public school system. This understanding is what motivated her entry into a doctoral program in order to better develop leadership skills to address the flaws in the system. With this in mind, Danielle now works to prepare future educators to be transformative teachers in their own classrooms. Additionally, Danielle is a mom to two children, a 14-year-old and an 13-year-old and it is her experiences managing her own children's educational experiences that acted as a catalyst for this study.

Before his current role as an assistant professor in teacher education, Tim spent 11 years as a classroom teacher, mostly in junior high school social studies. His commitment to critical and socially just schools/education emerged from his own subtractive school experiences as a Chicano

attending California schools in the 1990s, and his continued study and experience of the structural inequities that maintain such realities to this day. A major impetus for the project was navigating his own daughter's kindergarten experience. Believing deeply in the power of teachers and administrators to facilitate individual thriving as well as collective resistance and justice, he was quick to understand many teachers did not share similar beliefs. While he knew this to be true as a classroom educator, it impacted him differently as a parent/professor.

Moreover, as we shared a version of this paper at a conference, we realized additional layers to our positionalities that influenced our conceptualization and analysis. Having both grown up in working-class families, we were not used to recognizing some of the privileges we now have in navigating our children's education. For example, even if we disagree with and/or critique school policies, we still generally feel welcome in school spaces. We are both English speakers, and U.S. citizens, and have flexible work schedules that allow us to attend conferences, meetings, and events. We have knowledge of tools such as email, devices, and education technology that facilitate communication with teachers and administration. Thus, we wondered if we felt the navigation of our roles as teacher educators, professors, and parents to be more tenuous because we now inhabit positions of privilege we did not experience as children.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In their edited volume, *On the High Wire: Education Professors Walk Between Work and Parenting*, Dotger et al. (2015) lead with a series of simple questions, "as education professors, are we still at work when we are at our child's school?... When we email our child's teacher, when we go to a district meeting about school redistricting, are we working or parenting?" (p. xi). The publication of the aforementioned text (and the additional literature we share) suggests that (education) scholars have found such inquiry of academic value. Moreover, given the current reality in which public education has been (re)weaponized by the political right to maintain white supremacy (e.g. Barber, 2021; Hixenbaugh & Hylton, 2021; Ray & Gibbons, 2021) we feel such questions of how to be a K-12 parent and a community-engaged, anti-racist faculty member will only continue to merit practical and academic investigation (Montaño & Martinez, 2021).

Throughout the academic literature about parenting and (education) professoring, a common thread emerges, namely, that the positions of academic and parent are often at odds (Theoharis & Dotger, 2015; Godley, 2013). Cann (2015) describes this positionality as one between the heart and the mind, "a constant struggle to make choices between political beliefs, academic knowledge, and parental hearts" (p. 38). Histories of intersectional oppressions further layer such nuanced tension. For example, in Chapter 1,[1] "It takes a village . . .a Facebook village: On advocating for my Black son" of the aforementioned Dotger et al. (2015) book, one author discusses multiple overtly racist incidents regarding her son and acknowledges that as a university professor, she has unique levels of political and social capital to deal with these situations. Still, she wonders, "How do I advocate for my child in ways that do not further marginalize the other students? How can my actions work to improve conditions for all members of the school community?" (Dotger et al., p. 8). Similarly, the author of Chapter 28 outlines a pattern of

inaccurate teaching of racial and ethnic topics, as well as general discomfort in approaching LGBTQ+ families and issues, at their child's school. The author (of Chapter 28) recognizes the fact that directly confronting school leaders and teachers often causes alienation and strained relationships, so building bridges and alliances is crucial. Still, the author feels a "moral obligation to work in schools as an educational activist" (Dotger et al., 2015, p. 231) and highlights how the directness of such problems in schools constitutes a "call to action" (Dotger et al., 2015, p. 231) for scholars and academic inquiry.

This "call to action" appears all the more palpable at a time when being critical of public education, even in a loving and productive manner, only feeds its critics and further burdens its exhausted and alienated teachers (Anand & Bachman, 2021; Monreal & McCorkle, 2022). Thus, more recent scholarship by Montaño and Martinez (2021) frames this line of research in terms of freedom dreaming (see also Love, 2019). In their own reflections of parenting through pandemics they write it is an opportunity to freedom dream, "[to] push ourselves in raising our children, demanding of our schools, and the future teachers and leaders we train" (Montaño and Martinez, 2021, p. 151). Thus, in conversation with the approach, we (Danielle and Tim) "engage in dreaming and imagining what may seem out of reach, but what needs to be accomplished" (Montaño and Martinez, 2021, p. 151). We aim to join the above scholarship that highlights the pushes, pulls, paradoxes, and privileges of being an education scholar for social justice while participating in a system designed to reproduce social inequality (Cann, 2015; Godley, 2013; Lowenhaupt & Theoharis, 2021).

A related, but slightly different line of scholarship takes up the pushes and pulls of being an education scholar (for social justice) by discussing boundaries in terms of work-life balance. For example, in the Dotger et al. (2015) text, the author of Chapter 18 asks a very simple question: "Is this a job that would allow me to be a good dad?" (p. 157). During various academic job interviews, he (author of Chapter 18) receives mixed signals pointing toward how being a parent and being an academic is incredibly difficult for myriad reasons. This author writes, "the times when our children are young often coincide with professional periods that require tremendous attention to our professional productivity and profile, as junior faculty advance along the career track toward promotion and tenure" (p. 160; see also Lowenhaupt & Theoharis, 2021). He also wonders how a necessary focus on critical scholarship intersects with becoming 'those parents.' Pointedly he writes, "As parents, the challenge is in knowing when expressing our beliefs will create difficulties for our children at school. The jury is still out on this one" (Dotger et al., 2015, p.163). Still, he believes it is necessary to sometimes separate his role as a teacher educator from his role as a parent, a position that many researchers (including us) feel is nearly impossible.

In sum, the above research shines light on the complexity of the present moment – hopes of promising change and racial reckoning that gave way to "settler colonial retrenchment, the assertion of white political dominance, and conservative backlash" (American Educational Studies Association, n.d., para. 1). Moreover, we feel it essential to re-examine the tensions we experience as parents who actively support the work of teachers ***and*** are part of a system as parents and teacher educators that too often reproduces White supremacy and settler colonialism (see for example,

Calderón & Urrieta, 2019; Hatt, 2012; Horsford et al., 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Sabzalian, 2019).

THEORETICAL FRAME

Given our stance as critical educators who support the project of public education, we use a general framework of critical theory and pedagogy to guide our inquiry. This allows us to understand education as a tool of power and political act/ion. To further draw upon the effects of education as a power-filled (and power re/producing) political project, we discuss scholarship that highlights how schools (re)produce ideas of normative behavior. In particular, literature on critical classroom management and critical disability studies demonstrates how school (behavioral) norms are classed and raced.

We begin from the position that schooling and public education projects have been used to reproduce unequal and unjust social hierarchies (Friere, 1970). In the words of McLaren (1994), "Critical theorists [of education] begin with the premise that men and women …inhabit a world rife with contradictions and asymmetries of power and privilege [and] knowledge acquired in school is never neutral or objective but is ordered and structured in particular ways" (p. 175). This overarching starting point speaks to the tensions we feel in knowing the power and privilege we have as teacher educators, and how this complicates our interactions with our children's teachers and schools. We know and understand the layers of schooling, how schools are structured, and how/why some knowledge/skills/behaviors are more valued than others in school settings. We also struggle, as this knowledge of the reproductive nature of schooling often means we can use it to draw upon opportunities for our own children (see also Godley, 2013). Put another way, even as we believe that "teacher education should be inexplicably linked to critically transforming the school setting and, by extension, the wider social setting," (p. 438) we must contend with the fact that our knowledge of school systems will more than likely benefit our own children.

We also believe education is a place where hegemonic understandings of achievement, success, and opportunity get reproduced in the form of "common sense" practices that often go unquestioned. These "common sense" practices easily make their way into classrooms through leadership, power, and the unquestioned dominance of certain ideals. One such example of how hegemony succeeds through legitimizing norms and ideas in school is the discourse of classroom management. Leaving aside the increasing reality that managing students (and/or their environments) has become an, maybe even *the* overriding concern for teacher candidates and teacher educators, Vassallo (2017) discusses the need to critically evaluate the assumptions and ethics of 'managing' students. To this point, Vassallo (2017) discusses how both explicit conditioning of students (behaviorism) and seemingly progressive uses of cultural responsiveness and/or socio-emotional learning are actually geared toward the same end, knowing and understanding students in order to change their (poor/deviant) behavior. This deficit-based perspective has the ultimate goal of "render[ing] students amenable and adaptable to schooling structures by shaping behaviors *deemed* appropriate," (Vassallo, 2017, p. 134, emphasis ours) rather than involving students in the democratic process of cooperative (learning) community

building. Thus, classroom management, especially the unquestioned idea that students must be "observed, measured, evaluated, and judged" (Vassallo, 2017, p. 137) is really about fixing students, norming behavior, ensuring compliance, and justifying ranking(s). Research in critical race and disability studies extends this line of thinking to center on how the (schooling) power to categorize and 'normalize' certain types of behaviors (and ability) intersects with racism and is both based on and furthers the project of white supremacy. Thus, we must question the racialized lines between 'regular/normal' students, knowledge, and behavior in addition to how such lines are continually recreated and who has control over how these lines are drawn (Annamma et al., 2013).

Central to the research at hand, we must then critically reflect on how and when we might use power to disrupt the unjust effects of such educational structures. Drawing from Maxine Greene (2009) we look inward "against such a background…to go in search of a critical pedagogy of significance" and to locate "the sources of questioning, of restlessness?" (p. 434). We view our experiences (both as parents and as teacher educators) through this lens of personal critique paired with Greene's (2009) reflexive "passion of possibility" (p. 84). It is no surprise then that Greene speaks to the work of Freire when she writes that a democratic and loving social vision does not match our current democracy. Moreover, all too often, a critical and loving vision of education does not match our current structure of formal schooling. Hence this project aims to question and critique, not only the hegemonic practices we are observing in our own children's formal education but also to reflect on our own practices as teacher educators (and how they might intersect with hegemonic ideals). It is at this place of restlessness we find ourselves - critical of educational structures in general, but walking that "high wire" between parent and educator. Importantly, we are not simply navel-gazing here but rather critically interrogating our own sources of questioning in order to forge new ways forward for us as advocates, (teacher) educators, and parents.

DATA SOURCES AND METHODS

In order "to delve deeper into a common area of interest" (Fallas-Escobar & Pentón Herrera, 2021, p. 3) — the intersections of being a public school parent and critical teacher educator — we describe our duoethnography methodology. At a basic level, duoethnography (Docherty-Skippen & Beattie, 2018; Sawyer & Liggett, 2012) extends autoethnography (and other currere self-interrogation[2]) to another, and the/our selves become the site of the research (Breault, 2016). Our inquiry took on a reflective nature as we worked to gain clarity into and highlight the differences of the pushes and pulls we feel given our personal and professional roles and the ways in which they intersect. Given that duoethnography is polyvocal and dialogical (Breault, 2016), it allowed for us to both merge and untangle ourselves and our experiences, creating a layered text (of ourselves) that allowed us to look at our experiences through a critical lens in order to better understand how to navigate these struggles. We used the following three steps to explore two research questions: (a) How do our roles as education scholars and parents conflict at certain moments? and (b) How do we, as parent-scholars, navigate these moments of tension and conflict?

- **Step 1:** After mapping the academic literature (see above) and focusing our research questions, we independently wrote 3-4 brief vignettes (~300 - 500 words) about specific moments of personal conflict (as teacher educators and parents). We then shared these vignettes with each other. After exchanging our vignettes, and reading them, we engaged in an open-ended conversation/interview where we sought to interrogate similarities and differences in our experiences. We recorded the conversation for transcription through Zoom video technology and wrote analytic memos.
- **Step 2:** For an added data source, we independently chose 3-4 artifacts (pictures, messages, assignments) to share with each other. Similar to step 1, we engaged in an open-ended conversation/interview where we sought to interrogate similarities and differences in our experiences. We recorded the conversation for transcription through Zoom video technology and wrote analytic memos.
- **Step 3:** *Analysis and Coding*: During the reading of the transcriptions, overt and covert categories were utilized as a way of analyzing the conversations. Carspecken's (1996) concept of low-level coding was used to help generate simple descriptive themes and patterns that were found throughout the conversations, pictures, messages, and assignments. These themes acted as overt categories. Following this low-level coding, we again analyzed the data using high-level codes that required interpretation in order to determine covert categories.

FINDINGS

After working with the data, four main themes emerged. The first theme was the thread of obedience and compliance in the classroom and how the hegemony of school practices causes issues in both of our homes. The second theme was the push and pull of our identities as parents and our identities as scholars in regard to how we can use our position to fight for increased equity and provide opportunities for our kids. The third theme again focused on our identities; namely, when to intercede in a situation and when to "pull the professor" card. The fourth and final theme that emerged from the data was the balance between supporting classroom teachers while also working to improve teaching practices. Interestingly, all of these themes also fell under one big umbrella: how do we - as parent scholars - avoid looking like we are attacking teachers, especially in these (political) times?

Compliance and control: "So even though we're like, we don't dig it, they love it."

For both authors, this idea came up frequently, especially as it pertained to rewards or "classroom management" strategies. Class Dojo,[3] a digital behavior management and parent communication application in which students are assigned brightly colored monster avatars (see Garlen, 2019), for example, was a point of contention in each of our households, but especially in one home, where there were tears over not downloading the app. Tim shared, "My wife and I reiterated that we understood [her/our daughter] but did not think it [Class Dojo] was best for her

or the class. She grew more agitated and angry, finally crying and screaming, 'I want you to get the monster app. You need to see my monster.'" Despite explaining a concern that the app was being used to describe (even create) kids as "good" or "bad" in the classroom, our stance went against the teacher's advice. To a kindergartner, what matters is what the teacher says, what the teacher is asking them to do, and the emotions that come when Mom and Dad are not on the same page as the teacher. As a parent, how does one take away something that a child loves (like building her monster on an app) simply because the scholarly side of that parent is not in agreement with it? Moreover, in the current context of attacks on public education and curriculum under the guise of 'parent's choice', how might a decision to disagree with a teacher be read?

A similar situation occurred in the other home when a child came home talking all about 'brag tags.' These brag tags were exactly what they sounded like - a set of tags on a ring, with each tag signifying something to brag about, such as 'stellar for the sub' or 'quiet in the hallway.' It should be clear that the bulk of these rewards are based on compliance and control (not only by the teachers but panoptically by/with classmates), concepts, and practices which are normalized in schools on a regular basis. In this particular instance, the brag tags were displayed at the front of the room, for anyone who was in the classroom to see. At the end of every quarter, the student with the most brag tags got to be "teacher for the day," a huge, visible reward that placed one student in a position of power over the others. While Danielle's daughter was absolutely over the moon because she earned enough brag tags to be the teacher for the day, the struggle at home was very real. As a scholar, the entire (mundane) spectacle of the tags, the behaviors for which they were rewarded, and the public nature of everything was all unsettling. But as a parent, the look of pride on her daughter's face was difficult to push back against. Again, the issue of how to balance resistance to practices centered on compliance, control, and (self) surveillance as a scholar, versus not crushing the happiness of a child felt nearly impossible.

Inequitable practices: "I just constantly return to this question of, why aren't these opportunities there for everybody?"

As public scholars who support more equitable conditions and opportunities in schools, it was not necessarily a surprise that this theme emerged from the data. However, what was interesting was again, the places at which our identities intersected. For example, when we see an issue in our child's classroom, we want immediate change, we want answers. On the other hand, as educators, we know how slow any kind of real, structural change can be. Our struggle remained how to "fix" whatever issue was occurring for our children while also questioning what we could do in our positions to fight for increased equity in order to provide not just opportunities for our own children, but for other children as well. Tension emerged as we recognized that absent the large structural and policy changes necessary to make schooling more equitable, we have decisions to make with our children in the present. We must contend with how our individual decisions could possibly conflict with the larger changes we advocate for in our teacher education classrooms.

For example, Danielle has a son who has chosen to attend a 'specialty' high school within his district. To attend this high school, students must first apply, then sit for a test, then participate

in a Socratic seminar, and then wait to see if they were admitted. The school admits just 100 students per year based on a lottery system. Essentially, it does not matter if a student placed first or last on the assessments; if a student passed the tests, they were put in a lottery and 100 names were drawn. Now that the school year has started, the vast differences between the curriculum and pedagogy at the specialty school versus the curriculum and pedagogy at the 'regular' schools are astounding. This made it difficult to shake the uneasy feeling that one of our children was the beneficiary of the wildly different opportunities across the district. Again, as a parent, of course, the desire is there to be excited and celebrate the road ahead, but as a scholar, the critique exists in regard to how differently students are being served based on categories of ability and difference. This situation is in line with an experience Tim had at an institution where he worked. His colleagues were shocked that he would send his children to the city's public school district, implying he was disadvantageous to his own children by not looking for 'better schools.'

When to speak up (as a professor): "I mean, I won't lie. There've been times I've deliberately sent emails from my work email."

Despite a genuine belief that our teacher candidates take our instruction toward and passion for equity into their positions, we also know that the current educational climate has successfully stoked fear amongst many beginning practitioners.[4] Still, we both shared how difficult it was to see certain practices continue in our children's classrooms, and at what point we "pull our professor cards" to wield whatever power comes with our educational credentials. In one example, we discussed what to do when our children - because of unchallenging and antiquated pedagogical strategies - came to dislike portions of school. We discussed how we always assume the best but are motivated to action if things do not improve. As such, after months of one child being miserable in math, Danielle sent an email asking what could be done to help challenge her son, even offering her old materials from teaching higher-level math. After the teacher assured Danielle that he was working on differentiating instruction, he created a packet of worksheets and sent a few peers into the hallway each day. Sitting in the hallway, filling in blanks with one another became the extent of differentiation. In another instance, Tim shared his reactions to seeing the 'library' in his daughters' kindergarten classroom:

> I glanced at the titles. Lots of older books, Scholastic promotional materials, and texts about animals…not a single book that centered Latinx characters, people of color, non-Western cultures, LGBTQ+ families/communities, or issues of dis/ability…I wondered how this school, in a relatively well-resourced district with a majority students of color, did not have more representative texts. I did not want to "flex" the professor card, but also didn't feel this was acceptable. My wife and I decided to buy half a dozen children's books and send them as a "new school year gift". I am not sure what happened to those books, but we received a thank you card.

As we discussed this particular vignette, we oscillated between disappointment in the individual teacher, the school, the district, and teacher education. Even though it was the teacher's

first year, we both wanted to believe that her teacher education would have emphasized the need for inclusive children's books. Additionally, this shouldn't have fallen on the teacher's shoulders alone, the school should have explicit supports in place to help a beginning teacher build a library that reflects the critical, anti-racist, and culturally responsive education all students should have access to. It was clear that this was not a pressing concern or point of concentration of the teacher or the school, and as such we wondered if speaking up as a professor from a local university would change things. We also discussed how such critique, even if framed in a supportive manner, might lead to retributions against our child and/or our department, especially as leadership from the university often cautioned about appearing "too political" and jeopardizing important relationships with schools and districts. Even after much discussion, we were left feeling uncomfortable and as though we do not have the answers in regard to how to handle these types of situations in the future.

Challenging norms: "I don't ever want to feel like I'm attacking a teacher . . but when you see these really horrible practices . . ."

Given our positions as (education) faculty we are effusive in our support and admiration of classroom teachers. At a fundamental level, we believe that teachers are the experts in/of their classroom, that they are (more than) qualified professionals doing amazing work in complex situations, and that they, too, are motivated by a belief in children and transformative change (see also Schneider, 2022). And while counter-examples or cases exist, what happens if that 'n of 1' is your child's teacher? What if an otherwise good teacher engages in unjust and/or inequitable practices? How do we balance our support of public school teachers/teaching when we see areas that might need improvement? As Danielle shared regarding one conversation with her child's teacher, "He was full of nothing but griping about 'students these days' and how awful they are, etc. It was disheartening to hear an educator talk that way, but especially an educator my child spends so much time with daily."

As the previous three themes and our theoretical frame demonstrate, many of these practices and rationales are wrapped in hegemonic norms that are structured into the way school reproduces inequality. Thus, we discussed how important it was that critical educators interrogate the unquestioned ideas that schools must fix students, norm behavior, and ensure compliance, rather than levy blame on the individual behaviors of teachers. Returning to our conversations about the digital behavior management and communication system ClassDojo, we felt it was necessary to highlight the assumptions behind behaviorist classroom management schemes that implicitly created ways of thinking about other students. We knew that teachers were encouraged, often by mentor teachers, colleagues, and administrators to engage in such systems. Thus, Tim was just as concerned about the individual atmosphere of his daughter's classroom as with a school space that rested on such manipulation of kids' behavior. In such a reality, it is important to engage school leaders and make sure they understand how such normative thinking about classroom management intersects with deficit (and White supremacist) views of religious, racial/ethnic, linguistic, and economic differences (Hatt, 2012). Calling back to Dotger (2015), such discussion

may provide an opening to advocate for what's best for our own children "in ways that do not further marginalize the other students and improve conditions for all members of the school community" (p. 8). In sum, we came to realize how important it was for us as parents/professors to critically discuss these issues as a larger phenomenon that needs to be addressed at the school with administrators and school officials (rather than individual teachers).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Taking the time to investigate the tensions between our identities as parents and our identities as scholars has proven to be a valuable experience. Not only has this project highlighted some enduring tensions that have been identified in previous literature (Godley, 2013; Theoharis & Dotger, 2015), but it has also acted as a catalyst for us to engage in a more critical (self) analysis, one rooted in a reflexive passion of possibility (Green, 2009) that encouraged us to freedom dream towards more critical, democratic teacher education. This dreaming can start by critically reflecting and engaging with ideas that consistently emerged throughout this inquiry, in the hope of moving toward action.

One main idea that we both grappled with was illuminated in the literature and the data; namely, "How do I advocate for my child in ways that do not further marginalize the other students? How can my actions work to improve conditions for all members of the school community?" (Theoharis & Dotger, 2015, p. 8). As parents and as teacher educators, this is worth teasing apart. One on hand, as parents, of course, we want the best experiences for our children. This includes a rich, inclusive curriculum that allows for critical thought and freedom in the educational setting. But on the other hand, when we know that those opportunities are not available to all children, how do we ensure that advocating for our own children does not indirectly further marginalize other children? How do we provide thoughtful critique of the educational system (and thus, teachers' role in maintaining it) without making working conditions worse?

This concern over a perceived critique of teachers runs parallel to a second issue that emerged from our themes, which was a continued delicate dance around how to support teachers while also illuminating hegemonic structures that inform some of the critical decisions we are trying to make, both as educators and as parents. In all of our conversations and communication, we never quite arrived at how to successfully perform this delicate dance, although some evidence from the last theme points to the need to have critical discussions with administrators. It appears further research is needed in order to make sense of how our layered identities as parents and scholars play a role in how we approach questioning the harmful, hegemonic practices that we see in schools - both in our children's schools, as well as in university partner schools.

A final point of discussion is recognizing that most deeply rooted in this passion of possibility is structural change paired with a deeply personal praxis meant to challenge Schools of Education. These are the sites where pre-service teachers and in-service teachers need to be engaged in critical conversation and discussion. If institutions of higher education are not making clear the need to advocate for all children and the need to challenge hegemonic practices, how can anyone be surprised or disappointed when real change is not occurring in classrooms? The reality

is that pre-service teachers leave the university and are often met with a fork in the road: follow what their school mentors or peers or administrators suggest (even if antiquated or harmful) or implement what they learned in the teacher preparation courses, sometimes completely on their own. New teachers have so many stressors in their first years of teaching, that appearing to be the only one enacting transformative practices can end up feeling like too heavy of a lift. As Schools of Education, what can we be doing better in order to challenge the current systems so that new teachers do not feel this way? In our mind, this means more longitudinal support for new teachers as well as some type of continuing critical education for principals, mentor teachers, and district officials. To these ends, Danielle is in the midst of a (freedom dreaming) research project investigating new teachers and their levels of self-efficacy as they pertain to teaching for diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, early data indicates that many new teachers do, in fact, quickly fall back on the practices of their mentors or their new peers, even when they know these practices are not in line with what they just learned in their teacher preparation programs.

In closing, like most research, this project yielded just as many new questions as it did answers. Our experiences as parents, K-12 teachers, and now teacher educators inform our lived experiences and frame how we approach both parenting and teaching. This speaks to what Theoharis and Dotger (2015) describe as ". . .experiences of education professors who often have practical/lived experience working in K - 12 schools as well as scholarly expertise about aspects of K - 12 schools. These two experiences, together with their role as parents, make for a different relationship and real tensions as these faculty work in both professional and parental capacities with K - 12 schools" (p. xv). These tensions, while difficult to navigate, have brought us to this point in our inquiry, where we wonder if this type of reflective research might lend itself to Michelle Fine's (1994) definition of activist research, which includes four main strategies: "breaking the silence", "denaturalizing what appears to be natural", "attaching what is to what could be", and "engaging in participatory activist research" (p. xvi). Is it possible that these waking nightmares have provided the catalyst we needed in order to immerse ourselves more fully in activist research, both for our own children and for all children in public schools? For we cannot allow this moment to push schooling further away from the very freedom dreams we hold for the project of public education.

Endnotes

[1] Notably, individual chapter authors from Dotger et al. (2015) are anonymous to avoid any potential repercussions, either to the teachers involved in the vignettes or to the professor who shared their stories.

[2] Currere is a critical form of autobiography and curriculum studies forwarded by Pinar (1975).

[3] Proponents of Class Dojo cite its relative popularity among educators, its ability to track behavior, and its potential to increase parent communication. Critics of digital management systems like Class Dojo focus on student data concerns, behavioral manipulation, and constant (self) surveillance (see also Garlen, 2019; Scott, 2012).

[4] It is important to note that while the fear from many educators is real, so too, is a reality that teachers of color share disproportionate risk when centering issues of social justice.

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LESSONS ON SERVINGNESS FROM MENTORING PROGRAM LEADERS AT A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Servingness is a multidimensional framework detailing how Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) – which enroll at least 25% Latinx students – can shift from merely *enrolling* to meaningfully *serving* students holistically. Critically examining how institutional structures facilitate or inhibit servingness is essential for improving institutional efforts focused on student success. Adding to a dearth of literature linking servingness and mentoring, we investigated mentoring program leaders' visions for servingness, along with the strengths and challenges they experience towards serving and mentoring minoritized students. Secondary analysis of interviews with 11 leaders demonstrated that visions of servingness were rooted in promoting *student-centered* and *equity-forward* policies. Strengths included *building belonging* for minoritized students and *implementing high-impact mentoring practices*. Importantly, six structural challenges to servingness were identified, such as *precarious or limited funding*. These often unexplored viewpoints – from

leaders on-the-ground – provide vital perspectives and actionable lessons to shift institutional structures in ways that better fulfill a public mission of servingness.

Keywords: servingness, Hispanic Serving Institutions, program leaders, mentoring, minoritized students, support structures

INTRODUCTION

Servingness is a framework detailing how Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) can shift from being enrollment-focused to meaningfully serving students' holistic needs (Garcia, 2023; Garcia et al., 2019; Garcia & Cuellar, 2023; Núñez et al., 2015; Núñez et al., 2016). When universities enroll a minimum threshold of full-time racially-minoritized students, in this case 25% Latinx students, they may apply for a federal designation as an HSI. This designation affords access to Title V funds specially earmarked to assist in developing support infrastructures. Here is where the multidimensional servingness framework is useful. It goes beyond the federal designation to consider different *indicators of servingness,* like student outcomes (e.g., GPAs, self-concepts) and experiences (e.g., perceptions of campus climate), and how these are tied to *structures for serving*, such as organizational dimensions (e.g., institutional policies, programs for minoritized students). These various levels direct attention to critical intervention points for researchers and practitioners aiming to improve student success.

Despite having access to federal funds to address these intervention points, HSIs may fall short in how they *serve* their minoritized students. Unlike Historically Black Colleges and Universities or Tribal Colleges and Universities, HSIs were not created to serve the needs and strengths of specific minoritized student populations. Because of this, many HSIs still operate as traditionally White institutions (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Contreras et al., 2008; Cole, 2011; Garcia, 2017; Gutierrez & Banda, 2022; Ledesma & Burciaga, 2015; Nelson Laird et al., 2007; Santos & Acevedo-Gil, 2013). That is, various organizational features of HSIs (e.g., curricular design, hiring decisions, cultural norms that define a "successful" student) continue to cater to and reward those from continuing-generation-to-college, middle-to-upper class, White backgrounds (Covarrubias, 2021; Covarrubias et al., 2022; Patton, 2016). Such privileging continues to produce disparities in outcomes (e.g., grades, retention and graduation rates) and opportunities (e.g., access to resources) among dominant and minoritized groups (Cabrera, 2018). So although HSI leaders might publicly tout a commitment to racial equity and holistic student success, if they do not shift necessary structures, servingness remains purely aspirational (Garcia, 2017, 2023).

Being critical of how an institution engages in servingness is essential for improving institutional efforts. However, simplistic binary framings of HSIs as simply *enrolling* versus *serving* discourage creative strategies towards servingness (Garcia, 2018; Garcia et al., 2019; Núñez, 2017). They fail to recognize the nuance that exists within this binary, such as the many facets of an institution that promote or thwart this mission, especially from the perspectives of those doing work on-the-ground. For example, even before "servingness" became useful language for university leaders, commitments to equity work have long existed on campuses. This includes

federally-funded TRIO outreach and student programs, established in 1964, which have assisted low-income, first-generation-to-college (FG) students along the academic pipeline for over half a century (U.S Department of Education, 2020). What makes the HSI context unique is that it benefits from the legacy and ongoing efforts of such programs and is committed to developing new grant-funded programs that share a similar mission. In the current study, we explore the strengths and challenges that leaders of various undergraduate mentoring programs at an HSI encounter as they engage in servingness. Our focus on mentoring programs is a direct result of minoritized students' requests, as they identified this area of servingness as needing more attention at the target institution[1].

This reported need also aligns with substantial evidence from higher education literature of the numerous benefits of mentorship programs for students, particularly those from minoritized backgrounds (e.g., McClinton et al., 2018; Smith, 2013). Research typically documents the experiences of mentoring programs from the perspective of mentees (e.g., undergraduates) and mentors (e.g., peers, faculty). Although informative, often left out of the research are the perspectives of program leaders who design, implement, and run these programs. These on-the-ground viewpoints are important to consider, especially in HSI contexts, given that they tend to have fewer resources and to support larger numbers of minoritized students (Cunningham et al., 2014; Petrov & Garcia, 2021).

To date, only one study has explicitly examined mentorship programs in relation to an HSI's mission of servingness (Rodriguez & Gonzales, 2020). Title V funding allowed the target HSI to create mentoring program elements, including the First to Go and Graduate initiative which provides peer and faculty mentoring to FG students. Based on qualitative interviews with mentees and peer mentors, mentees reported how having a trusted mentor from a similar cultural background with shared language and/or experiences and who understood them helped them feel a sense of belonging to campus. This investigation enabled researchers to propose mentoring as a culturally-enhancing indicator of servingness (Garcia, 2017).

Though this study ties mentoring to servingness, the research did not examine the strengths of or structural challenges in running the programs – insights that program leaders could uniquely provide. Understanding these structural facets is vital for considering the longevity and transformative ability of these programs. Adding to literature, the current study explores the shared strengths and challenges among mentoring programs to understand how they navigate a mission of servingness within an HSI context. For example, how do mentoring programs create a *vision* for servingness and what intentional everyday practices do they implement to carry out said vision?

[1] The campus's FG Initiative administered evaluation surveys after hosting an event designed to facilitate belonging for FG students. The evaluation included a question asking students to identify areas for future programming. Overwhelmingly, students identified mentoring as the most critical area to focus programming. The FG Initiative staff then conducted the interviews presented in this paper to better understand, from the perspective of program leaders, what the campus needed to improve mentoring for minoritized students.

Do mentoring programs communicate with each other and, if not, what factors limit this communication and what consequences emerge from its absence? Indeed, research has documented communication challenges within STEM mentoring programs that stemmed from little university infrastructure facilitating connection among programs (Mondisa et al., 2021). This often resulted in programs competing amongst each other for resources, instead of strategically working to fill in gaps between programs.

Through secondary analysis of interviews with 11 leaders of mentoring programs at a four-year public, research-intensive HSI (HSRI), we aim to document the structural features that facilitate or thwart efforts of servingness. Understanding the experiences of program leaders engaging in servingness work at an HSRI contributes a missing perspective in research in three ways. First, though there is growing theory on servingness (Garcia, 2017, 2018, 2023; Núñez et al., 2016) and empirical research on engaging servingness in practice (Garcia, 2020; Garcia & Cuellar, 2023), there is scarce research within HSRI settings. Yet this context matters as HSRIs have the potential to curate unique professional pathways for minoritized students. For example, HSRIs can offer robust research mentoring necessary for future careers. Secondly, and relatedly, only one study to date has explicitly focused on mentoring as a servingness structure within an HSI context (Rodriguez & Gonzales, 2020). Adding to this study, we aim to understand, with greater precision, the strengths and challenges of running such mentoring programs, as they play a critical role in facilitating servingness (Garcia et al., 2019). Finally, scarce servingness research has centered the perspectives of on-the-ground leaders (e.g., Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Quinteros & Covarrubias, 2023). Centering their experiences provides critical insights for shifting institutional structures toward stronger practices of servingness. Collectively, this investigation contributes both to theory on the multidimensional servingness framework and on mentoring.

METHOD

Program Leader Participants

The project took place at a four-year public HSRI on the western coast of the U.S. which received HSI designation in 2015. According to institutional records, at the time of the study, the campus served 30.3% White, 27.9% Asian, 26.7% Latinx, 4.3% Black, 0.8% Indigenous, 0.4% Pacific Islander, 7.8% international, and 1.7% unknown domestic undergraduates; FG students made up 38% of the population. Participants were identified through a rigorous search process. A paid undergraduate intern and a full-time staff member from the on-campus FG Initiative searched through all campus programs to identify those serving large numbers of FG students, the majority of whom identify as students of color. Eligible programs had to provide some type of mentoring component, even if the program goals were much broader.

Out of the 14 mentoring program leaders invited, 11 agreed to participate[2]. Participants reflected a range of positions and perspectives, including program directors and supervisors, program coordinators, program managers, lead advisors, and staff specialists. The programs

[2] We did not collect demographic information to protect the privacy of participants.

tackled mentoring and support in diverse ways, including providing academic, financial, career and professional, research, and social support. Some programs focused on serving students from particular racial/ethnic backgrounds (e.g., Black) while others were focused on other features, like academic discipline (e.g., STEM).

Research Approach

We employed secondary analysis of previously collected and transcribed interviews. This approach allows for an efficient use of resources (e.g., time, money) and for access to sensitive, rich data (Smith, 2008). The FG Initiative originally conducted these interviews with program leaders to better understand how to strengthen campus mentoring approaches more broadly. Using secondary analysis, we reviewed the transcripts with a more focused lens, namely with a servingness framework in mind. For example, we paid explicit attention to how the leaders described their experiences maneuvering and building a *structure for servingness* within their mentoring programs.

Participants were invited to participate in individual, semi-structured interviews centered on the topic of "mentorship on campus." Interviews were conducted by at least one staff member from the FG Initiative, which included two paid interns (one undergraduate and one graduate) and a full-time staff member. The interview protocol included questions that addressed program leaders' roles and responsibilities, program priorities, gaps and challenges in mentorship programs, and resources that were helpful for program development. The semi-structured format of the interviews ensured consistency across interviews while also allowing for organic conversation to unfold (Josselson, 2004). All interviews, which lasted an average of 45 minutes, were audio-recorded and transcribed via Temi, an online transcription service. A staff member de-identified the transcriptions and shared them with the research team, which included an undergraduate research assistant (RA) and principal investigator (PI), for analyses. Given that the project entailed secondary analysis of de-identified data, the university's IRB determined it did not meet the requirements of human subjects research and, thus, did not require formal approval.

Coding Procedure

The research team used inductive thematic analysis to better explore patterns using a data-driven approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To begin, the PI and RA became familiar with the data by independently reading interview responses and generating initial impressions from their readings. The team met to discuss these initial impressions to understand overlap and distinctions in their observations, especially as they related to the research questions. Next, the team began to review and refine the impressions into codes, including discussing how well the codes captured interview responses, if any might be consolidated, and whether to add new codes. The team then defined and labeled the codes, organizing them under three major categories: program frameworks, program challenges, and program strengths.

After constructing the codebook, the team then independently re-read the interviews and applied the codebook. Codes were not mutually exclusive, meaning that multiple themes could be

identified between and within interviews. After each phase of coding, the team met to discuss their codings, including discrepancies, until consensus was reached and all interviews were coded. These discussions enhanced the trustworthiness of the work, as two independent investigators worked through their perspectives and reached convergence in their understanding of the codes and the data (Merriam, 1998).

RESULTS

Overarching Frameworks or Visions for Servingness

Across the 11 interviews, the vast majority of programs grounded their efforts and perspectives in two overarching frameworks. First, programs (n=9) *advocated for student-centered mentoring*. This included developing mentoring processes and efforts that recognized the importance of the student role in building and maintaining the mentoring relationship. One participant[3] communicated this perspective when they shared:

> [M]entoring is bidirectional. As a mentor you can't believe that you are the all-knower…. Both of you have something to learn from one another. The other thing, too, is not having a White savior… perspective. You aren't there to save someone, you are there to offer support whatever way you can.

Program leaders recognized the careful balance in supporting students from minoritized backgrounds and being "careful with mentors developing some kind [of] savior complex." The approach here was to move away from the deficit notion that "mentees have nothing to contribute or are empty vessels" (Yosso, 2005). Instead, participants acknowledged the importance of reciprocity for recognizing students' strengths. One participant shared, "the best mentoring relationships… listen and learn from each other…. [Reciprocity is] key in that it allows one to see the strengths and assets that the mentees bring in." The same participant identified a "good mentor" as someone who is "open to learning from their mentee."

This student-centered focus in mentoring aligned with the other dominant framework in which programs *promoted equity-oriented approaches with students* (n=8). This included adopting policies that addressed issues of equity, access, and diversity in meaningful ways that aligned with a mission of servingness. Leaders discussed the importance of being flexible about who they served in their program (i.e., loosening program eligibility criteria, like GPA requirements) to ensure they provided equitable access for more students. Others remarked on the importance of hiring diverse staff to serve as important representation for students and to bring on mentors who "really care" and who are "doing the work" because they "really want to make a difference."

Part of this equity-oriented commitment was motivated by participants' understanding that "the university creates inequitable barriers for first-gen, low-income students" and their beliefs that the programs functioned to "disrupt that or create equity on [the] campus." For example, one participant shared they adopted "more of an activist approach" where they could challenge "social

[3] To further protect the identity of participants, we did not link specific data excerpts with a particular program and we also used "they" and "them" pronouns for each participant.

injustices in higher education" and "use [the] space as a site of resistance." In doing this work, they spoke of the need to consider intersectionality – how multiple systems of oppression overlap to inform schooling experiences (Harris & Patton, 2019; Overstreet et al., 2020) – in their programming and in the training of staff. In general, programs were deeply committed to equity-oriented approaches and explicitly named their intention to support those "who have been historically disadvantaged in higher education."

Daily Practices that Strengthen Servingness

Whereas program frameworks captured overarching visions for how programs engage in servingness, we also identified specific, everyday approaches to mentoring that stem from these frameworks, or program strengths. We noted two strengths shared among nearly all of the programs. First, all 11 programs were committed to *fostering a sense of community* among all their program members (e.g., staff, students). One participant shared their guiding question that grounded this practice, "How are you going to support and nurture this community?" Others identified their approaches to this, like making active attempts to build community and a sense of belonging, especially via community events, socials, and team-building activities. Participants understood that such community building was critical for retention, with one stating, "I think community is important especially for first-year students. That's when they're most vulnerable. So, if [we] don't provide them with some anchor, we could lose them." In fostering a sense of community, they aimed to communicate to student participants that "there's a web of support."

The second strength shared by the majority of programs (n=8) included *implementing high-impact mentoring practices*. High-impact mentoring included coupling academic advising with informal, holistic counseling that addresses the wide-ranging needs of students (e.g., challenges related to their college transition). One participant shared how students might meet with "peer coaches more consistently" to receive continuous support and noted the importance of balancing the support provided. The participant remarked, "In addition to academic goal setting or focusing on choosing a major, [mentors also talk with mentees about] how their week is going, are they getting along with their roommates…." Another participant shared how they offered high-impact mentoring by considering all aspects of the student experience. They shared, "My role is holistic counseling which means I deal with academic, personal, famil[ial], cultural [facets of the student experience]… imposter syndrome, sense of belonging, financial aid, [and] budgeting." For other program leaders, high-impact mentoring meant being flexible on when and where to meet students, recognizing they were balancing a lot and might have restricted schedules. Overall, high-impact mentoring attempts to meet students where they are to fully serve them.

Structural Challenges that Undermine Servingness

Participants communicated six different challenges, program needs, areas of support, and/or barriers they encountered in their capacity to serve students from minoritized backgrounds. These challenges reflected the low structural investment from the university in supporting the efforts of mentoring programs to foster servingness.

Precarity and Lack of Funding

The most cited challenge (n=9) included navigating inconsistent and precarious streams of funding (e.g., no permanent source of funding) and/or simply just not enough funding. As a consequence, program leaders were left to their own strategies and resources to create equity-based programming. One participant described this reality, "It is a do-it-yourself entity to some degree. We have to be creative and do things within our means because we don't have much of a programming budget." This often translated into invisible labor among staff, including heavy and additional workloads that are unpaid and unrecognized (Daniel, 1987; Gordon et al., 2022). One participant shared the competing demands because of having limited funding to hire additional help, "You do the grant writing, you check in with the students, you do this, you do the evaluation, like it's too much." Participants noted feeling "so stretched" by the various program needs and that it "would be nice to have more staff support," to meet the needs of students.

Indeed, participants noted the importance of such financial resources to the mission of servingness. One participant stated,

> If we had financial support to support [students] throughout the year, then we would be able to foster those relationships in a more prescribed way and they would feel much more investment.

Program leaders acknowledged resource calls advertised by the university to directly provide more programmatic support for students but they also noted the importance of permanent funding to support staffing needs in an ongoing and sustainable way. One participant shared:

> Some of these resource calls that I've seen… I would love to support more students… but then if there's no more support for the staff, it's like, what's the purpose in increasing the number of students [served] if the quality of support is going to go down?"

They recognized that without sufficient financial resources to support full-time staff, increasing the number of students served in the program with the use of one-time funds jeopardizes the quality of servingness overall.

Siloed Organizational Structures

Program leaders (n=7) noted the desire or need to seek campus collaborations to provide better support for students, especially under financial constraints. One participant expressed wanting to work with the FG Initiative on campus in order to "get support, programming, or funding" because they recognized that "a lot of these [mentoring] programs are doing support services but *they* don't have enough support." Participants described not wanting to replicate the same exact services but instead wanting to work toward developing partnerships that synchronized the way they served students. One participant shared,

> I don't necessarily want folks to be out there reinventing the wheel. If they are starting new things and getting the support to start new things, I want them to know that there are other folks doing similar work and that they, as well as we, need to learn from each other.

Conversations among leaders who run similar types of programs could allow program leaders to align efforts and to learn from one another. One participant remarked that "some convening of all the folks that do mentor-type programs" would be "helpful and useful." They noted that "folks benefit from hearing from others" because it helps to identify something that program leaders "missed that could be really beneficial to the program that [they are] trying to develop and maintain and grow." Yet overwhelming numbers of participants noted the absence of such opportunities to meet and exchange information, underscoring the university's siloed organizational structure.

Program Evaluation Constraints

Another barrier for program leaders (n=6) included issues related to conducting program evaluation. This included a lack of expertise (i.e., knowing how to do an evaluation) or lack of resources to conduct the evaluation (e.g., little staff support). Such constraints had a direct impact on servingness. One participant expressed this frustration: "I don't really have time to do [an] in-depth evaluation of the program…. I wish I had more time to see what we are doing right and wrong or what needs improvement." Related to not having time to conduct their own evaluations, program leaders shared that "finding the folks who can do these evaluations can be a barrier too." And when programs hire graduate students in this capacity, they noted the importance of compensating them for their time, which requires resources.

Still, when programs were able to conduct the evaluation, they identified some barriers in how the data could be applied to improve servingness. One participant posed the question, "How [have data] been used to actually impact the campus or institutionalize changes?" They noted that they see "data all the time presented on their efforts" and wondered "where is it going?" They clarified, "We are tracking all [these] data… and how is the greater campus… how are the changes [being] made on the bigger level?" This participant questioned the utility of program evaluations in the absence of larger structural campus investment to improve the areas of need identified by the data collected.

Bureaucracy

A smaller number of program leaders (n=5) discussed navigating bureaucratic processes that undermined their capacity to serve students. These processes included university policies and guidelines that influenced what programs were able to do or not do when working with students or when running their programs. Different from the *precarity and lack of funding* theme which focused on insufficient funds, this theme called attention to the strict use of funds that were available. One participant described the "emotional labor" involved in "working in a bureaucracy." They noted how after identifying their direction for programming, the university responded with, "'No we don't have the funding' or the university will not allow that kind of support.'" The participant felt "frustrated with trying to advocate and do more and being told either 'we can't do that' or 'we shouldn't do that'" even if funds were available.

The emotional labor included feeling again, "so stretched," when navigating these bureaucratic processes (e.g., filling out multiple forms to reserve a meeting room or to get reimbursed). A consequence that one participant noted was that staff "can't spend the amount of quality time with a student to really get into more depth and really help them develop skills or mentor [them]." Participants shared that while program leaders and staff remained committed to servingness, it took a large toll to navigate university bureaucracy. One participant summarized this best, "...sometimes we feel powerless because we can constantly help the students but, in the end, it's the system that needs to be changed to actually really get great success for students."

Barriers to Engaging Students

Program leaders (n=5) identified that a critical component to servingness was understanding barriers to how they were engaging and recruiting students in their programs. For one participant, barriers to engagement resulted in low event attendance,

> We don't have any web presence…. [T]he students don't know each other, there's no sense of community, there's no sense of, like, pride with [being in the program].... So we hosted… scholars events this quarter. All my peer mentors put on events, the purpose was to bring them together, have them meet each other. Our attendance was so low. Our challenge is to incentivize them to want to be even more involved.

Part of understanding how to incentivize students was understanding the stigma, especially among low-income, FG students of color, around asking for support from others (Chang et al., 2020). Thus, program engagement efforts necessarily had to address issues of imposter syndrome that might prevent help-seeking and program engagement. One participant shared,

> I mean with mentoring I think it's difficult, speaking as a first gen myself…. I feel like there are probably reasons… why you wouldn't reach out to someone, it could be extremely intimidating talking to someone, you know, 'like do I seem smart enough, do I seem worth of or stupid…."

In working with their particular student populations, for program leaders, servingness required a keen understanding of all the barriers, including the psychological, that undermined engagement.

Mentor Needs

Program leaders (n=5) identified a final type of barrier which included ensuring that program mentors received adequate support to fulfill their responsibilities as mentors. Programs had vastly different types of training (e.g., goals, length) and resources for mentors. One participant described this as a "multilayered situation" where the program is "trying to help support [mentors] because oftentimes they've never been in this type of role before." Participants discussed the importance of building mentor confidence in working with students and also helping mentors to set up agreements with their mentees, recognizing that things "can go very wrong when they're not really spoken out." Other smaller facets of support included mentors wanting smaller mentor-mentee ratios, needing specialized training to do their jobs, and using self-evaluations as a way to develop in the role professionally.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Analyzing interviews with mentoring program leaders at an HSRI revealed key insights about the approaches, strengths, and challenges of servingness from those doing the work on-the-ground. Voices from program leaders within an HSRI context are vastly unexamined in literature, yet such perspectives correspond directly to the quality of servingness structures identified in the servingness framework (Garcia et al., 2019). Understanding the experiences of program leaders helps to assess the fidelity of a university's commitment to servingness; it unveils the strengths and challenges of support programs and services that directly aim to serve minoritized students on campus.

Across the interviews, we learned that program leaders' visions of servingness were rooted in promoting student-centered and equity-forward policies. These visions guided program strengths focused on daily practices of building belonging for minoritized students and implementing high-impact practices that holistically served students' needs (e.g., academic, personal, financial, professional). These findings provide concrete, empirical examples of how mentoring programs enact servingness. We also noted challenges in engaging in servingness. These included navigating precarious and insufficient university funding streams, siloed organizational structures, limited capacity to evaluate program effectiveness, bureaucratic rules and processes that constrained resources needed to engage in servingness work, barriers for reaching and engaging more students, and training and supporting mentors so that they could better support mentees. As a servingness framework details, identifying barriers offers critical intervention points for improving institutional practice.

Implications for Institutional Practice

One central implication for institutional practice is providing secure and flexible funding support. Programs were largely under-resourced, leaving few staff members to take on responsibilities beyond their role or to spend time navigating bureaucratic tape instead of focusing on program development (Cunningham et al., 2014). Universities should leverage HSI-related grants to provide essential support for student programming and services (Perez, 2020; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). This is one starting point for institutional change. Universities must also think strategically about how to sustain these programs after grant funding ends. Investment from institutions beyond the grant cycle not only builds infrastructure for servingness but it also allows for more flexible use of funding than what might be allowed by federal grants. This is critical as program leaders also identified restrictive and bureaucratic limitations on use of funding as a barrier. Flexible funding, for example, might benefit programs wanting to provide comprehensive training to mentors, especially in equity-grounded approaches (Rodriguez & Gonzales, 2020). This was another barrier program leaders identified in the current study.

Partly the way that long-term university investment gets decided is through rigorous evaluation of servingness programs. With appropriate tools, programs can identify critical places for further investment. Yet, as our findings illustrate, capacity for program evaluation was cited as

a challenge by program leaders. One way to improve practice, then, is to offer more resources for evaluation. This can include hiring program evaluation staff to serve in this campus role or funding to support graduate student or faculty researchers with evaluation expertise to partner with programs in this effort. Enhancing structural support for program evaluation relieves staff from the burden of creating their own evaluation mechanisms and pushes the campus to think critically about how they are effectively enacting an organizational identity of servingness (Petrov & Garcia, 2021).

In considering the allocation of resources toward servingness, institutions must also reflect on how to support collaboration across units. When resources are limited, programs may be left to fight for resources, pitting programs with similar aims of servingness against one another (Mondisa et al., 2021). Indeed, the development of new programs through HSI grants can often take away recognition or visibility from or marginalize programs that have been functioning for a long time (e.g., TRIO; Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Such a context might also contribute to the siloed nature of mentoring programs that program leaders identified in this study. Yet, leaders wanted more opportunities for collaboration, as they thought this was critical for realizing their mission of servingness. Institutions should work to bring together different campus units to dissolve academic silos and to facilitate connections and cultivate synergies among various campus efforts (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015; Mondisa et al., 2021; Petrov & Garcia, 2021). Doing so enables institutions to leverage the strengths of various programs – as they each fulfill an important facet of servingness – and offer opportunities to support one another in a larger ecosystem rather than compete for resources. This type of convening also allows leaders to think strategically and collectively about streamlining student outreach, as students can experience communication about resources in disjointed ways (Hora et al., 2022).

Areas for Future Research

Scholarship has increasingly documented the ways in which universities enact servingness through various programs and initiatives (Garcia, 2020). We uniquely add to this literature by synthesizing the strengths and challenges of 11 program leaders engaged in activities aimed to provide equity-oriented and student-centered mentoring and support for minoritized students at an HSRI. A strength of this study is the range of expertise represented in this approach. We were able to critically examine the structural features at play in an institution's mission of servingness by creating a composite voice from on-the-ground leaders.

Still, there are areas for future research. First, future work should aim to link these voices to direct impacts on students. As past work has shown how grant funding might facilitate outcomes (Garcia, 2023; Perez, 2020; Petrov & Garcia, 2021), work can also show how challenges to servingness might be felt among students. Thus, future research should employ diverse methods – such as surveys, secondary analysis of institutional research data (e.g., retention, grades), ethnographic approaches – that better connect how structural strengths and challenges at an HSI relate to student experiences.

Second, though the findings represent voices across several programs, the challenges and strengths might be informed by the unique cultural context of this particular HSRI. There is much variation in the structural diversity (e.g., demographic representation of students, staff, and faculty), resources, and commitment to servingness across HSI and HSRI settings (see Sanchez, 2019). For example, nearly half of all HSIs are two-year colleges, which greatly differ in their mission, funding, and opportunities for servingness in relation to four-year colleges (Excelencia in Education, 2019). Future work should examine challenges and opportunities for servingness across and within different types of institutions to further refine the servingness framework.

Third, though all identified programs in this study included a mentoring component, the programs offered much more robust support services for students. Though the interview questions did focus on mentoring components, some of the challenges identified likely speak broadly to many support service programs (e.g., inadequate funding, lack of program evaluation tools). For educators and researchers interested in programs that mainly serve as mentoring hubs for students, future research should be more selective in their selection criteria. A focus on programs that function just as mentoring services could yield more specific types of strengths and challenges that might contribute to literature in different ways.

Finally, a secondary analytic approach allowed us to engage our questions in a resource-efficient way. We could apply a servingness framework to already collected data. However, this approach limited us to pre-existing questions within the interview protocol (Smith, 2008). This meant that we were unable to ask program leaders about their definitions of servingness. Though servingness is difficult to define (Garcia et al., 2019), asking program leaders directly about their ideas of servingness within the university and their programs might have yielded different visions, strengths, and challenges. Future work should ask explicitly about servingness to understand how those perspectives align or diverge from what we documented.

Concluding Remarks

This study answers the call proposed by the multidimensional servingness framework for researchers to explore the different structures that strengthen or attenuate a mission of servingness (Garcia et al., 2019). We identified the shared visions for servingness, program strengths reflected in daily practices of and commitments to servingness, and challenges that thwart servingness faced by program leaders as they strive to support students from minoritized backgrounds. By shifting the unit of analysis from students to institutions, this work importantly addresses a key perspective that has yet to be explored in servingness and mentorship literature, especially within HSRI contexts. These voices – from those on-the-ground – provide vital perspectives and actionable lessons on what it takes to shift structures to better fulfill a mission of servingness and, ultimately, build an institutional climate that is inclusive, welcoming, and supportive of students. Program leaders play an essential role in this work. Elevating their voices not only honors their continued labor but it also recognizes crucial expertise for what it means to holistically support student needs, strengths, and lived experiences.

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ACCELERATE ETHNIC STUDIES WITH "ALL DELIBERATE SPEED!"

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ABSTRACT

America is known as the Land of Opportunity, yet one may ask, "Opportunity for whom?" Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/ Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander along with other traditionally and historically underrepresented groups have experienced being marginalized in the United States as well as the school systems within our society. Since the inception of the concept of schooling in the United States, public education has had a minimal acknowledgment of historically and traditionally marginalized groups as contributors to the cultivation and development of the United States. It's beyond time to redesign our educational system to reflect a system that will contribute to a *true* and sustainable democracy. This will require social justice educators with the capacity to teach our youth the complete truth of their cultural and ethnic imprint within the history and fabric of our country.

Keywords: Ethnic Studies, Social Justice, Historically Marginalized, Cultural Relevance, Civil Rights, Transformative, Equity, Institutional Racism

INTRODUCTION

> And whatever we may think of the curtailment of other civil rights, we should fight to the last ditch to keep open the right to learn, the right to have examined in our schools not only what we believe, but what we do not believe; not only what our leaders say, but what the leaders of other groups and nations, and the leaders of other centuries have said.
>
> (Du Bois, W.E.B. 1949/1970, pp. 230-231)

This quote by W.E.B. Du Bois, as though trapped in an echo chamber, rings as true and important today as it did over 71 years ago. During a tumultuous time that has seen the resurgence of a national divide drawn along racial and political lines prompted by political tectonic shifts, an unjust murder described as a modern-day lynching of a Black man, that fueled worldwide social justice demonstrations, and the worst pandemic in over 100 years that exposed the privilege and entitlement of a democratic society, one could surmise that this "perfect storm" has brought us to a tipping point of the American experience. Our collective and overwhelming response will either cause it to be an abject failure or the purification and rebirth of a truly democratic society.

One could argue that the political perspective created by colorblind post-racial liberalism began to unravel beginning with the 2016 election of our 45th President. A monumental and historical event that was a response to the election of our 44th and first and only Biracial President. Having said this, we caution you to resist the inclination to fault or give too much credit to any one individual or one specific event in history. We are reminded of what Princeton University Professor Eddie Glaude said on a popular American news cable show when he refuted this inclination to blame one individual, but instead proclaimed, "…this is us!"

Looking back at the fore mentioned series of political events, few forecasted that they would serve as precursors for a perfect storm. A combination of liberal contentment at having "arrived" to being repudiated by the backlash of a conservative *not-so-fast* response dog whistled as a call to "Make America Great Again." But *great* for whom? The timing of this political confrontation could not have come at a *worse* time or depending on your perspective, at a more *perfect* time. Building on the urgency of ending school segregation outlined in Brown vs the Board of Education II, this series of events gives added significance to the term *deliberate speed*. Whether deliberate or not, Governor Newsom and the newly signed bill AB101, making Ethnic Studies a graduation requirement for all California high schools beginning the 2029-30 school year, we posit that not only is this change long overdue but *the time is now*.

Setting the context of why the time is now, one has only to consider a once in over a 100-year pandemic that arrived in December 2019 to remind us of both our human frailties and vulnerability as a free society and democratic nation. Then as if one *virus* was not enough, the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, at the hands of law enforcement, created a worldwide firestorm to eradicate the virus of institutional racism. This resulted in a global call for social justice not seen since the 1960s Civil Rights movement. Culminating in what can only be described as a tipping point for our nation, the cries of a stolen election coupled with an insurrection's attempt to overturn a modern-day election by disrupting the peaceful transfer of power. This chain of

events begs the question, if not now, when and how can we simply return to "*normal*?" Or for that matter, how and why should we return to the conditions that got us where we are now?

Never has there been a more appropriate and necessary time to reimagine and redefine our educational system. An educational system that will contribute to a *true* and sustainable democracy. This will require social justice educators with the capacity to teach our youth the complete truth of their cultural and ethnic imprint within the history and fabric of our country. This needs to start with shifting the responsibility to the educational system to institutionalize cultural knowledge in a way that will provide future generations with the capacity to help redefine and reposition the dynamics of difference as it pertains to the American social constructs of power, justice, and democracy.

A Time for Transformative Change

> "The global pandemic known as COVID-19 gives us an opportunity to dig more deeply into our study and use of culture as a way to re-set education"
>
> (Ladson-Billings, 2021, p. 76).

In a diverse California where students of color have become the majority student demographic in (K-12) public schools (U.S. Census Bureau 2018), educational leaders need the capacity to address individual, organizational, and institutional barriers to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Educational leaders need to be able to challenge and transform a longstanding and unchanged educational system that historically has struggled to engage, motivate and inspire California's students of color and other underserved groups. It is for this reason that we choose to focus on the groups identified by the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum's foundational disciplines which include: Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/ Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian America and Pacific Islander, bi-racial ethnic groups and other historically marginalized groups. In this article and our writings moving forward, we also intentionally choose not to use the acronym BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color). In our opinion, this acronym can be perceived as exclusionary or make invisible segments of the foundational disciplines.

As we adhere to the urgency for representation of Black/African American, Hispanic/ Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander, California is leading the nation by becoming the first state to require ethnic studies as a high school graduation requirement. In addition, California has adopted the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum (ESMC) to guide schools and districts as they implement Ethnic Studies in high schools to meet the state requirement. The ESMC defines Ethnic Studies as: "An interdisciplinary field of study that encompasses many subject areas including history, literature, economics, sociology, and anthropology (AB 101, 2021)." The ESMC also includes the following information about ethnic studies.

> It emerged to both address content considered missing from the traditional curriculum and to encourage critical engagement. As a field, ethnic studies seeks to empower all students to engage socially and politically and to think critically about the

> world around them. It is important for ethnic studies courses to document the experiences of people of color in order for students to construct counter-narratives and develop a more complex understanding of the human experience. Through these studies, students should develop respect for cultural diversity and see the advantages of inclusion. Because of the interdisciplinary nature of this field, ethnic studies courses may take several forms. However, central to any ethnic studies course is the historic struggle of communities of color, taking into account the intersectionality of identity (gender, class, sexuality, among others), to challenge racism, discrimination, and oppression and interrogate the systems that continue to perpetuate inequality (AB 101, 2021).

The California (K-12) public school system, composed of predominantly White educators, shows no indications of a significant future influx of educators of color (Boser, 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This necessitates a paradigm shift toward culturally proficient educational leaders capable of challenging and changing individual, institutional, and organizational cultural perspectives (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, Terrell, & Lindsey; 2019; Shields, 2018). Educational leaders must have the capacity to address and challenge individual, organizational, and institutional barriers confronting a majority-marginalized student population that the system's design positions to remain underserved, while their White peers continue to have higher student achievement and college and career goals.

These demographic and cultural differences require culturally competent educators capable of leading change through *praxis*. Praxis is defined as what Freire (2014) alluded to as a critical examination of our awareness, reflection, analysis, and action. Shields (2018) further substantiated that it starts from within: "It begins with awareness -- of self, of the strengths, weaknesses, and challenges of our society, and of our school system" (p. 11). This inside-out approach is critical to finally transforming not only our educational system but addressing the societal issues that created the perfect storm for change. More specifically, intentional activism with a focus on widening and challenging existing individual and societal perspectives, values, and beliefs of an unchanged "status quo" educational system (Flores, 2019).

When one looks at the history of American public-school educational reform, it becomes evident how educational policy and decision-making are influenced by power and ideology (Rippner, 2016). The United States public school system has a long history of being deeply rooted in Eurocentric, neoliberal, and meritocratic perspectives reinforced by a colorblind discourse (Briscoe, 2014). These components fused together drive narratives that influence the existing foundation for educational beliefs and expectations in the United States, and closer to home, at the state and district-level. The challenge, as Rippner (2016) stated, is that "educational leaders and policymakers must focus on all students achieving at high levels in order to meet national attainment goals" (p. 3). Research and data show that the American public-school educational system and structure are presently not meeting the needs of all students, but more specifically, students of color (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Griner & Stewart, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Milner, 2013; Sleeter, 2011; 2018). Rippner (2016) further points out that what makes this

challenging is that education consists of a set of interrelated systems that lack the ability to improve itself due to continued institutionalization.

To this point, our public schools need culturally proficient formal leaders to lead and be able to "address issues that emerge when cultural differences are marginalized in schools and other organizations" (Lindsey et al., 2019, p. 5). Cultural differences found within an unchanged educational system primarily led by a largely White dominant group in charge of teaching a majority-marginalized group that historically has been seen by our society and educational institution as inferior, resulting in deep-rooted systemic marginalization and oppression. Lindsey et al. (2019) stated that our call to action begins as an inside-out approach to how we view cultural differences. This necessitates an educator's leadership style inclusive of perspectives and expectations that look to create a more just and equitable educational system. It is our contention that the implementation of Ethnic Studies is a great example or outcome of this goal. This will equate to a system that is more culturally competent, culturally responsive, inclusive, and accessible that will benefit *all* students and families.

Our educational philosophy is consistent with other educational scholars who recognize the importance of a quality education capable of engaging all students to reach their full potential despite their socio-economic status, class, race, ethnicity, gender, language, and special needs (Franco, Ott, & Robles, 2011). Providing a quality education begins with our public school educational leaders understanding that the family, as defined by each culture, is the primary system of support in the education of children. This responsibility begins with school leaders having a critical consciousness of personal, societal, and institutional barriers. This critical consciousness includes, but is not limited to, understanding the dynamics of difference and how organizational culture, created and influenced by an educator's beliefs, values, attitudes, behaviors, and practices, impacts and affects student achievement.

Background of the Problem

Throughout our nation's history, the impact of laws, especially relative to civil rights, has left an indelible mark on public school education. American history shows the impact that civil rights laws have had on the educational access and rights of students to receive a free, appropriate, and quality public education. Despite best intentions, policymakers and educators have missed the mark in providing equity, access, and inclusion for all students. (Flores, 2019). American societal and educational perspectives leveraged by the dynamics of power and privilege status of a dominant, White, male, and Eurocentric hegemonic views have both purposefully and unconsciously oppressed or marginalized American minorities (Banks, 2008; Briscoe, 2012; Cruz-Janzen, 2009; Sleeter, 2011).

Changing the Narrative in Service of All Students

The United States has had countless reforms in our education system that aim to close the achievement, opportunity, and equity chasms. Many schools and districts throughout the United States have a mission and vision that support the concept of a "student-centered Culture," however,

we have yet to ensure that all ethnic groups see themselves represented in the curriculum. Leaders throughout the educational system, at all levels, Pre-K-16, are preparing to move beyond the discussion of closing the chasms we describe as achievement, opportunity, and equity gaps. This is a primary reason why we support and advocate for implementing Ethnic Studies as early as possible throughout the public school experience.

As we seek to band together as a nation and eradicate the modern-day lynching of our Black/African Americans, call out and stop Asian American Hate, eliminate the continued and historical discrimination experienced by Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x American population and acknowledge the genocide that left our Native American/American Indian population confined to only portions of their land, Ethnic Studies is an important start point to dispelling stereotypes that cause America to be biased and prejudice against these and other ethnic groups. The anti-Asian Hate, I Can't Breathe, and Dreamer's path to citizenship for undocumented student campaigns are examples of the push for a fair and accurate representation of people of color. Each of these campaigns validate the need for schools and districts to implement Ethnic Studies as part of their curriculum. This approach would require a systemic approach to inclusion of those who traditionally and historically have been excluded and marginalized from the current school experience which would also serve to counter their feelings of marginalization and imposter syndrome. Equally important would be that Ethnic Studies courses would benefit students of the dominant culture by informing and addressing potential cultural blindspots as a result of privilege and entitlement and lack of proximity to different cultural experiences. This improvement to curriculum and instruction will more accurately reflect a holistic approach to the opportunities, challenges, and travails of the cultural experience greatly influenced and informed by our country's history.

Ethnic Studies Completes our Educational Programs

> "Ethnic studies seeks to rehumanize experiences, challenge problematic Euro-centric narratives, and build community solidarity across differences."
>
> (Sleeter and Zavala, 2020, p.4)

The recent and historical experiences of Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/ Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander, brought about the decision to develop a Model Curriculum for Ethnic Studies and the talk of an Assembly Bill to include Ethnic Studies as a graduation requirement. So, what is Ethnic Studies? It is the multidisciplinary inquiry and study of race, ethnicity, and indigeneity with an emphasis on experiences of Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian America and Pacific Islander, in historical events in the United States. Schools in California have been offering courses in Ethnic Studies since the 1960s, and as of 2021, there is a Model Curriculum, as well as an Assembly Bill, which will add a graduation requirement that will require scholars 9-12 grade to complete at least one semester in Ethnic Studies by the 2029-30 school year. The implementation of Ethnic Studies aims to empower Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/American

Indian, Asian America, and Pacific Islanders and other historically and traditionally marginalized groups and to encourage scholars to tell their own stories in the form of the counter-narrative and share their journey towards self-discovery. Scholars are more likely to be engaged in exploring topics that are relevant to their lived experiences. Ethnic studies is designed to develop the cultural competencies of educators and to provide a platform to ensure that Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander scholars see themselves and the accomplishments of people who represent their culture in the curriculum. Schools and districts that incorporate ethnic studies with fidelity have leaders, teachers, and scholars who have the capacity and desire to think more critically about the current world in which we live. Ethnic studies provides a great opportunity for educators to facilitate the exploration of the true and complete history of all Americans in the United States, their lived experiences, contributions, and trauma in the U.S. Through the adoption of the Ethnic Studies Model Curriculum and the passing of the Assembly Bill that will include ethnic studies as a high school graduation requirement, scholars of all ethnic and cultural backgrounds will benefit from learning about the untold history and literature of our Nation's most underrepresented populations which have not only been omitted from our history books but due to this omission, continue to experience discrimination, hate, oppression, bias, and limited opportunity.

Ethnic Studies PK20

The history of slavery, school segregation, Mexican Schools, Native American Boarding Schools, the Chinese Exclusion Act, and other acts of discrimination and marginalization, as well as positive contributions of Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian America and Pacific Islander, is not introduced in detail in schools, however, it should be covered at all levels. It is vital to incorporate ethnic studies at every level of the educational journey so that scholars of all ages and ethnicities are afforded the opportunity to learn about their culture and history as well as others in our society. It is time we eliminate hierarchy and chasms in our society that have caused much discord amongst different racial and ethnic groups. We must incorporate ethnic studies so that as a society we do not repeat the same malpractice of marginalizing our scholars. We must revisit the policies and procedures put into place that have systematically caused Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/ Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander scholars in our PK-12 system to feel and be regarded as inferior. We need to ensure that no one feels marginalized and that all our student groups see themselves represented in the curriculum and receive the support they need in order to not perpetuate cycles of marginalization. Due to our nationalistic pride, we tend to bury things that we are ashamed of, however, we must rise above our shame and discomfort so that we can disrupt educational inequities and dismantle the system to create equitable outcomes for students from all backgrounds, ethnicities, and abilities. It's important to begin by focusing on those who have experienced marginalization as an inheritance, passed down intergenerationally for centuries. Focusing on the historically marginalized is a starting point that is necessary to dismantle a system that does not serve all scholars in ways that

provide equitable access and outcomes. Once the system is re-examined, redesigned, and transitioned to a more inclusive curriculum, all student groups will begin to benefit socially and academically.

Not a Minority

In our careers as educators and our experience as lifelong learners, we know what it means to be classified and referred to as minorities. This designation often causes us to feel as if we do not belong, causes us to be treated as inferior, and consequently, requires us to work twice as hard just to get a seat at the table and to be invited to the conversation. Undeterred, our hope and reason for writing this article is to embolden equitable opportunities and a relevant educational experience for the demographic groups identified in the model curriculum because they should see themselves just as qualified and capable as their white peers who have historically been classified as higher-achieving. It is past due that all scholars see themselves positively and accurately represented in the curriculum. Marian Wright Edelman wrote, "It's hard to be what you can't see (Wright Edelman Founder and President Emerita, 2018)." Thus, it is critically important for the US educational system to commit to providing enriched educational experiences where all Americans see themselves represented in the curriculum.

As times change and our society continues to grow more diverse with people of different ethnicities and cultural backgrounds, it is well beyond time to introduce ethnic studies as an integral and essential course for public schools. Although ethnic studies will be a requirement for high school graduation, we find it equally vital to incorporate ethnic studies in early education, elementary, and middle school as well. We are aware that we must begin somewhere and like the Brown vs Board II ruling recommended for education in the 1950s, let's move to establish ethnic studies as essential with "All Deliberate Speed." Christine Sleeter, Professor Emerita from Cal State Monterey Bay, and author of the book *Transformative Ethnic Studies in Schools: Curriculum Pedagogy & Research* conducted research to determine the impact of ethnic studies. Her research indicates that students of color can be disengaged because the curriculum has a heavy European American influence that leaves little room to add the cultural background and lived experience of our diverse and ethnic population (Sleeter & Zavala, 2020). It is for this reason, that ethnic studies is being endorsed as an essential content area and a high school graduation requirement. Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/ Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other historically and traditionally underrepresented scholars deserve to have an opportunity to be engaged in school with content that is relevant to their historical and lived experience. As students journey through an educational system designed to adhere to what Thomas Jefferson imposed, "twenty of the best geniuses will be raked from the rubbish" (Louden, 2010 p.43), let's be reminded that the domination of European Culture has influenced our society and our school system and causes Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/ American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander scholars to be underrepresented, underserved and disengaged. Thomas Jefferson's proposal of a two-track system for the "laboring and the learned," has created the chasms that exist

even though Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander scholars were not included in the original plan for those to be educated in the American school system.

As educators, we have experienced and have witnessed, the impact the present structure of our educational system has on the potential of Black/African American, Hispanic/Chicano/a/x/ Latino/a/x, Native American/American Indian, and Asian American and Pacific Islander students. Unfortunately, for many of our students, existing curriculum standards continue to ignore, fail to accurately recognize, and even worse, misrepresent or seek to bury their cultural, generational, and societal experiences. Keeping in mind the historical significance of the indigenous to the land, the different diasporas of people entering the United States by free will, force, or refuge, or history that predates the Mayflower, it is time for educators, to champion a more complete and inclusive curriculum that will move ethnic studies from the fringe to the mainstream.

This leaves educators and students of color with a similar experience as described by the foretelling of W.E.B. Du Bois when he spoke of an African "double consciousness" where he states "it is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity." (W.E.B Du Bois, 1903). That this situation still exists today and considering how long we have failed to give all students the opportunity to explore the fullness of diverse histories and perspectives, is why we advocate for accelerating the implementation of ethnic studies with all deliberate speed.

Closing the Chasms

It is time or as it is described in Spanish, *es tiempo*, to reexamine public school education by recognizing the impact of power and privilege, addressing bias, and intentionally preparing future generations to eradicate racism so that our society may more fully realize and sustain democracy in our country. W.E.B. Dubois (1949/1970) further stated "We must insist upon this to give our children the fairness of a start which will equip them with such an array of facts and such an attitude toward truth that they can have a real chance to judge what the world is and what its greater minds have thought it might be." (p. 230-231). To this point, as educational leaders, we must recognize the systemic structures and barriers that continue to unfairly advantage some while continuing to marginalize and disenfranchise students most affected by the chasms of achievement, equity, and opportunity.

Beginning with the acknowledgment and understanding that our public education system is not meeting the needs of all students, not as a matter of unintended consequence, but intentionally as designed, brings educators to the conclusion that our educational system requires transformative change. As educators, all we want is a more inclusive education that accurately and honestly portrays the challenges and struggles as well as accomplishments experienced by generations of families that comprise the American experience represented today by a majority of students of color. Our hope is that by doing so will change the narrative of a "single story" to all of our stories, no longer being seen from a deficit perspective. Likewise, we collaborate on this

journey so that the doors of opportunity will stop being closed roughly in the face of generations of historically marginalized populations whose contributions make the United States great.

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A LATINA LEADER'S CONSEJO: GET TO KNOW YOUR PEOPLE AND GET THEM ON THE PATH OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

The author explains, in detail, strategies used in her experience to develop a shared vision, with every group she led, to serve as their guide for all improvement efforts. These are strategies that she used throughout her leadership experience. The first strategy helps the leader know the school and the community partners. The second strategy is designed to clearly define a compelling future of excellence for the organization. The Theory of Action is simple: Once every single member of the school community shares in this vision and sees themselves as a contributing member, they find purpose in the endeavor. This shared vision becomes a call to action and the commitments they bring to the school are materialized. The mandates become an opportunity for change and a shift from a "Compliance to a Commitment" mindset begins. Through her Testimonio, the author will help readers understand the importance of developing a clear road map that can be revisited multiple times to keep the teams focused on top priorities for all students. The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance of using social capital and the will of the team members to activate a vision in any educational setting ensuring an equitable approach to begin the journey of continuous improvement (Bryk et al., 2017).

Keywords: school vision, continuous improvement, data driven decision making, school improvement plans, administration preparation program, collective efficacy, adult learning theory, storytelling

This article is about the testimonio of one Latina school leader and her experiences developing a clear and shared school vision with the people closest to its enactment. This Latina relied on her own cultural background to engage the people in her charge to imagine a compelling future for the organization that would guide their efforts.

Currently, all school sites must have a vision included in required documents, such as the site plan, the state's report card, and even to follow California's standards for administrators used for their evaluation. As a matter of equity, the vision serves as the guiding destination for every student at the school site or the institution. In the last four years, the author has been a professor in an administration preparation program, and very few students can recite their school's vision, or identify its location.

This paper has been divided into four main sections: First, the purpose and significance of this paper are explained. Second, a literature review is provided to highlight the work of experts in the field of education that supported the decision-making throughout the experience. Third, the narrative begins with the journey of building relationships and getting to know the community. It ends with the co-creation of a clear destination or vision, operationalizing it, and utilizing it to begin the conversation on goal setting and an action plan. Finally, a conclusion and a set of recommendations are provided to help other leaders replicate the strategies taught.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this article is to highlight the importance of activating a shared vision in any educational setting to ensure equity and begin the journey of continuous improvement (California Department of Education [CDE], 2019). This article uses Testimonio and Storytelling as the methodology to describe my lived experience so it can "be used to recast and challenge pervasive theories, policies, and explanations about educational failure as a problem, not of individuals but of systemic institutionalized practices of oppression" (Reyes & Curry, 2012, p. 527). As a Latina leader, I was able to entrust the individuals of the school community to develop a shared vision that disrupted the persistent failure of certain groups. They also became empowered and ready to take on this challenge. My testimonio helps the reader understand how to replicate this and create a common vision that will begin the conversation on "what could be" and propel the journey to improve student outcomes. As a Latina leader with over 20 years of experience as a K-12 administrator, I worked with several groups in a variety of educational contexts, and I was successful at changing persistent equity gaps. As an immigrant and a second language learner, I needed to find a strategic way to bring to fruition a shared vision that clearly defined the school, district, or department's destination. A compelling future that could be created by the collective effort that would not appear like a demand on the practitioners, but more like a call to action for all those involved. This shared vision would also serve as a clear guide to do the work necessary to start closing equity gaps and engage in a continuous improvement process (CDE, 2019). This strategy is based on my lived experience and research. The literature review is based on research specific to school improvement and developing a school plan.

In this article, my testimonio will provide a strategy, a sequential action plan that has been developed through years of experience at various levels of administration in my career. The storytelling aspect of Testimonio is the qualitative methodology used in this article. It is rooted in in oral cultures and in Latin American social struggles. According to Bernal et al. (2012) "within the field of education, scholars are increasingly taking up *testimonio* as a pedagogical, methodological, and activist approach to social justice that transgresses traditional paradigms in academia" (p. 363).

Storytelling is central to learning new concepts and to develop understanding in Latinx cultures (Torres et al., 2017). *Déjame que te cuente Limeña* is a popular phrase in a song and in Lima, Peru where I grew up. Storytelling has been central to my success as a Latina leader when discussing difficult topics of inequities, doing the right thing for all students, and empowering those closest to the issue to do something about it.

Research Questions

What personal skills can a Latina leader use to drive change in a school? How will she develop trust?

What will she be held accountable for?

How can a vision of a school serve as a clear and equitable destination for all constituents?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides the primacy to the strategies that are used in this article and the co-development of the school vision. According to state and federal standards, all school sites must have a vision that is included in required documents, such as the site plan, the state's report card, and it is even stated on the evaluation of administrators (National Policy Board for Educational Leaders [NPBEA], 2015). As a matter of equity, the vision serves as the guiding destination for every student at the school site or the institution. For the last four years, I have been a *doctora,* a tenure-track professor in an administration preparation program. Through this experience, I have witnessed very few students recite their school's vision or identify its location.

The California Professional Standards for Education Leaders, (CPSELS, 2014) is a document that was approved by the California Commission on Teaching Credentialing (CCTC) department. The CPSELS (CCTC, 2014) serve as a guide to all public education leaders in California. Their development was influenced by the following specific document, *School Leadership that Works: From Research to Results* (Marzano et al., 2005). The standards were drafted in collaboration by several leading educational organizations in California and based on the National Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards for School Leaders (Council of Chief State school Officers [CCSSO], 1996). There are six standards, and it is important to highlight the first standard, Standard 1 which states, "Development and implementation of a shared vision. Education leaders facilitate the development and implementation of a shared vision of learning and growth of all students" (p.4). It also has three elements that highlight the important components of this standard,

- Element 1A: Leaders shape a collective vision that uses multiple measures of data and focuses on equitable access, opportunities, and outcomes for all students.
- Element 1B: Developing Shared Vision: Leaders engage others in a collaborative process to develop a vision of teaching and learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.
- Element 1C: Vision Planning and Implementation: Leaders guide and monitor decisions, actions, and outcomes using the shared vision and goals (p. 4).

The first element is about drafting a vision, the second is about engaging others on the vision, and the third element is about using this vision and the goals as a guide for improvement. Moreover, these elements require that this vision takes into consideration an analysis of the data and a collective action towards closing any achievement gaps. At the national level, the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (NPBEA, 2015) were revised in 2015 and the first standard states: "Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student" (p. 9). This reaffirms the importance of leaders developing a vision that will guide all decisions in a school to provide a high-quality education for students.

In my experience as an administrator, there seems to be a disconnect between data chats and a shared vision that clearly and collectively defines the commitment that all community and school partners should embody for equity to be at the center of all decisions. Some researchers have touted the idea that developing a vision statement is a waste of time (Rozycki, 2004). That is, if the statement is vague and never used to drive the goals. In this article, the development of a vision entails creating a list of evidentiary behaviors that will serve as a guide for all practitioners in that school. A set of commitments based on data in a coherent plan. Usually, district accountability meetings look like this: a mandatory district wide meeting for all administrators to learn about the state results of the district. Today, districts deliver results from the California School Dashboard (2023), which uses a growth model approach and provides a public website that can be accessed by all constituents. In my experience, the district data is shared in the morning of one of the first days of the school year. In the afternoon, administrators go back to their sites to discuss their own results. It seems that the purpose of these meetings is to highlight areas of success and areas of improvement. So, in practice, accountability, data, and the vision are not connected. Data and accountability are connected quantitatively, but the vision seems to be isolated and not used to drive any improvement efforts. Without a common resolve and a commitment that goes beyond numbers, this meeting will be dreaded by most, unless the results are glorious.

Finally, research on cultural values and traits in the Latinx culture that influence my actions is also researched and compared to my lived experience. Developing trust, *confianza*, with the people in my charge, has a very different connotation that the Eurocentric approach to trust building being good for business (Covey, 2006). I used skills and values that were central to my personal beliefs, like *simpatía, familismo, respeto, y honor.* Finally, *mi palabra es impecable.*

Accountability in Education

The literature review revealed that there is personal accountability for an administrator via the standards (NPBEA, 2015) and school accountability via the school plans that are submitted (CDE, 2019). If we follow the order of the standards and the school plans, the vision of a school or district is the first step in any change effort. As explained in the standards for administrators, the development of a shared vision is critical to the action plan that is implemented to support all students in learning (CPSELS, 2014). All districts and schools in California are familiar with the word accountability. Through the years, there have been different accountability requirements with specific quantitative expectations like the Academic Yearly Progress and the Academic Performance Index brought to us by the No Child Left Behind Act in 1999. Today, we have a growth model that starts with the Local Control Accountability Plan (LCAP) and its measurement, the California School Dashboard, which compares the growth of a site or district in two years. In the last few years, accountability has shifted from a punitive approach to a more supportive approach. This shift was signaled by the establishment of the California Collaborative for Educational Excellence (CCEE) in 2013 to provide advice and assistance to districts. It clearly states on their website that they are "charged with assisting LEAs in need of support, CCEE provides universal, targeted, and intensive supports and resources for local educational agencies (California Educational Code [CEC] Section 52074, 2013). In my opinion, the feeling of being held accountable by punitive means or by supportive means, is the same during that first data review meeting.

Along with the required LCAP or other plans in California, all public schools are required to report their progress by completing and publishing a School Accountability Report Card (SARC), (CDE, 2023). The document requires schools to provide a "Description and Mission Statement (School Year 2022–23). Use this space to provide information about the school, its program, and its goals (p.1)." There is no mention of the school mission in the instructions and no mention of a vision. Another document that must be submitted by every public school in California is the School Plan for Student Achievement (SPSA). Although it requires schools to develop a plan that meets ESSA requirements, this plan must include a needs-assessments and the development of goals and strategies. There is no mention of a school vision. This gap creates confusion. On one hand, administrators have the duty to develop a shared vision to drive continuous improvement as the standards state. On the other, all forms and plans required by the state and federal government, skip this part and require the development of goals and strategies. As a Latina leader, I faced this dilemma. Therefore, I sought other sources of guidance. I poured over research available to me related to school accountability and improvement.

The literature review related to accountability for educational leaders is clear. Educational leaders are held by standards that require them to establish a shared vision based on data, that should be used to guide improvement efforts. State and federal accountability forms do not require a vision. They require goals and action. There is little literature that explains how to develop a shared vision in an accountability driven context. As a Latina leader, I searched for literature that would help me identify the best ways to implement a vision that would be shared, based on data,

that would also be actionable. The research I found was related to effective schools, best teaching practices, best adult learning practices, and distributed leadership. Most of the authors did not look like me or shared similar backgrounds or challenges. In addition, they did not suggest the best ways to create a shared vision. Nevertheless, to imagine what a compelling future in a school like mine would look like, I needed to understand best practices in this context and what teachers would be doing. Following are some highlights of this research.

Effective School Practices

New administrators depend on blending theory and practice, understanding how to help their teachers, and understanding equity gaps to lead their sites successfully (Westberry & Hornor, 2022). These books become a needed resource for administrators. Two authors that specialize in school improvement are Dr. Fullan and Dr. Reeves.

Michael Fullan (1992, 2002, 2003, 2008) argues that principals are better off spending time creating collaborative cultures rather than spending time creating a vision. Fullan (2003) discusses how principals need to be change agents that influence the school and the individual teachers, thus changing the context of the school. The implication is that if a school is not performing, this can be influenced by the principal by creating a few goals that are clear and attainable. Later in his research, Fullan (2014) discusses how principals need to have a clear moral purpose to do what is best for students and that creating coherence is most important.

Doug Reeves is the author of the *90-90-90 Schools* research. He studied the common characteristics of schools that were 90% successful, 90% ethnically diverse, and 90% of their students lived in poverty. Reeves (2004), suggests that two important concepts for success are to have student-centered accountability and to look at teaching practices. He further states, "…the research is clear that variables in teaching, curriculum, and leadership are profoundly important. In fact, these variables—which teachers and leaders can control—have more influence over student achievement than the intractable variables of poverty, culture, and language" (p. 79).

These assertions keep the focus on leaders and teachers, who are at the core of student success. Dr. Reeves (2011) suggests that a vision without implementation is a waste of time. He adds that people take too long trying to craft the perfect vision statement and action takes a second seat.

These two researchers resonated with me. I also have a moral purpose and I work in areas that are ethnically diverse and poverty stricken. I believe that continuous improvement is necessary, and the focus should be on leaders and teachers. Together we could design a compelling future well defined by a shared vision. Furthermore, it could serve as a great impetus for achieving our moral purpose and coherence. We could serve as change agents if a vision is operationalized from the beginning and becomes a set of agreements that leads to coherence and an action plan.

Effective Teaching Practices

There are many authors that have focused their research on best teaching practices. Doug Fisher & Nancy Frey (2008, 2021) provide many strategies focused on best practices for English

Learners as well as student centered practices. For example, they expanded the Gradual Release of Responsibility (2012) and added student collaborative practices where they would practice new target academic language. They created time for Structured Language Practice, which also served to help English Learners develop new language in English. Considering quantitative meta-analysis of best practices, John Hattie (2009) and Tomas Marzano (2001, 2005, 2009) had important findings that reaffirmed the school effectiveness research. Hattie (2009) argues that his meta-study finds the power of Collective Teacher Efficacy as having the highest positive impact on student learning. Tomas Marzano (2001, 2005, 2009) went a step further and linked Effective Schools Research and Teacher Effectiveness where he identified that effective teachers who work in effective schools actually have the highest student outcomes.

These authors provided the affirmation that teachers that work in collaboration and are focused on student outcomes will have the most impact on positive outcomes for students. In addition, all efforts should be student centered.

Distributed Leadership

This research suggests that schools need to help their teachers collaborate with their peers and administration. This is what will help everyone learn from each other and improve the school system together. Here are three sources.

Richard Elmore (2000) brings up the idea that school leaders cannot be solely responsible for school reform. In this new era of standards, teachers are the ones to implement them. Leaders need to be aware of their context, their community, and their teachers. He states that shared leadership is the only way leaders will accomplish their goals. Elmore (2009) also suggested the practice of Instructional Rounds and compares them to those in the medical field. To understand where learning occurs, we must look at our current teaching practices and do it collaboratively with teachers to identify how to improve student learning. He suggests that if we want to learn about student learning, we need to look at the cause, which is teaching. These observation-discussion-analysis practices should be shared as they take place, so there is a higher understanding on what strategies are the most successful. He calls improvement "a change with direction" (p. 13) which implies that all changes should be working towards the same vision of success.

Rick Dufour (2004) was an expert in Professional Learning Communities (PLC). He discussed multiple components of an effective PLC. Most importantly, the main focus of a PLC is to engage in collective inquiry to explore student learning and the best practices that would result in the best student outcomes.

Matthew C. Militello (2009) established the use of a Cycle of Inquiry to help principals improve teaching and learning. His book, *Leading with Inquiry and Action* discusses how to use the Collaborative Inquiry Action Cycle at the site level or at the grade level. It is a tool that helps leaders engage in cycles of action and evaluation to identify issues in practice.

The prior three references on distributed leadership have a clear alignment to andragogy, adult learning theory. If teachers work collectively on relevant topics, such as their own teaching practices and their students, they will more likely be engaged. If they operate as problem solvers

in their own practice, they will also be empowered to do more. Malcom Knowles' theory, included in his book, *The Adult Learners* (2020) describes adult learner theory as transformative, in which adults engage as agents in their own practice by following these principles: a self-directed, experiential, and problem-centered approach to learning.

Two other strategies that are related to adult learning and have a direct impact on vision development are: identifying micropolitics in a school and how to translate values into operational principles. The idea of understanding micropolitics in a school (Malen, 1994) suggests that leaders need to understand the power relations that exist in schools. Principals need to know and recognize those who make the decisions in that school, the de facto leaders. This is important information when you are learning the lay of the land before the vision is developed. The second strategy is called *Totems, Taboos, and Repetitive Interactions* (Zuieback, 2013). Zuieback suggests that values can be translated into principles by asking people about the behaviors that would be congruent with their values (repetitive interactions), the behaviors that would violate these values (taboos), and the quantifiable measures they could achieve (totems.) This strategy was adapted with the purpose of translating a compelling future into tangible commitments.

Latina Leadership: Mis Valores y Talentos

Culture is a very complex concept and there has been extensive research in the comparison of individualistic cultures and collectivist cultures in many dimensions (Fatehi, K. et al., 2020). Cultural values among collectivist cultures center on the benefit of the family and community (Hui, C. H. & Triandis, H. C., 1986). I grew up in Lima, Peru and our cultural values are congruent to those of a collectivist culture. Nevertheless, immigrating to the United States as a young wife, married to an American Anglo-Saxon, and having three children before going into education, brings its own unique perspectives. My values are my own. I believe in bilingualism, multiculturalism, collaboration, social justice, integrity, and always doing my best. As a leader, I had the challenge of working with people I did not know but felt responsible for them and their wellbeing. I believed that students needed to be treated as I would want my children to be treated. Finally, I was unapologetic when it came to students' rights. Juana Bordas (2001) suggests that there are three common values that permeate the Latino culture. They are *Confianza, Respeto*, and *Simpatía*. *Confianza* or inspiring trust is a key concept that we take seriously that is aligned to caring for others and having the best intentions for them. In addition, the concept of *mi palabra es impecable*, is very important. You can trust what I say because my word is law. Being respectful also comes with being humble. I learned at a very young age the concept of *respetos guardan respetos* and is central to my core values. I must initiate these respectful interactions. Finally, being polite and non-confrontational is very important and not easy sometimes. Being an administrator requires you to confront some injustices but it is our approach that makes a difference. Being completely direct and straightforward in a difficult conversation is not that easy for me.

Conclusion of the Literature Review

The literature review starts with a deeper look at accountability systems for administrators. A gap is found when comparing accountability for individual leaders in education and their required accountability tasks. To meet their evaluation standards, educational leaders must develop and sustain a shared vision at their sites (NPBEA, 2015; CPSELS, 2014). This vision must be based on data, take into account core values, be student centered, and share an understanding within the school and the community. When accountability at the site level is explored, there is no mention of a site vision. The focus is on goals, strategies, and measurements (CDE, 2023). Leaders then must find the way to do both. They must understand their context, their students' needs, and the accountability systems that they are evaluated by. They must use their own knowledge, their strengths, and how to organize and lead the adults in their organization.

As a Latina leader, the research that focuses on distributed leadership aligns well to my belief systems. Coming from a collectivist culture, being the oldest daughter in a family of 6, and being the mother of three before working in the field of education, gave me a unique perspective. The values related to *familismo* and *simpatia* are part of the building blocks of my self-actualization as a Latina leader (Ortiz, 2020). Collaboration is required for success, for innovation, and for progress. Collaboration is tied to familismo in which the school is a family and we will transform together. We will reach our goals together. In addition, social justice and equity are also at the core of my upbringing. My *mami* used an example often, where she compared us, her children, to the fingers in her hand. She would say,

> *Ves los dedos de mi mano? Son cinco dedos diferentes y cada uno tiene su tarea especial. Pero juntos, son poderosos y pueden hacer muchas cosas. A la vez, yo le doy a cada uno de Uds. lo que cada uno necesita. Y no porque le doy a uno, le doy al otro. Solo les doy lo que cada uno necesita.*

This visualization gave me direction throughout life. *Todos tendrán lo que necesitan.* Collaboration is key (Hattie, 2009; Marzano, 2009). Together, we can give teachers and students what they need. Our unique characteristics make things even better. Distributed leadership resonated with that.

The literature review suggests that teachers need to work collaboratively and look at instructional practices and their impact on student learning (Elmore, 2000; Dufour, 2004; Militello, 2009; Knowles, 2020). In this article, as a Latina leader, I propose that leaders need to start getting to know the context of their new assignment and get to know the people working in it first (Malen, 2009). The second step is to conceptualize a clear and compelling future with teachers and with those that have the most influence over student learning. This process ensures that multiple viewpoints and multiple perspectives can agree on what would be the best scenario possible for a school that is working effectively. This starts with an asset-based mindset and looking at equitable practices. Collectively, we could identify specific best practices and describe what they would look like if we implemented them at our site (Zuieback, 2013). Our teachers are our best resource for ideas and for making these ideas come to fruition. So, the first step is to establish our direction, or true north.

Methodology

The methodology used in this paper is that of Storytelling and Testimonio. It is a call to action. Currently, most administrators fail to take the time to develop a shared vision with their partners. They are quick at pointing out deficits and data gaps and telling their staff what to do. This prescriptive approach often falls on deaf ears. This narrative is considered a qualitative method that is used to increase understanding and to develop a sense of urgency. It is not a myth or fable or accidental in nature. It is rather based on multiple experiences that were carefully planned and resulted in successful outcomes through many years of application and lived experiences. This testimonio is "intentional and political" (Reyes and Curry, 2012) and it aims to challenge issues related to inequities and educational reform in a Eurocentric institution (Delgado Bernal et al, 2012). My first assignment as a leader was to turn a school around that was struggling. Besides a drop in state scores, there had been 4 principals in 2 years, the school had high numbers of student suspensions, teacher grievances, and low attendance. Boundaries had changed and the number of English Learners increased significantly. Teachers were not happy about this change. Bottom line was, 70% of the students and their families looked and sounded like me. I questioned the decision of the superintendent to place me in a school that was plagued by disruptions in parent meetings by the political voices against any Spanish translation for parents. He had *confianza* in me. I had to find a way to build a team in this context. I had to reach deeply and tap into the strategies I was familiar with that would be transformational, transparent, and that would build trust. My Testimonio shares the strategies I used and improved year after year based on lessons learned as a Latina growing up in a collectivist culture where collaboration, common goals and the success of the community are most valued. Thus, the approach utilized in this Testimonio is highly relational (Ortiz, 2020), "through positive and nurturing interactions with others" (p. 484). To give a sense of a true Testimonio, I am using *mi lengua* and code switching to illustrate my own unique experiences.

Déjame que Te Cuente

There are two parts to this story. First, you need to get to know your context. You are new in this environment, so you are the outsider. You know this feeling very well. You are an immigrant, you are a second language learner, and you must learn to navigate this new world, new culture. You learn that although things are different, you need to understand these differences. My mom always told me, *Hablando se entiende la gente*. I knew it would help me build trust. It is time to use this skill. Listen first, and foremost, listen to understand. The context of where you are is very important. "What is the common language? What is the culture? You need to learn those before you can be accepted as a member of the community. Once you know your people and your context, you are ready to set a destination (Vision) which constitutes the second part of the story.

First Step: ***Conoce a tu Gente y a tu Patria***

For this stage, *tus primeros pasos*, you need to understand your context. That includes the community, the people that work in this place, what their belief systems are and the structures that are in place. In other words, you need to learn the culture and the system where it lives.

First, assess the situation. One of my mentors, Dr. V., advised me to conduct a "Listening and Learning Tour." You need to learn the landscape, your community, your people. Talk to everybody informally, visit classrooms, ask parents, community members, etc. "Feel" the school. Talk to the school secretary and custodian as your top experts. This will help you start feeling the school, but this is not enough, you need to collect data.

Go Deeper -To get a hold of what is happening at the school behind closed doors, you will have to be more strategic in data gathering. At this point, it is you and them. They are the experts. You just joined them. What do they value? What are their perceptions of their school? What do they expect from you? Would teachers and staff have their own kids attend this school? Ask everybody! To accomplish this, you will have to strategize (Review, H. B., 2017). Although this is a business practice, I adjust the questions to fit the context and the culture of the site.

Strategy #1: Formal Interviews

Conduct formal Interviews. Schedule 10–15-minute individual interviews with every staff member. Start by being sincere and truly caring about their wellbeing. Ask about them, their families, their goals. Then you will follow with questions that ask them about their school, their opinions, their perceptions, and their hopes. Here are a few simple questions you can ask:

1. **What is the one thing you are most proud of at this school?** If we had an opportunity to re-open the school, what would you want to take with us?
   This will give you an insight of what they value, which programs they like (and see if this is because the program works or because it makes their lives easier. Sometimes their answer is completely unexpected and unrelated to the program itself.
2. **What is something that needs to go away or needs to be restructured?** There are usually three types of answers. Some will tell you which programs should be eliminated completely. Others will tell you about things that need to be "fixed." And thirdly, staff will tell you of the current issues that could be fixed now (low hanging fruit.) Make sure you ask them what is wrong, exactly. Ask for details. This will help you later when you are mapping their answers.
3. **What can I count on you to do outside of your current role?** We are not asking a person to restate what is in their job description. We are asking them to voice their level of commitment for the students and the school. This can be a scary question, especially when a teacher is overwhelmed with their own class assignment and the daily challenges they face. Nevertheless, these questions make them open themselves up to the school as a member of a community, a responsibility that goes beyond their classroom and makes them think of strengths that they can put into practice.

4. **What do you expect of me?** This can be a scary question for you, the administrator. Maybe their expectations are beyond what you thought your role would be. But just like in the last three questions, you will start understanding the needs of the staff and the school in a different way. It will help you see the bigger picture and it will challenge you to think of new ideas, new challenges and actions that have been neglected for a while, including, the low hanging fruit.

Strategy #2: Expand the Circle

Take the questions to all classified staff, parents, and students. Due to the numbers, you will have to ask these questions in a different setting. Gather focus groups and start with your personal story, what are your passions, and your dreams as an educator. Then follow up with the same questions.

You already might have different leadership groups taking place on your campus such as the English Learner Advisory, African American Advisory, Associated Student Body, Athletics, etc. Take the same questions to them and ask them in a group setting, adjusting the questions appropriately.

Strategy #3: Analyze Your Results: El Mapa Politico

You now have enough information to create a political map. What are the needs, who are the players, what are their goals? Both personal and for the school. Who is willing to collaborate with you? Who do you need to work with? Who are the leaders? You are trying to understand the power relations in this place (Malen, 1994).

To organize all this information, you must map it out. We call this the SoCal approach. My friends from Southern California would appreciate this name. You read it here first!

Strengths
Off limits
Changes needed
Aspirations
Low hanging fruit

Create a map of the answers and identify trends, such as strengths, areas that are off limits for now, perceptions of things to be eliminated or changed, aspirations and hopes for the school. In addition, identify the "low hanging fruit" and take care of it as quickly as possible. You could use other methods, like the Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats (SWOT) Analysis (Fea, 1973), but what is the fun in that? Let's go over each component.

Strengths: Through your interviews you will understand what teachers and staff perceive as their strengths. In my experience, the more challenging the environment, the more connected to each other people will be. They are survivors, so they had to rely on each other to 'make it." Therefore, they consider each other their biggest asset. This is a great opportunity for you since they have become your best assets as well, your human resources.

Off limits: Through these interviews, you will also find what is near and dear to their hearts. Besides each other, they might have some traditions that they will not give up for anything! Tread lightly! Even if you think this needs to change or go away, wait. As the new administrator, you are in no position to make such change. Remember that you are in your Listening and Learning Tour. One of the biggest mistakes made by eager and new administrators is to make changes and add new things without consulting with the people that have run this place for years.

Changes needed: This might be your only opportunity to make changes at first. Do not be hasty. In your interviews, when they say that something needs to go, it might be related to a district mandate or a great program. For example, teachers might tell you that evaluations need to go. That is impossible and outside of your purview. Be sure to pay attention to the details that need changing that are within your sphere of influence. Your analysis of these answers is critical!

Aspirations: Many staff members will express their desires through these interviews. When they answer Questions # 1 and 2, they are telling you what they love about their place, and what needs changing. Read between the lines. What do they wish for? What are their aspirations?

Low hanging fruit: This is key to building trust. Just like you identify their aspirations, they will also mention things that could be easily addressed: the gate that should remain locked for safety; the number of copies assigned to each teacher; a quick change in schedule; the number of bells before and after lunch; or others.

These actions will build trust. You sincerely want the best for the school, and you are showing that. Now they know you are listening. Paciencia.

Segundo Paso: *A Dónde Vamos?*

Creating a Shared Vision: The Missing Link in Continuous Improvement Efforts.

Now that you know the lay of the land, it is time to co-create a clear destination in our journey. You are starting to act and feel like a community member. People understand you want the best for the school, so it is time to start clarifying what that means. Have you ever had the thought: "One day our school is going to be a school like that!" This phrase is one we use when we see a car go by and we say, "One day I will have a car like that." "One day I will have a career like that!" The good news is that as a new principal, you can co-design "a school like that." This would be a school where all adults work collaboratively to ensure every child has access to the resources they need to be successful. Sound familiar? We know that every school in the United States must have a vision to receive funding from the state or federal government. Unfortunately, many see creating a vision as compliance and not as a commitment made to every student that attends the school. In this manuscript, part of my intent is to show how imperative it is to have a clear and shared vision that will serve as the "true north" for all stakeholders in a school that desire to develop an equitable and just system for every student in their charge and any future student that will walk through their doors. To do that in an effective way there are several steps you need to follow, and although you may have heard about these in isolation, there is a systematic way to accomplish this. This new way empowers every staff member to see themselves as part of "a school like that."

Strategy #4: ***Develop Your Vision with Teachers.***

To accomplish any goal, you all need to move in the same direction, right? For this activity, you must start with the people that have the most influence over student success: teachers. The recommendations from the literature review are that teachers need to examine their own practices to identify any gaps in student learning. To identify some of these gaps, I adapted the activity that I learned from Steve Zuieback many years ago called–*Totems, Taboos and Repetitive Interactions* (2013)**.** I adapted this strategy to facilitate the goals I wanted to achieve. Zuieback recommends the following order: Repetitive Interactions, Taboos, and Totems. I changed the order. Instead of starting with Repetitive Interactions, I start with Totems, proceed with Repetitive Interactions and end with Taboos. I found that it is easier for people to dream about things that could be accomplished if everyone put forth the same effort. Starting with quantifiable accomplishments, especially those we are held accountable for, makes these dreams possible. Then we explore the behaviors of those people that would work in such a place (qualitative data). Then we discuss what we would never see in such a place which become the Taboos and part of the commitments.

Choose a time when teachers will be together for at least one hour of uninterrupted time. If you are working in a different context outside of a school setting, then work with the people that do the work in that department and that are directly responsible for the outcomes of that unit. I have replicated this activity as a director and as an assistant superintendent. Every time I have used this strategy, it results in people being empowered, ignited, and you can see the collective power immediately. Our goal here is to empower the adults in the organization, to do the work that will impact our ultimate goal, improving student outcomes. For this activity, you need to plan and monitor your time, so you do all three parts in one single session. This is critical to its success.

Totems- Our Dreams. Start with the concept of "a school like that." Ask the question, "If we were a school where all parents wanted to send their kids to, all teachers wanted to send their own kids or relatives to, what would that school accomplish? What are those measurable outcomes they would reach? Think about our current accountability measures, what would a school like that accomplish?

List all ideals that a school would accomplish, no matter how unattainable it seems at the present time. *Paciencia*, give people time to dream. You need to tap into their desires and into their possibilities. For this part, make sure we have quantitative measures, true signs of academic success that schools seek to accomplish.

Repetitive Interactions. Now that we can see our destination, ask the question, what would teachers in "a school like that" be seen doing all the time? What would be the observable behaviors of the teachers in such a school?

For this section, come up with as many behaviors that are within the teachers sphere of influence. Inevitably, they will want to come up with statements that include parents or students. You need to be in control, so you tell them that this is about us, the people in this room.

Taboos. Now that we know what our dream school looks like, let's talk about what we would never see in "a school like that." Depending on your context, this brainstorming is just as

powerful as the Totems and Repetitive Interactions. Teachers will share those things that they want to change in the school. Those behaviors that they no longer want to see.

The Wrap up. After these lists are completed, we need to consolidate what we just accomplished. First, we have a clear picture of where we want to go, our destination. The Totems serve as our goals. Second, we have a list of behaviors that we know would ensure success. These are now our commitments. We will start behaving like this and soon our goals will come to fruition. This statement by Douglas B. Reeves *(2009)* supports this idea. If we start behaving as "the school like that," as if we already had reached our Totems, then we will believe this is possible.

> Behavior precedes belief - that is, most people must engage in a behavior before they accept that it is beneficial; then they see the results, and then they believe that it is the right thing to do...implementation precedes buy-in; it does not follow it (p. 44).

If we start behaving like we agreed to, we will believe that this dream is possible. Finally, the taboos are those behaviors we want to minimize. All of us, not just the leader, are responsible to guard against them and to remind each other that this is not what we do here. It will take a collective effort to manage those negative behaviors.

Now we have our goal of becoming a "school like that" and we know what that looks like, what it doesn't, and what we can accomplish. We are moving from an accountability system that is not about compliance, but rather, it is about our commitment to make it happen.

Strategy #5: Making it Happen! Juntos Sí Podemos!

Memorialize your new vision. Create a chart with the commitments. Post them in the Teacher's Handbook. Bring them to every staff meeting or professional learning. They are part of us now. *At this school the staff is committed to…*

Share them with the rest of the school community. Have teachers come up with three vision statements or mottos that represent the "School like that" vision. Have a contest where every staff member, parent leader, and student votes for their favorite one. Once you have that Vision Statement, you can operationalize it with your goals and commitments. Memorialize them in a couple of murals and all the main communications for the school: Staff handbook, Student Handbook, Home to School Compact, District Plan, your evaluation. Once they are in print, you believe them, and you live them. You have invested in your social capital and human capital. Most importantly, your community partners share in this new vision for success.

Use the commitments as often as you can in staff meetings. Review them regularly and during moments of crisis, like rumblings from teachers during stressful moments, at the beginning of the year, before testing, at the end of the year.

Once there is clarity in your destination and your collective commitments, the learning community is ready to review the data and identify where they are now and where they want to go this year. Develop goals from the *Totems*, create assessments, monitoring tools, etc. These commitments and goals become the new way of "doing things around here". Goals must be SMART for the year, Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Timely. Staff is ready to have this conversation and most importantly, they know which behaviors will lead them to success.

Conclusion

This paper has described my Testimonio in the implementation of leadership strategies that were successful. Two main activities that could help leaders know their school and their context and that helps them develop a shared vision statement, operationalize it into commitments, and into goals. These strategies can be used in any school, district, or educational environment where a group of people are charged with the production of outcomes that ultimately lead to student success. The whole school community will not only feel like part of a solution, but they will also feel empowered and invigorated, up for the task at hand. As a Latina leader, I used my *talentos y valores* and braided them into my journey as an administrator that needed to comply with an accountability system imposed upon me.

Recommendations/*Consejos*

The first step for any administrator is to listen to understand while getting to know "their people," their most important resource. Using the SOCAL method will help a leader understand the landscape and build trust by systematically taking care of the low hanging fruit. Once this is established, the leader has an idea of where people want to go individually. Only then, the second activity can take place where the will of the group will begin to shine. This is the way collaborative structures can get started or repurposed.

Here are just some of the benefits of using this approach:

1. Building relationships
2. Building trust
3. Bringing clarity and co-constructing the vision or destination
4. Knowing your why
5. Empowering teachers
6. Moving from a "compliance" mindset to a "commitment" mindset
7. Increasing coherence by having all constituents be on the same page
8. Letting the experts (teachers) lead the way
9. Using the principles of adult learning theory
10. Being ready for data chats, cycles of inquiry, and establishing collaborative problem-solving teams.

My *Testimonio* provides the reader with a clear road map on how to mobilize the community to focus on student success. A shared vision is designed and implemented. With this approach, teachers start working together and co-constructing their commitments to the school and the students. In addition, the rest of the school community will also understand the vision for the site and will understand their purpose and role in the advancement of goals. I highly recommend that you use these strategies in the order provided. Getting to know the people has to always be first. Only then, can you begin to dream and envision "a school like that."

Con respeto,

A Latina leader

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BOOK REVIEW

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Bounding Greed: Worklife Integration and Positive Coping Strategies Among Faculty of Color in Early, Middle, and Late Career Stages at Comprehensive Universities
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In *Bounding Greed: Worklife Integration and Positive Coping Strategies Among Faculty of Color in Early, Middle, and Late Career Stages at Comprehensive Universities* (henceforth known as *Bounding Greed*), authors Guillaume and Martinez artfully craft an instructive template for faculty of Color in coping with the distressing culture of many comprehensive universities and the achievement of work-life balance. In this edited book, each author thoughtfully provides autoethnographies or *testimonios* to convey their personal and professional experiences at varying stages of their careers in higher education. The authors assert that it is with considerable difficulty and an often unmitigated microaggressive strain, faculty of Color experience a wave of personal and professional challenges that leave many disillusioned and emotionally traumatized. With

seemingly tangible barriers to tenure, retention, and promotion, faculty of Color at comprehensive universities experience intense bouts of racism, marginalization, isolation, and double standards. While navigating these incredible professional difficulties, faculty of Color also face an array of personal circumstances that, in tandem with the professional woes, lead to a high degree of emotional and psychological taxation. Using coping strategies to attenuate the stress endured by faculty of Color, this text offers a number of techniques that institutions would be wise to promote.

Part II Early Career

In chapter 2, *Becoming Mamascholar: Unlearning Oppsistional Thinking and Pursuing Opportunities both/and,* the author, Aeriel A. Ashlee, documents how the patriarchal conditioning of society positions her to feel guilty and makes women choose between professional and maternal responsibilities. Supplying life while breastfeeding a newborn daughter, the drain of domineering structures seemingly sapped the author of their vigor, as refrains such as "There is no good time to have kids as a womxn in higher academia" (p. 12) played vociferously in the background. Ashlee discusses the use of bell hooks' (1994) work and Anzaldua (1987), among others as salves in the traumatic circumstances of higher educational confines. The author gave birth to a daughter named Azaelea and how womxn of Color with career ambition must "work twice as hard to get half as far" (p. 12). While the challenges of breastfeeding Azaelea while navigating the professional space were also pronounced, the author used hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* as a source of comfort and support during difficult times. Striking a work-life balance is difficulty, but as Ashlee eloquently stated: "Sometimes work is the priority, and other times life and family take precedent" (p. 16).

Chapter 3 features the work of author Bernadeia Johnson entitled *From Trauma to Unicorns: Surviving the Afflictions of Teaching While Black and Female* and deftly shares the trauma associated with the intersection of Blackness and femaleness. Johnson discusses navigating the transition from school district superintendent to assistant professor at a university in Minnesota. Significantly, Johnson notes there is little ethnic diversity in this university setting. Unfortunately for many Faculty of Color, this is the unsettling reality, as Edwards and Ross (2017) found that Black faculty in particular often lacked *anticipatory professional socialization*, which, plainly stated, is a lack of understanding of professional mores and culture in a new, mostly White setting. Edwards and Ross suggest that mentorship is an effective technique to support new Black faculty. Intuitively, Johnson provides an essential statistic that undergirds the psychology of many conscientious Black educators, as they astutely point out that Black males have a 1 in 1,000 chance of being murdered by police. With this awareness and the ongoing attacks on critical race theory (CRT), Johnson maintains that microaggressions are a commonplace occurrence in their higher education setting. Johnson lists the following among coping strategies amid the personal and university-level challenges she encounters: spending time with family, connecting with professional networks, and seeking the help of a therapist.

In Chapter 4, *Balance vs. Integration: Finding an Alternative to the Work-Life Integration,* author Isela Peña notes early on that "I am not convinced the work-life balance is possible (p. 33), but also asserts that work-life balance implies the two existences are separate rather than blended.

Peña goes on to adroitly detail the challenges of serving as a program coordinator while completing a doctorate degree and as an assistant professor and offers key suggestions as to how faculty navigating similar struggles might cope. A salient step in achieving a measure of self-support is boundary setting. According to Peña, not giving out a personal cell number is an example of establishing parameters to nurture one's personal self. Additionally, taking time to disconnect from work and engage in fulfilling activities is another coping mechanism. Core to the strategies offered by Peña is the mentoring faculty of Color need, both inside and outside the institution. These resources were seminal in promoting healthy personal and professional existences, according to Peña.

In chapter 5, *Finding Joy and Balance Through Campus Engagement in Male Success Initiatives*, author Eligio Martinez, Jr. provides a strong understanding of the need for mentorship throughout one's journey. "Find something that brings you joy and stick to that' (p. 47). Inspired by the preceding sage words of a colleague, Martinez realized a passion for working with Latino boys in a local school context while developing his dissertation. While this partnership served dual purposes, it also seemingly provided a salve during difficult times, serving as a reminder that mentorship is central to development. Accordingly, Martinez suggests, incorporating your work into service. "We must not allow the things we are passionate about to be put on hold or discontinued because of the service responsibilities we have, but rather, make the work that we do part of our service" (p. 55). Martinez also lists learning how say no to diversity work and making time to connect with the community as vital inclusions to cope with workplace stressors.

Part III Mid-Career

Nancy Acevedo, author of Chapter 6, *You're Getting Bold: A ChicanaMotherScholar's Testimonio of Inward Healing and Outward Actions*, supplies an approach to achieving work-life integration and seeks to offer healing to the harms caused by academia and the heteropatriarchal society in which many were reared. Particularly striking is Acevedo's statement that "women are less likely to receive tenure if they have a child within five years of earning a doctorate degree" (p. 61). After skillfully providing context for their ascension into a tenure track faculty position, Acevedo, a first-generation college student, neatly chronicles the harrowing experiences of micro and arguably macroaggressive treatment they received as a faculty member. For example, after bringing her three-year-old daughter to the doctoral commencement, the ChicanaMotherScholar shared that she was unofficially chided for bringing her to the ceremony. Because of this and other stressors, Acevedo gives a few life-giving suggestions for successfully navigating the tumult. Among her suggestions are developing a scholarly (writing) community developing a writing familia, and doing service that matters.

In Chapter 7 *Pushing and Setting* Natalie Rasmussen relates their experience as a Black female science educator. Serving as a chemistry teacher in a predominantly Black school, Rasmussen witnessed "the full spectrum of Black life: Black love, Black conflict, Black joy, Black grief, Black shame, and Black pride" (p. 76). After earning a PhD and moving into higher education, Rasmussen, the scholar, wife, and mother, noted the palpable impact of racial battle

fatigue and the need to sufficiently gird against its causes and effects. Rasmussen catalogs White people in academia into four main groups: *the Cynics, the congregation, the Choir, and the Concordance,* with each detailing how White people position themselves around equity work. Using seminal texts such as Audre Lorde's *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1984) and Woods-Giscombé's *Superwoman Schema*, Rasmussen began to understand the core role of Black women in the academy. To combat the trauma regularly experienced by faculty of Color in academia, Rasmussen touts truly knowing who she is and asking for help, including help of the divine variety.

In Chapter 8 *Una Golondrina No Hace Verano,* author Maria de Lourdes Viloria relates how trauma-informed experiences as a first-generation college student and the lack of historical access to learning opportunities have shaped her identity. Viloria actively leans into the *consejo* tradition of valuing and seeking advice from those more knowledgeable or experienced. Similarly, Viloria intends to share consejos with future generations and intentionally chooses to call them scholars of Color. Viloria cites the troubling statistic that of all full-time faculty at degree-granting institutions, "3% each were Black males, Black females, Hispanic males, and Hispanic females" (p. 93). Accordingly, Viloria assumes a mentorship role with faculty of Color to help them develop social capital and effectively navigate the higher education landscape. Further, Among other offerings, Viloria provides the following coping strategies to faculty of Color: Providing outreach opportunities to prospective scholars of Color, granting scholars of Color opportunities to establish affinity-based relationships based on cultural responsiveness, and having experienced faculty of Color share their experiences with less-veteran faculty.

Part IV Late Career

With Chapter 9, *Being Asian American, Working Class, and Male,* Eugene Oropeza Fujimoto powerfully conveys the career challenges that taxed his marital relationship and his sanity. With a devotion to "life-affirming" (p. 108) diversity, equity, and inclusion work, Fujimoto shares how committing to those efforts required deep investment that came with expensive costs. As an Asian American male who has capably served as faculty and department chair, the challenge to resist the pervasiveness of Whiteness in education has been an active one and states that the dismantling of racial oppression comes from an earnest analysis of how "unearned privileges" (p. 109) are actualized and when they occur, as leaders are evaluated against a White backdrop of "believing, thinking and doing" (p. 109). Fujimoto pens three letters, one each to his niece, daughter, and a student. In every case, Fujimoto relates the value of self-care, building connectivity with others, and challenging normativity. The letters serve as a form of mentorship to the recipients and offer real chances at reflexivity among them.

In Chapter 10 *Overcoming Burdens of Identity When Being Perceived as the Underdog,* author Mahmoud Suleiman begins by dexterously pointing out that higher education institutions were not designed for faculty and students of Color. With this realization in place, Suleiman relates his experiences as a survivor of a war-ridden environment and how he strove to overcome the "...fear, marginalization, oppression, and racism" (p. 121) to ultimately serve as a University

professor, department chair, Fulbright Scholar, mentor, etc. Suleiman imparts the advice he was given upon applying for a professorship at one university, relating he was asked: "*Why apply to this campus, especially if you are originally from the Middle East where most people here would despise you and hate the ground you walk on, despite what you have to offer?*" (p. 127). Suleiman poignantly shares his experience with the tenure review process, detailing how unjust, opaque, and uncomfortable the process was for him. With the attendant challenges to his existence as a faculty of Color, Suleiman provides, among others, the following suggestions for coping mechanisms: Being true to oneself at all times, being strategic in choosing battles, and attacking problems, not persons.

Frank Lucido, the author of Chapter 11: *Hay Que Trabajar Para Vivir, No Vivir Para Trabajar,* supplies a compelling testimony of personal trauma and professional challenges. With the early death of his father and grandfather, Lucido and his mother worked to ensure a safe, prosperous existence. Entering higher education many years later as an adjunct faculty member was fraught with challenges, however. Lucido found that life as an adjunct was difficult and tenure track were few. When an opportunity did arise, Lucido states, "I did not get the royal treatment that other candidates received since they already knew my abilities…" (p. 139). Ultimately, although Lucido earned the tenure track post and spent a long career serving students and the university, a health scare forced him to emphasize personal reflection, setting goals, and family time. Lucido reminds readers to "don't ever forget the importance of life-work integration to be a better academic for all our personal families and our university students!!" (p. 144).

Bounding Greed grants readers access to the lives of its authors and delivers pragmatic suggestions based on the need to generate work-life balance. With simple reminders such as spending time with family and being true to yourself among the many meaningful offerings, readers can conduct additional research on those topics to find the best approach for their particular circumstances. While these techniques all have great import and potential for supporting faculty of Color, Peña maintains that suggestions alone will not solve the problems. "In the absence of a collective effort and structural changes by universities, we will continue to grapple with this issue" (p. 32). That said, all the provided coping mechanisms are sound and carry varying forms of applicability, but the onus for supporting faculty of Color, with some measure of balance, should in large part, be borne by institutions of higher education, as the achievement of balance would likely improve interpersonal relationships and productivity in the workplace. Unequivocally, all faculty, particularly faculty of Color, would benefit from reading *Bounding Greed*.

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