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A Professional Profile of Culturally Responsive Continuation High School Principals

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A Professional Profile of Culturally Responsive Continuation High School Principals

by

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A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

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This dissertation written by Benjamin Wardrop, under the direction of the Dissertation
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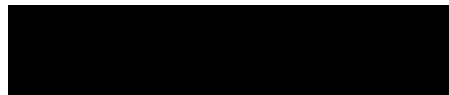requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

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Our challenge is not to educate the children we used to have or want to have, but to

educate the children who come to the schoolhouse door.

–H. G. Wells

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

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With more than 10% of all high school age students taking classes at a continuation school at some point in their high school career, this normally forgotten alternative learning environment is one that serves many of our most historically marginalized student groups: Black, Latinx, those with learning differences, and English Learners (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Leadership in schools is the difference-maker in student learning efficacy (Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Whitaker, 2020). This qualitative study was situated on the theoretical framework created by Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL). The aim of this study was to build a professional profile of effective continuation school principals to help guide current practitioners, aid district leadership in identifying candidates best suited to lead their continuation schools, and how to train future leaders. Data was collected via interviews with nine principals of model continuation schools, the highest honor such a school can receive from the California Department of Education (2022a). Data showed that the study participants embodied many of the tenets set forth in CRL, but were not as strong in specific modeling and fostering cultural responsiveness in others. As described earlier, the opportunities for professional growth and collaboration across schools and principals is not well developed statewide. This area for growth is one of the most substantial opportunities the continuation school community has to improve professional practices and improve learning outcomes for all students across the state of California.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Continuation schools are one in a list of many different types of alternative schools, also referred to as *education options* by the California Department of Education (CDE) (California Department of Education [CDE], 2020). Alternative schools play an important role in the larger educational landscape, filling a small yet important niche to serve students that benefit from an alternative educational setting. According to the CDE (2020), an alternative school is a voluntary option that provides alternative means of meeting grade-level standards and meeting student needs. Alternative schools include: community day, independent study, home and hospital, adult, adult transition, and continuation. The different types of alternative schools are explained in more detail in Appendix A. All of these alternative schools "provide the environment, curriculum, and support systems needed to ensure that they achieve their full academic potential" (CDE, 2020, n.p.). Unfortunately, despite this goal, at-promise students are already at a disadvantage when they arrive at continuation schools due to policies and practices that limit the effectiveness of the schools.

This qualitative study that collected data through one-on-one interviews with current principals from model continuation high schools in the state of California endeavored to answer the question: What are the leadership qualities of Model Continuation High School principals that allow them to ensure historically marginalized students engage with and find success in school? Using the resulting data, this study aimed to define a professional profile of effective school principals in the continuation school setting. With one in ten students in California attending a continuation school,

normally due to the student having previous academic, behavioral, or attendance issues, effective leadership is essential in ensuring these students do not become drop-outs (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012)[1].

Continuation high schools, as defined by the CDE (2020), are for students 16 to 18 years old in need of credit recovery and have a focus on planning for post-secondary life. They tend to be much smaller than traditional high schools in total students; typically supporting less than one tenth the student enrollment of a typical public high school. In California, continuation schools have hosted about 10% of all high school student enrollments (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Many districts are not large enough to support more than one continuation school servicing their local education agency with 425 continuation high schools spread across 1,037 local education agencies across the state of California (CDE, 2021).

Students enrolled in continuation schools represent at-promise[2] youth, defined as, "students who may fail to earn a high school diploma for a variety of reasons, including irregular attendance, low motivation, a past record of academic underachievement, economic disadvantage, or low scores on math or English standardized tests" (CDE, 2020, n.p.). Many of these students enrolled at a continuation school in hopes of recovering credits and graduating from high school in a timely manner. Others have been involuntarily sent to continuation schools as a disciplinary action. Some students come to

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[1] Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) and Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2012) are referenced often in this literature review. Even though the most current report is dated from 2012, their data collection is considered to be the leading source in continuation school data across California (M. Ilic, personal communication, September 25, 2021).

[2] The term "at-promise" is described in more detail later in this chapter. Other terms are used throughout the study that can be viewed as harsh or insensitive. Some of these terms include at-risk, forgotten students, discarded, dumping ground, etc. These terms are specifically used to draw attention to the stigma attached to continuation schools and to pay tribute to the original language used by referenced studies in the review of literature.

the continuation school setting after being discarded by private or charter schools not equipped or willing to get students back on track, moving towards graduation. Still more students are moved to continuation school due to issues with attendance (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). No matter the reason for being moved to a continuation school, whether it be by choice or because there is no other option, students are normally behind on earning credits and in need of making up for lost time due to missing class or failing grades (Berliner et al., 2009).

What are Alternative Schools?

What alternative education looks like across the United States of America is defined by each state, with 43 states and the District of Columbia having formal definitions of alternative education as of 2014 (Porowski et al., 2014). Lange and Sletten (2002) found that alternative programs generally serve students who are at risk of school failure or who have been marginalized from the traditional education setting.

Through a national survey during the 2007-2008 school year, 64% of school districts reported offering some form of alternative school or program for students not on track for academic and socio-emotional success (Carver et al., 2010). While the 2010 report funded by the United States Department of Education investigated state definitions and programs across the United States, there were no data gathered on target populations in California, which was the setting of this study. Not including California, 24 other states identified alternative education as an offering for high school age students. Of those, 18 states identified alternative programs being focused on at-promise students (Carver et al., 2010).

Considering this data, California was not alone in the offerings or struggles that come with alternative schools, but it was not an academic offering that was applied across the United States as a whole. This study now aimed to define alternative education, and specifically continuation schools.

What is an Alternative School in California?

What can be done to improve the outlook for our most at-promise students if they are attending failing schools? California's dropout rate steadily maintained around 2.4%, as was reported in the most recent data released for the 2016-2017 cohort (CDE, 2021). Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2012) reported a much higher rate of 30% while the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) wreaked havoc on graduation rates across the state. The CAHSEE was a required test to be passed by all seniors in high school in California, starting with the class of 2004. Then in 2015, California Senate Bill 172 (2015) eliminated the assessment of candidacy for a high school diploma, following the lead of many other states across the United States (Harrington & Freedberg, 2021). Some of these students drop out and never returned to school, others made their way to alternative schools (Sperling, 2020). In one study, a majority of students reported the traditional school setting did not meet their needs academically, emotionally, or socially (Sperling, 2020). Sussman et al. (1995) found that continuation school students reported using drugs at a rate of three to five times higher than students enrolled at a comprehensive high school. Drug use was mainly attributed to peer pressure and a desire by students to alter their emotional state (Galaif et al., 1998; Sussman et al., 1995). With students fighting battles on many fronts, it was no surprise the transfer of learning environments to an alternative school was difficult. With all of these negative effects, it is no wonder

continuation schools have a negative stigma attached to them and extending to their students (Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012; Shea & Muir Giles, 2012; Sussman et al., 1995). What has led to this negative stigma? How does it affect the students at these schools?

Exploring the efforts of many great educators working with all stakeholders (parents, students, staff and community agencies) to provide exemplary learning environments for all students, no matter their socio-economic standing, behavioral history, or racial background helped define the alternative education environment and direction for effective schools. These educators are building self-efficacy and empowering at-promise students to guide their pathway from continuation schools to adulthood (O'Brien & Curry, 2009). This highlighted the need for continuation school educators to teach students soft skills and life skills, not just core content standards because students need to be educated as whole children, not just on the academic pathway or language arts and math.

What is a Continuation School?

The CDE (2020) defined the more than 425 continuation schools in the state of California as an alternative diploma program for students 16 years of age or older and at risk of not graduating. Continuation schools are under-serviced and easily forgotten by policy makers, district leaders, and the educational system as a whole (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). These shortcomings include substandard curriculum delivery and standard attainment, inadequate support services for academic success and personal well-being, along with the negative stigma attached to these last-chance schools (Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012; Shea & Muir, 2012;

Sussman et al., 1995). In looking at what continuation schools can do to improve results, Berliner et al. (2009) determined the need to increase credit recovery options, develop plans for earlier identification of students in need of credit recovery, and pour resources into the re-enrollment of those students that have since dropped out of school. All of these hurdles acted as restraints on the progression of each individual student.

The purpose of continuation schools was established by California Education Code (1976/2020) 48430, in which the legislation intends these schools to provide:

- an opportunity for students to complete required courses and meet graduation requirements,

- an instructional program emphasizing occupational orientation and intensive counseling, and

- a programmatic design meeting individual student needs in connection with regional occupational programs, work study, career counseling, and job placement services, supplementing classroom instruction.

Fulton and Pepe (2016) depicted continuation schools, through their documentary film, as a last chance opportunity for students to graduate that might not be available at a traditional high school. Students were struggling with teen parenting, drug use, trauma, and lack of belief in self. All of which affect the focus and effort put into their academics, ultimately making the process of earning their diploma a great challenge (Fulton & Pepe, 2016). These defining barriers to academic success and common struggles attributed to continuation school students were explored in more detail in the following section.

Who are the Students at Continuation Schools?

Students at continuation high schools are a vulnerable group in desperate need of a positive schooling experience, with continuation schools being the last option within a school district after all other options have failed. Research has shown that if students are unsuccessful in alternative schools, including district and county continuation schools, they have been more likely to experience undesirable outcomes including dropping out of high school or incarceration (Sussman et al., 1995). With such a notable number of students enrolled in continuation schools, and the majority of them having been disconnected from the school social fabric, it is extremely important that such schools are guided by impactful school leaders creating a learning environment focused on student success.

At-risk vs At-promise

On October 12, 2019, California Assembly Bill No. 413 (Education: At-promise Youth, 2019) was signed into law by the governor of California. This bill, authored by a group of six state assembly members and state senators, deleted the term "at-risk" and replaced it with "at-promise" in Education and Penal Codes. The change in language in 23 state codes set a precedent for a growth mindset, deleting the fixed mindset of the regressive language previously used in these codes that immediately set a negative tone with the term "at-risk." This change in language had an impact across all educational settings, but was specifically impactful in the continuation school setting (Samuels, 2020). Similar adjustments in terminology have taken place in alternative educational settings in the United Kingdom and Australia. Te Riele's (2006) study based in Australia changed commonly used language like "youth-at-risk" to "marginalized students"

because the chosen term identified and focused on the relationship with school and not the students' personal characteristics.

All students enrolled at continuation schools are inherently at-promise because they are not on track for graduation, in need of social emotional support, and/or for behavioral reasons. The change of tone has set the stage for changing the narrative around continuation schools and the stigma attached to everything associated with them from students, to employees, to the student outcomes (Hernandez, 2018).

Who does the Continuation School Serve?

Continuation schools service many different subgroups of students that have struggled to achieve success in a traditional school setting. Not all students function well in a large high school, nor one that uses a traditional educational mode. According to California Education Code (1976/2020), continuation schools are meant for students between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age. Nearly 1 in 10 students in California are enrolled in continuation schools and as many as one in seven seniors attend continuation school (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Considering these staggering numbers, is this a statement about the educational policies and practices of the school system (Ladson-Billings, 2005), or a result of multiple familial and societal factors creating a perfect storm for these students (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994)?

It is clear many familial and societal factors have an effect on the students' belief in self. Some of the students suffer from emotional behavioral disabilities (Fallon & Feinberg, 2017; Minkos et al., 2018), drug abuse (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998; Lisha, 2012), socio-emotional factors (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998), and a negative stigma projected on the students of continuation schools (Barajas, 2021;

Hernandez, 2018; Sperling, 2020). Not only do they battle with the social pressures of the traditional high school setting, they all have non-school factors affecting their focus on education and lack of self-belief. These include abuse in the home, socio-economic stressors, societal stigma, and community elements include gangs, violence and drug use (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Nygreen, 2013; Taylor et al., 2015; Wiest et al., 1998). Students cannot focus on their education if basic life components are not met (Maslow, 1943).

The majority of students report that they plan to attend college after graduating from continuation school, but teachers tell a different story; that of students focusing on work, having children, or joining a gang within a year of high school graduation (Sussman et al., 1995). This observation and stark contrast of student outcomes according to the source is indicative of the state of California's shortcomings in the tracking of student outcomes after high school. There have been attempts to document post-high school pathways, like higher education, employment, or military service, but no easily accessible or functional way is used statewide. This is a problem for all school types, not just continuation schools, but the lack of data cuts shorts the analysis of praxis for continuation schools, thus creating a social justice issue.

Why are Continuation Schools a Social Justice Issue?

Continuation schools do not get the necessary attention, due to the fact they serve underperforming marginalized students (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Considering the data in Figure 1, there are many overrepresentations in historically marginalized student groups.

Figure 1

Continuation School Infographic

CONTINUATION EDUCATION DATA

425
Continuation schools across California

106
Model Schools with such distinction from CDE

47%
Of students are enrolled in any one school for less than 90 days, giving very little time to continuation schools to enact dramatic change

Enrollment Percentage
Continuation School vs. **California State**

(bar chart: ELs, SpEd, Hispanic, African-American; axis 0 to 60)

GRADUATION RATE:
~50%
Of alternative schools across the US have graduation rates below 50%

STATEWIDE:
14%
of all seniors are enrolled in continuation schools

Note: Adapted from "California's Continuation Schools" by EdSource, 2008, https://edsource.org/wp-content/publications/ContinuationSchools08.pdf, copyright 2008 by EdSource; "Alternative Education Options: A Descriptive Study of California Continuation High Schools" [Issue Brief] by Ruiz de Velasco, J., Austin, G., Dixon, D. Johnson, J., Mclaughlin, M., & Perez, L., 2008, *California Alternative Education Research Project, John W. Gardner Center for Youth and Their Communities, National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University, and WestEd, h*ttps://www2.wested.org/www-static/online_pubs/AEOIssueBrief-4-08.pdf, copyright 2008 by John W. Gardener Center for Youth and Their Communities, National Center for Urban School Transformation at San Diego State University, and WestEd.

Figure 1 highlights one shortcoming in the continuation education world: statewide data is not clear due to specific reporting not being attached to schools classified as continuation. This poses a huge problem for the students in most need. Not only are many continuation school students jaded by their previous experiences with the school system, but also need an immediate turn around in their classroom performance. Continuation school students' acute needs, as well as the timeline for credit recovery, create a situation in which it is essential continuation schools employ high-quality, experienced educators and leaders. This is done with the teachers that work directly with the students in the classroom, the support staff providing socio-emotional services, classified staff supporting marginalized families, and administration leading the school community in

creating a supportive and successful educational environment. The California Code of Regulations §80338 (2022) requires certificated school personnel in all school settings to provide certificated services without discrimination. This concept may seem simplified, but this also extends to administrators and their charge of guiding the overall school program, ensuring programmatic offerings that best support student learning and assignment of staff who also align with student need. The administrative standards are supported by the Commission on Teacher Credentialing (CTC) (Commission on Teacher Credentialing [CTC], 2014), with consistent reference to equity in daily practice. These concepts are supported by the CDE's (2015) Quality Professional Learning Standards that spell out equity-based professional learning and daily practice standards. The Quality Professional Learning Standards section on equity identifies three components of direct impact:

- Academic equity: This is achieved through the use of summative and formative data disaggregated by demographic subgroups to identify critical student needs, enabling educators to plan and implement evidence-based instructional strategies, and helps educators build on students' abilities, perspectives, and potential.
- Systemic equity: It is necessary to ensure all educators have access to effective professional learning, highlighting district policies that create inequities and work towards changing the policy, and help educators deal with inequities in overrepresentation and underrepresentation of students in relation to their school or district wide population ratio.

- Climate equity: Climate equity is achieved through positive school culture, supports educators in building strong relationships with stakeholders, and supports learners in their socio-emotional development.

Without these guiding benchmarks for practice, continuation high school education can diminish in quality and ultimately fail each individual student. This research will investigate the issues surrounding continuation high schools, their students, and why the students and schools need a very specific skill set from their leadership to ensure an equitable learning environment and experience.

Social Justice in Alternative Schools

This study was situated on the fact that it is only equitable that all students experience a positive school atmosphere like those provided at model continuation schools in California. There are lessons to be learned from looking beyond the borders of California. Alternative schools around the globe serve similar purposes, though reasons and processes of student placement vary drastically, not always ensuring socially just decisions with regards to the student's education. Pennachia et al. (2016) found through their literature review that alternative schools in the United Kingdom, Australia, Iceland, and other countries have exclusionary practices that do not consider the whole student. Once at the alternative school, the focus is on "fixing" the young person, not educating them in preparation for life after high school. The study concludes with the idea that the rigidity and impermeability of traditional schools highlighted a possible barrier to social justice in education, as students that identify with already marginalized demographic subgroups are further removed from the educational mainstream when sent to alternative schools (Graham et al., 2016; Pennachia et al., 2016).

Graham et al. (2016) found that students in Australian schools were being excluded from traditional schools at alarming rates. Exclusion in countries found in the studies abroad is better known as expulsion in the educational system in the United States of America (Mills et al., 2016; Wright et al., 2016). The authors contend that the "behaviour schools" that served the excluded students are not alternative schools by definition because they lack innovation and flexibility (Graham et al., 2016). McGregor and Mills (2012) found that students cannot have the bad disciplined out of them, which begged the question, are expulsions the best option for dealing with students in such a situation. Exclusions in Australia and the United Kingdom also took place for reasons including teen pregnancy and learning differences (Lehr et al., 2009; Vincent, 2016).

McGregor et al. (2015) addressed the reasons for increased exclusions through their description of the cycles of absenteeism and suspension through a growing comfort to speak up for themselves and assert themselves to meet their personal desires. The disconnection that sprouts from their absences leads to a lack of belonging at the school (in student sentiment) and the misbehavior leading to suspension fosters conflict with school officials (McGregor et al., 2015). Schools serving at-risk youth must develop meaningful student-staff relationships to repair the harm done when students are suspended or expelled (O'Donovan et al., 2015). This is congruent with findings of studies done here in the United States as will be addressed later in the literature review. Alternative schools can provide a setting for marginalized students to avoid out of school suspension and to increase social inclusion, leading to a higher rate of retainment of students through teacher relationships (Henderson & Redmond Barnes, 2016).

Yosso's (2005) concept of "community cultural wealth" used to explain the "turn around narrative" by young black men is referenced by Pennachia et al. (2016) and Wright et al. (2016) in describing the wherewithal necessary for marginalized students to find success in a school system that has supported their needs. According to Mills et al. (2016), education that is socially unjust refers to economic, cultural and political inequities driven by systemic shortcomings that ultimately affect the learner. Fulton and Pepe (2016) depicted these same economic and cultural inequities that present extra barriers for many continuation school students here in the United States. Even the political scheming necessary for the school to stay in operation as students present to the school board, hoping its closure does not come to fruition, is an example of extra stress and attention students must place on their education at a continuation school that detracts from their academic experience (Fulton & Pepe, 2016). This same experience can be viewed as a bonus, providing access to real-world experiences that would not normally be presented to students in a traditional school setting.

Issues of Continuation School Social Justice

Alternative programs across the country generally serve students at risk of dropout or those that have been marginalized from traditional schools (Lange & Sletten, 2002). Continuation schools do not receive the same attention the traditional schools receive (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). All of these components together create a learning climate that is not always best serving the at-promise student. We now turn to the individual components that are of grave concern when considering social justice in continuation high schools.

14

Instruction and Student Learning

Farris (2014) found that the educational offerings were not lacking, but the baseline skills of students entering continuation schools is well below grade level standards. This unified a population of students in need of academic recovery that may not be attainable in the short time most are enrolled before dropping out or graduating from high school. These findings brought a question to the forefront, what are the issues at traditional schools that must be addressed to minimize learning gaps? Even though these academic struggles are not attributed to the continuation school, many communities perpetuated a negative stigma attributed to continuation school student struggles and their subsequent academic performance (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013). To the contrary, Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) found that the continuation school setting provided a level of success that was not achievable in the previous traditional school setting.

Policies Affecting Equity at Continuation Schools

Now that it has been established that there are mixed results in the academic outcomes in continuation schools, this study turned its attention to the policies that are creating this unjust learning environment and possible solutions to problems. Continuation schools can be viewed as dumping grounds for students and staff that are under-performing, fostering a negative reputation (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013). With the most at-risk students being served at continuation schools, placement of underperforming staff becomes another practice that hinders the academic opportunities for these most needy students.

When considering the most influential bodies upon school policies, school boards, district administration, and site administration, it is important to note the small piece of the pie that continuation school leaders occupied in this sphere of influence. Normally,

these leadership groups are making decisions and approving policies that direct school practices at a district-wide level, thus placing traditional schools at the forefront of the decision-making process (Newton & Sackney, 2005). This is not only in policies, but also in consideration of district-wide professional development, in which Davis et al. (2021) reported that a staff most benefits from socio-emotional learning (SEL) training. With SEL needs at an extremely high level at continuation schools, this was an important factor to consider (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998). These differences in policy even stretched to state-wide practices such as graduation rate formulas used by the CDE as recently as 2017, that included adult transition students in the denominator of the calculation, even though they are not working towards a diploma and had already been counted as non-graduates when they were enrolled in 12th grade. In the winter of 2022 Education California (2022) reported that the United States Department of Education determined the alternative accountability measures, named Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS), does not meet the requirements set forth through the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (2015). The California State Board of Education originally created the accountability system for alternative schools not as a separate accountability system, rather as a modified metric that fairly evaluates alternative school success (Education California, 2022). This ruling could change the way cohort graduation rates are calculated, possibly negatively affecting the public perception of continuation school success.

All of these policies and practices act as the straw that can break the continuation school's back, diminishing the opportunities for academic growth for individual students

already caught against the ropes in the public's perception. Not only are policy issues a barrier for advancement, but general stigma within the community is prevalent, too.

The Negative Stigma Attached to Continuation Schools

Considering all of these negative effects, it is no wonder that alternative schools have a negative stigma attached to them and extending to their students (Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012; Shea & Muir, 2012; Sussman et al., 1995). These same studies identified students that have a hard time focusing on school while they struggle with drug abuse, community elements like gangs, socio-economic stressors, and a lack of self-belief. A negative stigma is already attached to some demographic groups at traditional schools, with racially charged implications. For example, English Learners (ELs) and African American students are overly represented in continuation schools compared to enrollment statewide (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). With an overrepresentation of these two student groups at continuation schools, some transferred their stigma right along with the student over to the school. Even teachers had a different view of many of their students at continuation high schools compared to the students themselves. Sussman et al. (1995) uncovered that while students reported plans of continuing in higher education, the students' teachers reported the same student would be working or involved in gang activity within a year of graduating from school. This is a glaring factor that highlighted the question, why are effective continuation schools so important?

Why are Effective Continuation Schools Important?

The desired outcome is clear: students pass classes, earn a diploma and are able to move onto other pathways beyond high school to include higher education, career

technical education, entering the workforce, or enlisting in the military. Students built

self-efficacy in alternative education settings that was not achieved while enrolled at a

traditional school (Moffatt & Riddle, 2021). Without the supportive wrap-around services

of a continuation school, more students dropped out of school, and thus have had limited

access to some of the after-school pathways that include career-based employment and

higher education. The increase in high school drop-outs has been shown to have

dramatically negative effects on communities (Rumberger, 2013). These consequences

included underemployment, poverty, and health risks (Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013).

With continuation schools' enrollment being overrepresented by minority populations,

the impact it can have on a community is immense, halting historical cycles of

unemployment, solidifying careers and accomplished lives through educational success

not originally found at a traditional school. Thus, the importance of a well-run and

successful school is paramount to the success of a community and healthful society at

multiple levels.

A Synthesis of Social Justice Implications for Continuation Schools

Considering the breadth of concerns and hurdles that have been presented for

alternative and continuation schools, both here in the United States and abroad, it is clear

there are marginalized students from many different walks of life who deserve better and

are given a chance through the continuation school setting. In conclusion, the studies

from abroad highlighted the shortcomings of traditional schools as they excluded students

and then the possibility that the mere existence of alternative schools could have been a

barrier to the reform necessary in alternative education. Then, looking more closely at

continuation schools in the United States, the obstacles and hindrances that affected

student learning are clear and dangerous. This study was meant to identify how a successful principal in such a school can provide a climate of success for their students.

Studies showed that alternative school settings across the United Kingdom, Australia and Iceland were full of students that had been expelled from their traditional school (Pennachia et al., 2016). This raised the question of traditional schools and their tiered intervention systems, but also of how to serve these students that are in desperate need of a fresh start with their educational environment. The expulsions or "exclusions" as they are known in the country of origin, also include behavioral divergence, teen parents, and learning differences. Again, marginalization of students that were struggling or need more support. Mills et al. (2016) identified these inequities as systemic shortcomings that affect the student.

Enrollment at continuation schools heavily leaning towards underserved students required leadership to look through a lens of equity and inclusion (Khalifa et al., 2016). Leaders that embraced this charge increased student learning through a focus on professional development and pointed instructional goals. The principal of a successful school will be an advocate within and around their district for policies that support success with the most at-risk students. School leaders will provide full wrap-around services for students to meet their every need and focus on the development of self-belief to negate the societal chatter of a negative stigma attached to their school. Ultimately, successful continuation schools not only served the students in the classrooms, but also built a successful cycle for the surrounding community. Continuation schools require the very best leaders, implementing the most effective practices for the distinct needs posed by the school community. This is what drove the purpose of this study. The dissection of

the policy and praxis that drives support and collaboration between continuation school leaders is the next step down this path. Understanding the policies guiding continuation school leadership and collaboration will shed light on the differing leadership models used in alternative education, and specifically continuation schools.

Continuation School Policy

If failing students are attending low performing schools, how can a focus on policy improve the outlook for our most at-promise students? Considering all of these negative effects, it is no wonder that alternative schools have had a negative stigma attached to them and extending to their students (Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012; Shea & Muir, 2012; Sussman et al., 1995). All of this begs the question, what can be done in the realm of policy to improve the administration, and ultimately the learning and attainment of a diploma, at continuation schools?

Any successful organization relies on sound policies, procedures, and daily practices that guide the daily rhythm and repeated successes of the individuals and the institution as a whole. This is accomplished through quality leadership. Examples abound of strong cultures being built through policies that engage employees in positivity (Lundin et al, 2000). There are also many examples of failed policies like the United States government's war on drugs in the 1980s or prohibition early in the 20th century (Gottfried & Conchas, 2016). Education is no different. Successful classrooms are those that have clear expectations and daily practices that are taught to all involved (parents and students), and the expectations and practices are continuously revisited (Moore et al., 2015). Successful schools included stakeholders (i.e., school staff, students, families,

school partners, and community members) in making decisions and receiving input from parents and students before implementing new procedures (Garmston & Wellman, 2009). Districts were successful across all school sites when there is feedback from all school leadership used in conjunction with the aforementioned student and parent input before enacting new policies. All of these examples included a common theme, the communication and collaboration between many different stakeholders. Who is guiding schools through this policy development? Who is influencing the direction of the larger conversation? Understanding the relationships, influencers, and social web of the educational environment will help inform actions that get at the crux of the policy issue.

Honig's (2006) evaluation of the dimensions of continuation education policy implementation in practice and research was visually represented by a triangle defined by people, policies, and places with arrows pointing in both directions between each component representing influence. Honig's (2006) visual representation of the influences on an educational community and applying this concept to a specific system, in our case, continuation education, can help in grasping the people, places and policies shaping daily praxis in an alternative setting such as a continuation school. The real focus of this theory was based in the how and why, not just the what (Honig, 2006).

Continuation schools were developed to provide a more personalized learning environment and flexible setting allowing all students to succeed. Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) attested to the continuation school setting providing students some amount of academic success, which was not attainable at their previous school. Unfortunately, many alternative schools failed to provide academic and socio-emotional support services

necessary to attain such success (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). The discussion now turns to accountability to ensure the possible academic success alluded to in this section.

Ladson-Billings (2005) argued that teachers, as professionals, should be held to a higher standard in their daily practice, and not providing a meaningful educational experience should be viewed as malpractice. Teachers at continuation high schools did not receive the same support and training from districts as do those at a comprehensive school, thus leaving teachers on their own to find ways to engage and support these struggling students (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). To counter these points, Farris (2014) contended that the value of the educational offerings is not lacking, but the baseline academic preparedness of students entering a continuation school was too far behind to prepare students sufficiently for college level coursework. Khalifa et al. (2016) stated that effective school leadership includes retaining teachers, consistently training teachers through culturally responsive mentoring and modeling, and finally, encouraging self-reflection by educators, leading to student success. Even with some of these successes, many communities propagated a negative reputation for alternative schools and their students due to these struggles and subsequent student performance (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013).

Despite their importance for serving marginalized students, continuation schools were under-serviced and easily forgotten by policy makers, district leaders, and the educational system as a whole (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). This posed a huge problem for the high-need population of students they serve. Not only are many continuation school students jaded by their previous experiences with the school system, but many are also in need of an immediate turn around in their classroom performance. These students'

acute needs as well as the timeline for credit recovery created a situation in which it is essential continuation schools employ high-quality, experienced educators and leaders. This was done with the teachers that work directly with the students in the classroom, the support staff providing socio-emotional services, classified staff supporting marginalized families, and administration leading the school community in creating a supportive and successful educational environment. Rather than provide these schools with maximized need for the very best educators, some low performing educators were "hidden" at continuation schools with smaller enrollments and less involved parents unwilling or unaware of how to complain at a public board meeting (Hernandez, 2018).

Using Honig's (2006) dimensions of influence to evaluate the landscape of continuation education policies helped clarify the structure, and opportunities for influence and improvement. The system was deconstructed by looking at each of Honig's individual dimensions (people, places, and policies), then reconstructed the system of influence and identified comprehensive themes affecting continuation education, taking a closer look at the how and the why.

People

First and foremost, we must identify the targets of continuation school policy, or in many broader instances, general educational policy. Continuation school students by definition, are at-promise. These students in need were the focus of the policies and praxis. Those playing the most influential role in the development of these policies included: site administrators, district administrators over alternative education, fellow site leadership teams from neighboring districts, community partners, site staff, parents and students. Community partners included local community colleges, workforce investment

boards, and prospective employers. Site administrators, through the feedback they receive from the school community (i.e., students, staff, and families) helped shape the majority of policies implemented in continuation schools. The inclusion of all stakeholders in the teamwork necessary to support at-promise students created a more widespread feeling of ownership in the process and responsibility (O'Brien & Curry, 2009). Although this is what O'Brien and Curry proposed in their paper, it does not mean all school sites have taken the time and energy to collect such input and use it to form policies.

More importantly, attention turned to how and why these aspects of influence (or lack thereof) were affecting policy in continuation schools. As students get older, parents become less involved in their child's school (Núñez et al., 2015). To exacerbate the issue, parents of lower socio-economic status have a harder time finding flexibility in their work schedules to participate at higher rates in their child's education (Ho & Hiatt-Michael, 2012). Since students in continuation schools are socio-economically middle to lower class, this lack of participation has had an exponential effect on continuation schools. While it was easy to quickly comprehend these claims due to their origins coming from peer-reviewed articles, it was also important to consider the findings of Bertrand et al. (2015) that the strengthening of deficit discourse by diverting attention from structural issues while advancing racist and classist ideas ultimately affected student learning. By not acknowledging and addressing these systemic issues, socially unjust practices were perpetuated.

Transitioning to a more positive theme, the communal process of policy development was easier with smaller staff sizes at continuation schools, leading to easier inclusion of everyone's voice on matters large and small. With a more isolated, "on an

island" feel to many alternative education settings, which will be dissected in more detail in the following section, the principal had more latitude and influence on policies that may be dictated by the district office or board of trustees for traditional schools (Bascia & Maton, 2016). This was due to the uniqueness of the schools, the enrollment size, lack of public visibility (normally no sports teams competing in front of community members, bands performing, or students wearing school gear around town) and lack of familiarity with the programs leads some leaders to distance themselves from the daily operations.

Places

Many different organizations have influenced the policies and praxis of continuation schools. In the state of California, the state legislature (both the Assembly and Senate) enacted legislation that guides detailed work from the California Department of Education (CDE) in the shepherding of policy development at the local level by Local Education Agencies. This funneling of guidance from broader to more specific had positive and negative effects. The state legislature may not be tuned into the specific needs of a small school district in, for example, east Imperial County. The opposite was true for the CDE's awareness and consideration of issues in a larger district such as the Los Angeles Unified School District, which may have disproportionately affected the creation of policies that were not in line with the needs of local education agencies across the state. Professional organizations that have influence on continuation education policy included: California Continuation Education Association Plus (CCEA Plus), the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), informal professional coalitions of administrators, and the local board of education. Even professional publications can play a role as they connect administrators with virtual professional

development and networking opportunities, but these cohorts were not focused on continuation schools (Education California, 2021).

CCEA Plus was more influential and more supportive of improvement policies for continuation schools, compared to other professional organizations like ACSA, for a few reasons. This included that there were not many administrators at continuation schools due to smaller enrollment numbers, thus less teachers as laid out in California Education Code 41400-41409.3 (California Education Code, 1976/2020). This lack of representation led to a small and quiet voice supporting continuation education in the most influential of professional administrative organizations in California. CCEA Plus is made up exclusively of educators from alternative settings. This focus on the specific learning environment led to policy and direction driven by feedback from fellow alternative educators. There are also great influence from informal professional coalitions, which are defined as local gatherings across local education agency lines to collaborate with job-alike individuals in other districts. These collaboration and planning sessions helped standardize practices, but if these practices were not codified through updating board policy or other solidifying actions, they would be lost when leadership changes.

The practices were at different levels of development across the state. There may be an opportunity for growth in this area, by standardizing practices in all regions. The discussion now transitions to investigate the role of continuation education policies in Honig's dimensions of influence.

Policies

Policies impacting continuation education many times are not written with continuation education in mind. These policies may have been written with the aim of reaching a goal that was set with comprehensive school sites in mind. Honig (2006) stated that certain goals are attainable depending on the current performance relative to the goal. Going further, continuation school students arrived to such schools far below grade level (Farris, 2014). An example of a policy that applied to such a situation would be graduation rate calculation, used by the CDE. As recently as 2017, the California Department of Education (2022b) was still counting adult transition students not working towards a high school diploma as non-graduates. These adult transition students had already spent at least four years, some as many as eight years, in a high school setting and have stated in their IEP that they will not be earning a high school diploma due to their disability. Due to this policy error in calculation, schools with adult transition programs had dramatically lower graduation rates than was representative of the actual success being had at each of those school sites. Should one of those schools have had a large population of adult transition students, it could have adversely affected the school and led to the CDE identifying the school for Program Improvement. There were positives and negatives associated with Program Improvement, as was the case with any policies (Gottfried & Conchas, 2016). There was more oversight from outside agencies like the county office of education or CDE, extra reports, budgets, and progress monitoring to complete. The positives included the increased financial resources that came with the increased efforts to improve student outcomes. Another backfire from this policy, as Gottfried and Conchas (2016) referred to opposite outcomes of the intended policy, is

that Program Improvement funding is meant for those students working towards earning a high school diploma, which eliminated those students whose data was used to determine the school's eligibility.

Looking at policies through a more positive lens, there were many educational codes that promote flexibility for continuation schools. This flexibility allowed each school to take actions that support student learning and positive experiences that meet each student's specific needs (Brauckmann et al., 2020). Some examples of that included the way average daily attendance (ADA) is calculated at a continuation school, compared to a traditional school. ADA is how the state of California determines the amount of funding provided to a Local Education Agency (EdSource, 2021). The ability to "bank" attendance hours beyond the codified 180 minutes per day allows schools to claim a more proportionally accurate ADA even though students' attendance may be lower than a traditional school, as described in California Education Code 46170 (California Education Code, 1976/2020). A loss of such money could cripple a small institution such as continuation school due to lower attendance, thus less funding in subsequent years due to state funding formulas determined through attendance rates (EdSource, 2021). This shorter day also allows administrators and counselors to provide more creative scheduling options for students that need a schedule outside of the norm due to their responsibilities with work, family support, etc.

The state of California has a plethora of education codes that give expanded flexibility and lead to ingenious school interventions and programming (California Education Code, 1976/2020). As you move down the funnel of influence and get to the local level, there began to be an even larger divergence in practice, both between

continuation schools and traditional schools, and among various continuation schools across more than one district. Again, this was not always bad, as the pliability of each school allows leadership to provide very specific options for their students in their community, but it is important to remember that this divergence from standardization led to a less academically rigorous environment (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012).

Looking more closely at the creation of policy at the school site, the inclusion of all stakeholders in the teamwork necessary to support at-promise students created a more widespread feel of ownership in the process and responsibility (O'Brien & Curry, 2009). There are some barriers to meaningful inclusion of stakeholders at levels of representation that reach beyond nominal parent participation (Shumow, 2009). The ability to include staff in decision-making and policy development was more manageable due to smaller staff sizes, on average (California Continuation Education Association Plus [CCEA Plus], 2021). Most CCEA members appreciate the autonomy and decentralized decision-making models used in their schools (Hernandez, 2018).

As studies have determined, the lack of focus on meaningful instructional practice in the continuation school setting can be tied to minimal learning outcomes (Farris, 2014; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). This clearly led to the conclusion that there is a greater need for standardization and alignment in praxis. This was also applicable to the coordination and collaboration between continuation schools and comprehensive schools. The predominant hurdle students were faced with in continuation schools was their connection to their school (or conversely, how they feel unwelcome at school), as opposed to their academic ability and potential (Hernandez, 2017).

In many smaller districts, there is just one continuation school, leaving these schools on their own for collaboration. This led to the need for school leadership to connect school staff with other schools, coordinate school site visits, and professional development that was focused on their school's specific instructional and socio-emotional needs. These steps can lead to great standardization of best practices, but work must be done to solidify these practices to weather the storm of leadership change and become a part of the recurring practice within each institution.

Professional Organizations and Support

The Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) was a professional organization that includes administrators from all levels of K-12 education across the state of California. Their political lobby provided a wide-reaching and prominent network of practitioners. ACSA (Association of California School Administrators [ACSA], 2021) maintained multiple levels of engagement from its members across California. At the state level, the executive director, board of directors, and board members made up the state leadership team. There was a more locally focused regional system with the state being broken into 19 geographic regions. Each ACSA region had geographic or topical charters that have their own executive boards that meet regularly. Regions provided professional learning opportunities, networking events, and communication up the chain for the purpose of lobbying for legislative action needed in education (ACSA, 2021).

ACSA's professional development offerings provided learning opportunities through year-long academies with cohorts of professionals, presentations from topical experts, connecting participants with higher level management for interview preparation, and guiding the professional in the pathway of upward mobility in the industry of

education. ACSA (2021) also has a full slate of ten professional conferences held throughout the year. At an even more impactful level, ACSA (2021) provided mentorship opportunities and even conducted a leadership coaching certification program.

All of these supports and structures were great for school leaders, in terms of their professional development, and career pathways. In the area of continuation schools, and alternative education in more general terms, there was very little focus. ACSA (2021) does maintain a state level Educational Options Council, composed of an elected president and member from each of the 19 regions. At the local level, regional charters have officers filling the state-alike councils, but not all charters fill all of these positions, let alone have multiple members from continuation schools (or for that matter, alternative schools).

Even though ACSA did not have a well-developed network of continuation school administrators focused on job-alike support and growth, there is another professional organization in the state that does center around continuation schools. The California Continuation Education Association Plus (CCEA Plus, 2021) was formed in 1962 as California's voice of alternative education. CCEA Plus served as an advocacy group and professional community for continuation and community day schools providing an annual conference, educator awards, and networking. CCEA Plus (2021) was not only a professional organization for school leaders, but also classroom educators and classified staff at continuation schools. This dynamic was very representative of the environment at most continuation schools, a familial environment where everyone is working together towards the same goal (CCEA Plus, 2021). The main focus of the conference is on bringing job-alike educators together (CCEA Plus, 2021). There is also a

school visit built into the schedule for those that are interested. The actual professional learning options are very limited through this association.

California has many other notable professional organizations focused on administrative networks, including the California Association of Black School Educators and the California Association of Latino Superintendents and Administrators. These organizations not only provided professional growth opportunities, but specifically focused their efforts in improving the educational experience for Black and Latinx students across the state.

Professional Organizations for Alternative School Leaders

Even more challenging for continuation school educators was building support systems focused on supporting their professional growth. The CDE (2021) reported there were only 425 continuation schools across the entire state, while there were over 1,000 local education agencies. Many districts with a single continuation school ultimately operate on islands and have limited collaboration between teachers and administrators. As different as each continuation school is, there were many opportunities for collaboration and learning between sites, whether or not they are in the same district. There are some opportunities provided through professional organizations like the California Continuation Education Association (CCEA) that provided opportunities for membership at the individual and school level. A more limited agency is the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA). ACSA (2021) did have an Education Options advisory committee that operated at the state level, but did not currently have a similar body functioning at the local level for intra-regional collaboration and professional learning.

What are leaders at successful continuation schools doing? How are these actions experienced by different stakeholder groups like students, staff, and parents? If we are able to identify these specific variables and how they are developed and honed, it will help improve leadership across all continuation schools, creating more successful schools supporting those learners most in need.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this research was to investigate the leadership of continuation schools, how these leaders support school efficacy, and how their professional growth creates positive learning environments for all stakeholders. Continuation schools serve the most at-promise students in the state, thus shining a light on the issue of social justice for historically marginalized student populations. Impactful and researched-based leadership practices were a must to ensure every student receives the best possible educational experience in preparation for life beyond school.

Continuation School Leadership

Continuation schools are unique because they are much smaller than traditional high schools, normally smaller than one tenth the student enrollment compared to the traditional high school. Since continuation high schools have a smaller enrollment size than a traditional high school, there is also less support staff, teachers, and administration. This ratio of staffing, as laid out in California Education Code 41400 to 41407 (1976/2020), was a distribution of ratios between the amount of full time equivalent (FTE) teachers, administrative FTEs, and pupil service FTEs (California Education Code, 1976/2020). This ratio was colloquially known as the Ryan Ratio. With less staffing on campus, there is a need for administrators to fill multiple roles and responsibilities

normally handled by an assistant principal or support staff member at a traditional school. Beyond the distribution of work, there is a different lens through which the continuation school principal guides their day. Continuation school students suffer from emotional behavioral disabilities (Fallon & Feinberg, 2017; Minkos et al., 2018), drug abuse (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998; Lisha, 2012), socio-emotional factors (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998), and a negative stigma projected on the students of continuation schools (Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Sperling, 2020). When considering the many hurdles continuation school students navigated through their high school career, it is clear the academic pathway can be perceived as secondary. This required continuation school leaders to prioritize socio-emotional health and counseling, school-family relationships, and building self-confidence in students.

Due to the uniqueness of continuation schools and the role the principal plays in smaller schools like these, there were normally not job-alike peers to collaborate with and learn from within their own district. With only 425 continuation schools in the state of California and 1,037 local education agencies, most districts do not even have a continuation school, let alone multiple sites allowing for collaboration among job-alike peers within the same district (CDE, 2020). This requires continuation school leaders to reach outside of their district and coordinate with other continuation schools in the region to improve their daily praxis, share best practices, vent to someone that understands the struggle, and get guidance on specific issues related to continuation education. Unfortunately, some districts use the continuation school setting for dumping their low-performing educators (Hernandez, 2018). This can include school leaders. Just like the students, some of these educators may have been jaded by the educational system and do

not feel connected. To provide guidance to the whole school community and specific support to individual educators and students, continuation schools required the very best leaders, implementing the most effective practices for the distinct needs posed by the school community.

This study focused on the leadership qualities of principals in the continuation school setting. While traditional school settings have different needs, it was important to understand common practices of principals in the traditional high school setting to provide a backdrop and comparison for those skills specifically identified as impactful for continuation high schools. Continuation high school enrollment was made up of those with emotional behavioral disabilities, a history of drug abuse, and the negative stigma of the surrounding community (Fallon & Feinberg, 2017; Minkos et al., 2018; Galaif et al. 1998; Lisha, 2012; Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Sperling, 2020). Students from historically underperforming subgroups deserve the very best education. English Learners and African American students were overly represented in continuation schools compared to enrollment statewide (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Enrollment at continuation schools heavily leaning towards underserved students requires leadership to look through a lens of equity and inclusion (Khalifa et al., 2016). The literature review in Chapter 2 conducted an in-depth review, analysis, and comparison, connecting general school leadership studies and theories, social justice leadership frameworks, in conjunction with the limited literature regarding continuation school effectiveness, and specifically the principal's actions to ensure student success.

The CDE annually sponsors the California School Recognition Program honoring students, educators, and schools for exemplary practices and achievements (CDE, 2022a).

As a part of the recognition program, CDE and CCEA jointly acknowledge Model

Continuation High Schools for three-year terms through a battery of evaluations

including application, school visit, and assurance of services. The CDE identified the

major purpose for this award process being to identify exemplary schools and programs

to act as visitation and guidance options for new and improving schools (CDE, 2022a).

The focus will now be on the Model Continuation School application process.

When a school applied to be a Model Continuation School, the process starts with

notification to the CDE of their intent to apply, which is due in June of the calendar year

in which their application is submitted. Some minimum qualifications that each school

must meet included minimum average daily attendance percentages and being an

accredited institution with the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).

According to CDE (2022c), applications were submitted digitally in September via a

CDE virtual portal. Applications consist of the following components:

- a school information sheet including data from the school;

- a certification form signed by the superintendent to confirm the validity of the
  report;

- eight separate narrative statements address school programs, practices and
  stakeholder experiences;

- three program effectiveness statements that includes a description on the use
  of data to drive decision-making;

- school quality indicator self-evaluation form and evidence;

- additional statements on exemplary programmatic components; and

- optional components that include portfolios, individual learning plans, and a video overview of the school.

Once the application has been submitted, continuation school educators from across the state come together to read applications and score the applications for each school using a rubric (CDE, 2022c). Minimum standards were set for each application to pass the application review process and be advanced for a site validation visit. Site visits consisted of interviews with school community stakeholders, classroom observations, and document review. The site validation visit is conducted over one to two days with the purpose of validating evidence and claims from the application and confirming a recommendation for status as a Model Continuation School made to the CDE (2022c). Should the school be recommended for Model Continuation School status to the CDE, the Education Options Office at the CDE shall review the school's district audit report to ensure there were no attendance reporting or internal control findings associated with the applicant. Those schools passing all stages of the model continuation high school identification process are notified by personal phone call of the prestigious award (CCEA, 2022a). The term of recognition lasts for three years, at which time schools can apply again for another three-year status term.

The logic follows that if the school is identified as exemplary, as is evidenced by the extensive application and confirmation process that is akin to the WASC accreditation process, then leadership must be as well. Model Continuation High Schools in California are the focus and a determining factor in the identification of participants of this study.

Theoretical Framework

In conducting the literature review for this study, many different theoretical frameworks and lenses presented themselves in the area of social justice applicable to the continuation school landscape. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) used a case study focusing on a high school assistant principal to define Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL) on three levels: personal, environmental, and curricular. The daily leadership praxis of the study subject, a school administrator named Faith, included six themes:

- caring;

- building relationships;

- being persistent and persuasive;

- being present and communicating;

- modeling cultural responsiveness; and

- fostering cultural responsiveness in others. (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Madhlangobe and Gordon's CRL development, and the study that helped them create this theoretical framework, posed clear themes that allow a school leader to be more culturally responsive. Constant themes that were presented by Madhlangobe and Gordon include relationship-based issues along with cultural awareness. Each of these are explored in more detail in the sections below.

Relationships

On the relationship front, Noddings (2013) work in defining and valuing care is foundational. Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) quoted previous works by Noddings (2013), in which *Caring* delved into the intricacies of caring and can easily be compared to leadership impact (Noddings, 2013). Leaders that embraced caring as a foundational

component were able to see through multiple lenses, both their own perspective and the one for whom they care (Noddings, 2013). Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) supported these findings in their study confirming that teachers participating in their research found success more often with Black and Latinx students when teachers created relationships with their students.

Cultural Awareness

Modeling cultural responsiveness and fostering the same practice in others was paramount to a social justice leader's success. Cultural awareness and campus-wide impact was a strength for Faith, the subject of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) study. Santamaria (2014) had similar findings in identifying the weight of culturally responsive school leadership practices. Faith's modeling of positive relationships with Black and Latinx students was received and mirrored by her staff, leading to more meaningful student-teacher relationships (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). Many studies support this theme, as these relationships led to student belief in success, and finally actually succeeding behaviorally and academically where there had not been success in the past (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Henderson & Redmond Barnes, 2016; Moffatt & Riddle, 2021; Murray & Holt, 2014).

Extending the Theoretical Framework

Knowing that continuation school students have been marginalized and unsuccessful in their previous school experiences, the draw of a study that showed minority students being successful in school, with higher persistence rates, lower dropout rates and improved student achievement will garner well-deserved attention (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). One component that was missing from CRL that holds

a prominent place in most other social justice leadership frameworks was the practice of self-reflection. This was a complementary component to CRL that will be considered when completing the literature review and analyzing the data collected. By considering these components, it allowed the reader to envision an effective leader at a continuation school. That same lens then transitioned to the findings of this study and use the six themes of CRL to help make sense of and apply the qualities and practices of successful principals at Model Continuation Schools across the state of California.

Responsibilities of a Continuation School Principal

The role of a principal at a continuation school was very different from a traditional school. The responsibilities involved in such a position are not exactly the same across schools, as each district uses different organizational charts and styles. However, many school districts assigned multiple alternative schools to one administrator due to the smaller size of the schools required by California Education Code 41400 to 41407 (California Education Code, 1976/2020). Considering the administrative responsibilities chart found in Appendix B, it was clear the administrators assigned to alternative education had a lot of schools and charges to attend to. CCEA Plus (2022b) argued that the smaller learning environment and increased focus on each individual student's needs is what provides a successful continuation high school experience. This contradicted the idea of one administrative team overseeing multiple schools.

When considering the size of an administrative team at a continuation school, roles were condensed, not just by leadership, but also by other employees on campus (see Appendix B). Due to leaders on continuation school campuses taking on multiple roles and wearing multiple hats, the focus on students easily became diminished. This begs the

question, how do continuation school principals maintain a focus on the six themes identified by Madhlangobe and Gordon in CRL?

The needs of students did not differ greatly from those at a traditional school, but the percentage of students in need of intense intervention academically and socio-emotionally well outpaced any traditional school (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013). This required the school leader to focus more on interventions, crisis management, and building support programs that service the whole child. California Education Code 48430 (1976/2020) dictated that continuation schools provide intensive counseling and supplement classroom instruction with workforce topics. This redirection of praxis was a huge departure from the traditional school's college-going culture and the *Race to Nowhere*, a concept documented in the film of the same name chronicling the negative effects of the relentless pressure to achieve, leading to cheating, stress-related illness, and disengaged students (Abeles & Congdon, 2010). Providing a more personalized approach focused on immediate interventions is the practice of effective continuation schools and their leaders (CCEA Plus, 2022b). These issues were very student-centered and do not consider the influential impact of a leader who fully embodies CRL. Developing these skills was not an overnight process, but considering the focus of this study, the hope was to pinpoint practices and qualities that will have immediate impact for school leaders.

Major Research Question

The development of each continuation school leader will look different due to their school's unique needs. There are general lessons to learn and specific questions that can be asked and answered when considering these variations. Bearing this in mind, in an

attempt to identify a general profile of successful leadership in the continuation school

setting, via the lens of CRL, the major research question was:

> What are the strengths and challenges of Model Continuation School principals
>
> successfully leading their staff and at-promise youth?

What was the Significance of this Study?

At-promise youth have been marginalized by previous traditional school

experiences (Nygreen, 2013). These historically underperforming students deserved a

caring and productive environment that is focused on the development of the whole

student (CCEA Plus, 2021). Effective school leadership practice leads to higher student

academic achievement (Stockard, 2020). Ensuring fidelity in school leadership provides

at-promise youth the quality education they deserve. There are very limited empirical

studies focused on continuation school principals and their leadership qualities. There are

some studies focused on impactful school-wide programs in continuation schools and two

recent studies on leadership at continuation schools, but this area was still short of a

robust collection of academic literature to support the implementation of research-based

practices.

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Positionality Statement

</div>

As I take a deep dive into my own positionality and intersectionality as an upper-

middle class White male in a management position, it was important for me to first

acknowledge that Crenshaw's (1991) original definition of intersectionality was the

combination of two or more dimensions an individual identifies with. This definition was

read by some as only applying to black females (Harris & Patton, 2019). According to

Agosto and Roland (2018), an individual's intersectionality was defined by the multiple

demographic subgroups that one person identified with and how that affects their social or professional standing or experience. Though Agosto and Roland's (2018) definition of intersectionality had a wider application, expanding to include all combinations of subgroup identities, acknowledging and citing the work of Crenshaw (1991) was a foundational practice in promoting intersectionality and herstory (Harris & Patton, 2019).

According to a graphic on intersectionality published by the Association for Women in Science (2019), I fell on the privileged side of the spectrum in every category. I was very aware of my positionality as a member of the upper-middle class, as a White male, heterosexual married father. I was able-bodied, light-skinned, and of European heritage. I also considered myself young and attractive. With all of that said, even though I say I was aware of this positionality, that does not mean I completely understood all of the privilege I was afforded, nor does that mean I completely understood the oppression and struggle suffered by those that identified below the "Domination" line in one or more areas defined by the Association for Women in Science (2019).

As the researcher, I was living and breathing the ins and outs of this study. I was a veteran continuation school principal with six years of experience. Before acting as a continuation school principal, I was an associate principal of a traditional high school, chock-full of at-promise and underrepresented students. My experience, influence, and connections with job-alike peers in the area should be noted and considered in the completion of this study. Some of the roles I have filled, in conjunction with other continuation school principals include:

- founder of the area continuation high school principal collaborative group,
- presenter at the annual CCEA Plus conference,

- two-time California Model Continuation High School award recipient,

- model Continuation High School visiting committee chairperson, and

- regional representative on the statewide educational options (alternative education) council.

These experiences and spaces have created professional relationships and influence within the continuation high school scene.

As I reflect on my positionality and the privilege it has afforded me throughout life, I think about experiences that have established fundamental principles that guide my praxis as a leader. This evokes Jean-Marie's (2006) case study on Veronica Murphy. In short, her parents peppered her with the language of "when," not "if." Kezar and Lester (2010) claimed that positionality is not fixed, it changes with someone's experiences. I liked playing the role of underdog, and sometimes I used that as encouragement for the student that feels like they have something to prove.

As a young educator, I cannot remember being actively aware of discrimination, and the subsequent effects that it could have on a student's educational experience. Through my experiences as an administrator over the past ten years and overt discussions with students and their families around their previous educational experiences, I better served our students with a bird's-eye view of the effects of systematic and individual actions that affect student learning and overall school success. This can be counteracted, in part, through a focus on rebuilding the school-family-student relationship.

All of these life experiences and identities have played roles in my positionality and intersectionality as a practitioner and researcher. My position as a White, male, manager has provided many opportunities that others may not have been afforded. I am

also a more effective leader because of my unique experiences. These same factors also

color the research that is embodied in this work.

Definition of Terms

- **Alternative school—**Alternative schools (also known as alternative
  education) are a broad genre of schools that stray from traditional settings.
  These schools include independent studies, community day school, adult
  transition, adult school, home and hospital, and continuation schools. The
  California Department of Education also refers to alternative schools as
  education options (CDE, 2020).

- **Association of California School Administrators (ACSA)**—The largest
  professional association for school leaders in the United States, serving more
  than 17,000 California educators through professional development,
  advocacy, networking, and professional guidance (ACSA, 2021).

- **Average daily attendance (ADA)**—"The total number of days of student
  attendance divided by the total number of days in the regular school year . . .
  ADA is not the same as enrollment, which is the number of students enrolled
  in each school and district. (Enrollment is determined by counting students on
  a given day in October.) ADA usually is lower than enrollment due to factors
  such as students moving, dropping out, or staying home due to illness. The
  state uses a school district's ADA to determine its funding" (EdSource, 2021).

- **California Code of Regulations (CCR)**—The CCRs are the codification of
  general and permanent rules and regulations backed by primary state
  legislation (CCR, 2022).

- **California Continuation Education Association Plus (CCEA Plus)**—The professional organization of continuation school employees (certificated and classified) formed in 1962 to advocate for the interests of students and staff of continuation high schools across the state of California (CCEA Plus, 2021).

- **California Department of Education (CDE)**—The CDE is an agency within the government of the state of California that oversees public education (CDE, 2020).

- **Continuation school**—The purpose of continuation schools is to provide an opportunity for students to complete required courses and meet graduation requirements in an alternative school setting in concert with career counseling, job placement services, and supplemental classroom instruction (California Education Code, 1976/2020).

- **Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL)**—A conceptual framework created by Khalifa et al. (2016) to describe effective school leadership looking through a lens of diversity and equity, focusing on the following four strands: critical self-awareness, teacher preparation, school environments, and community advocacy.

- **Culturally Relevant Leadership**—A conceptual framework defined as a continuum or feedback loop that is continuously changing and adjusting the practices of the leader through identifying issues, setting plans, acting and reflecting on the outcome (Horsford et al., 2011)

- **Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL)**—A concept developed by Madhlangobe and Gordon in their 2012 study focusing on Faith, an assistant

principal in a high school. Her praxis highlighted six themes: caring, building relationships, being persistent and persuasive, being present and communicating, modeling cultural responsiveness, and fostering cultural responsiveness among others. This theoretical framework is the lens through which this study is viewed.

- **Dashboard Alternative School Status (DASS)**—An accountability system developed by the California Department of Education with a modified metric to more accurately evaluate alternative school success (CDE, 2020).

- **Distributive Leadership**—The interactions and communication among school staff to make decisions, driving instructional improvement, student learning outcomes, and the development of culture in which all students can thrive

- *Every Student Succeeds Act* **(ESSA) -** A United States law passed in 2015 that replaced *No Child Left Behind* (2015) in governing United States K-12 public education policy (*Every Student Succeeds Act*, 2015).

- **Full Time Equivalent (FTE)**—A standard of measure that attempts to describe the ratio of time staff expend on a position and its responsibilities compared to a full-time position. An FTE of 1.0 is equivalent to full time.

- **Social Justice Leadership (SJL)**—A conceptual framework for school leaders promoting equity while pivoting on the trust, communication, and action experienced by the whole school community (Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014)

- **Transactional Leadership**—A system of exchanges between the leader and

the staff, with employees receiving positive reinforcement for meeting

organizational or personal goals (Bass, 2008)

- **Transformational Leadership**—Facilitating organizational collaboration that

helps move the vision of an organization forward (Bass, 2008)

- **Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)**—An accreditation

institution for schools worldwide. Accreditation status normally is for a six-

year term and validates the diploma and educational program of a school. The

accreditation process includes a self-study report completed by the applicant

school and site visit conducted by a visiting committee with the purpose of

validating the report and making a recommendation for accreditation terms to

the WASC commission (Western Association of Schools and Colleges

[WASC], 2022).

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

At-promise students enrolled at continuation high schools were already at a disadvantage, normally performing multiple grade levels behind their expected age-appropriate skill level before even enrolling at the continuation school (Farris, 2014). Continuation schools operated on islands, thus not collaborating and using each other and others as springboards to improve their practice (Hernandez, 2018; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Opportunities to collaborate, share best practices, and improve professional praxis were a central theme to the literature on continuation school efficacy (Bush, 2012; Dall, 2016; Stoops, 2012). As of the writing of this dissertation, there were 1,037 local education agencies in California, but only 425 continuation schools operating across the state (CDE, 2021). With fewer schools and gaps in collaborative opportunities between job-alike peers, there was a need to identify best practices of principals at continuation high schools. This begs the question, why is this important for continuation schools and their students?

At-promise students enrolled at continuation schools regularly have struggled to find success academically and to have meaningful social connections in their previous schools (Nygreen, 2013). At-promise students deserved a caring and supportive school environment that develops in students a positive self-worth, self-confidence, and personal satisfaction (CCEA Plus, 2021). This need identified by CCEA Plus was directly aligned with the theoretical framework of this study, Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) Culturally Responsive Leadership; specifically, the first two tenets, caring and building relationships are glaring reflections. Defining the actions that a principal takes to embody

these themes helps guide praxis and development of current and future school leaders. Impactful school principals resulted in student success in and out of the classroom (Stockard, 2020).

What is the Purpose of this Research?

The purpose of this research was to identify effective leadership characteristics of continuation schools through the lens of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) CRL. There was very little literature in the area of successful continuation school leadership and a pointed literature review supporting this study helped shed more light on the qualities of effective continuation school leaders. This was important because providing impactful learning environments for those most in need was most driven by effective school leadership (Leithwood et al., 2004). Donaldson (2013) took this further in identifying four major hurdles to the development of teacher effectiveness and the subsequent improvement of the school as a whole: economics, contractual hoops, school culture, and interpersonal boundaries. This study will lead to later research in professional growth to improve school efficacy, and how this professional growth creates positive learning environments for all stakeholders.

Continuation schools have been viewed as dumping grounds for students and staff that are under-performing, fostering a negative reputation (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013). There were over 1,000 school districts in California, with over 400 continuation schools (CDE, 2021). Most districts had only one continuation school, which limited opportunities for professional collaboration, and ultimately growth. According to these studies, the students most in need were receiving the short end of the stick. This led to some very clear questions:

- What leadership practices are creating positive learning environments for at-promise youth?

- How do these practices specific to continuation school leaders compare to practices at traditional high schools?

- Do professional organizations provide the best opportunities for growth and collaboration, or is it most beneficial for practitioners to coordinate their own support groups?

- How can continuation school principals lead their staff to exponentially impact students in their learning journey?

Why is This Issue Important When Looking Through a Lens of Social Justice in Education?

Traditional schools have fallen short in providing support and success for the most marginalized of students. At-promise youth have been jaded by their previous school experience in these traditional settings (Nygreen, 2013). Considering previous studies reviewed, the question has been asked whether the mere existence of continuation schools perpetuates the lack of meaningful systemic change to best serve marginalized students. The line of reasoning goes that if there was an alternative option, the traditional school had no need to change practices or systems that marginalize students. The student needs to adapt, or they will be moved to the alternative program to find success. If there was no alternative option, traditional schools would be forced to make wholesale adjustments to their practices and procedures to ensure all students, even those historically marginalized are serviced appropriately. This was a larger social justice issue than will be addressed in this study, but is important to consider when investigating

51

leadership qualities and practices that are common with successful principals at a traditional high school compared to those at a continuation school. No matter where students were enrolled, they deserved a caring and productive environment that is focused on the development of the whole child.

The first two tenets of CRL were caring and building relationships, yet leadership of a school extended beyond a caring and productive environment, all the while, relationship-focused qualities and practices acted as a foundation for so many other responsibilities that are addressed by continuation school principals. Effective administrative practice led to higher academic achievement, which in turn extended success into life after high school (Stockard, 2020). Without a high school diploma, the likelihood of underemployment, poverty, and health risks increased dramatically, having a negative effect on the larger community (Wilson & Tanner-Smith, 2013). Fidelity in school leadership ensured these at-promise youth would receive the quality education they deserved, preparing them for success and playing a role in the forward movement of a community.

A Roadmap for the Literature Review

First, the literature review laid the foundation of the discussion around leadership in continuation schools, which required a thorough definition of what needs students have at continuation schools, by nature being identified as at-promise and in need of a supportive and effective school setting (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). As such, leaders that were continuously improving their daily practice were necessary to help guide such schools in supporting the most vulnerable of student sub-groups through their final opportunity to graduate, before they dropped out of high school. One way to foster this

professional growth, not only in culturally responsiveness, but all realms of professional practice, was through self-reflection (Khalifa et al., 2016). At-promise students deserved an amazing learning experience, just like those attending a traditional school. After investigating the tenets of social justice leadership, a detailed review of past studies on continuation school leadership qualities set the stage for this study. Finally, bringing the previous components together helped depict the current leadership practices continuation school principals used daily, according to the current literature. This brought to light what the literature did not speak to, the voids in previous research, and the direction of this study.

Antecedents to Struggles at Continuation Schools

Why were students struggling at continuation schools, or even before they decided to transfer to an alternative setting? Kratzert and Kratzert (1991) attested to the continuation school setting providing students some amount of academic success, which was not attainable at their previous school. This raised the question, what are continuation school principals doing as leaders to create a learning environment that allows marginalized students the opportunity to be successful? Effective continuation school principals used internal accountability measures to create a data-based school culture (Kling, 2018). Every school aimed to base their actions on research-based practices and data-informed decisions, but without a programmatic organization of resources that met the students' needs, it is all for naught. Unfortunately, many alternative schools failed to provide academic and socio-emotional support services necessary to attain such success (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012).

Ladson-Billings (2005) argued that teachers, as professionals, should be held to higher standard in their daily practice, and not providing a meaningful educational experience should be viewed as malpractice. Teachers at continuation high schools did not receive the same support and training from districts as do those at a comprehensive school, thus leaving teachers on their own to find ways to engage and support these struggling students (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). To counter these points, Farris (2014) contended that the value of the educational offerings was not lacking, but the baseline academic preparedness of students entering a continuation school was too far behind to prepare students sufficiently for college level coursework. Khalifa et al. (2016) stated that effective school leadership included retaining teachers, consistently training teachers through culturally responsive mentoring and modeling, and finally, encouraging self-reflection by educators, leading to student success. Khalifa et al.'s themes were in direct alignment with CRL's tenets, specifically focusing on the importance of persistence and persuasiveness in supporting and guiding teachers. This could also be achieved through the tenet of fostering cultural responsiveness in others.

Many communities propagated a negative reputation for alternative schools and their students due to these struggles and subsequent student performance (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013). The negative stigma students and staff experience came from all angles. Other neighborhood students looked down upon continuation school students (Hernandez, 2017). Teaching staff that were not familiar with alternative education made assumptions about the experiences at such a school, and members of the community normally only had what the rumor mill churned up to determine the environment at a school for at-promise students. These misconceptions were addressed and reversed

54

through modeling and persuasiveness, per CRL's tenets. For this literature review, the specific focus was on continuation schools.

What Interventions Were Used at Continuation Schools?

Continuation schools used many different types of interventions to reach their students and provide the support they need to be successful. These interventions helped address the academic progress of a student, support behavioral tendencies, created engagement on campus, and aided in building meaningful mentor-like relationships with staff members (Malagon, 2010). These relationships helped build a positive self-image in students.

Why was educational success at a continuation school so important? At-promise youth are fighting on multiple fronts, while being very capable and intelligent students (Hernandez, 2017, 2018). Being on the edge of dropping out, joining gangs, and incarceration meant a powerful and supportive educational setting could ensure an impactful individual joined the community and possibly begin a cycle of educational success for generations to come through clear post-secondary planning (Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013; Taylor et al., 2015). Continuation school students struggled with hurdles like drug use, trauma, unstable living situations, and mental health issues (Galaif et al., 1998). Many studies explored the social impacts of academic success at a continuation high school (Kratzert & Kratzert, 1991; Shea & Muir Giles, 2012; Sussman et al., 1995; Wiest et al., 1998). A common theme across these studies was the importance of mental health of each student and the importance of developing a belief in self to be successful in their post-secondary lives.

Moving into the next section of the literature, this study identified common interventions used to support student success and provide a whole child response to student needs. Extending on this concept will be the role of school leaders and the principal in ensuring the efficacy and impact of these interventions for students. The study took a closer look at this issue in different themes: academic engagement, belief in self, and behavioral support.

Student Engagement and Academic Performance

Other efforts to increase engagement at school were addressed, such as the use of breathing exercises and self-management techniques along with tutoring as supports for students with emotional and behavioral disorders (Minkos et al., 2018; Schwab et al., 2015). Farris's (2014) work explored the role of the site administrator in engaging students in school while creating a college-going culture in the continuation school setting. Engagement was attainable when the goals set along with students were accomplishable, relevant, and of high interest to students (Farris, 2014). Hernandez (2017, 2018) explained the value of a staff member leading discussions with their students in a positive light that was focused on student action and belief, ultimately building strong relationships. Self-management was a stepping stone to self-efficacy and belief in self. Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) claimed that the actual learning value between traditional and continuation high schools was not much different, pointing to data that showed that student scores on state testing were comparable between the two types of schools. With that said, overall student test scores were markedly lower for those enrolled at a continuation school compared to a traditional school (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008).

Gray's (2022) view on engagement was based on the student's sentiment of belonging. The question was, how do individual educators and whole schools build a sense of belonging? CRL valued caring, building relationships, and building connections through presence and communication. Congruently, Gray (2022) proposed that belonging was built through caring, relationships, and an involvement and connection to the community. This connection to the community was not only the involvement of community entities, but a focus on and impact on the community. Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2008) claimed that continuation schools with exemplary academic outcomes had leaders who were emphatic about what amazing things their students could accomplish. When the principals were clear and proactive about their belief in the students, faculty and students mimicked the positivity and performance (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). CRL supported this idea of modeling and persuasiveness as an integral role of the school leader. In this same study, students reported that a principal that believed they were a "good student" and were able to learn made all the difference to the students. O'Gorman et al. (2016) had similar findings in that effective alternative schools in Ireland include offering physical, emotional, and psychological safe spaces; fostered a sense of community; enabled students to affirm their racial/ethnic pride; and, employed flexible behavioral supports. The question remained, what does the principal do to advance these school characteristics that enable student success?

Jóhannesson and Bjarnadóttir (2016) identified three main assets in academic re-engagement for dropouts returning to school in their study based in Iceland. The assets were a supportive school ethos including strong relationships with staff, online learning platforms for students, and meaningful formative assessments, but not high stakes

"finals." These components were easily controllable and easily developed through programmatic planning by school administration and prioritizing those most impactful variables of school leadership.

When considering the fidelity of implementation of strong instructional practices, impactful direct instruction relied on administrative support in providing an environment in which effective and efficient learning can take place (Stockard, 2020). Engelmann (2014) described these factors under administrative control, including, the daily schedule, personnel assignments, and professional development. Knowing that administrative support and control in these areas increased students' academic outcomes highlighting the impact and importance of the work of an administrator, specifically in a school serving at-promise students.

Belief in Self

Student belief in self was a constant theme in much of the literature. Self-image was affected through many different experiences, both before the student's arrival at the continuation school, in the community, and while at the continuation school. Wiest et al. (1998) explored the social impacts of academic success at a continuation high school. They reported finding that students' self-worth was most directly connected to the students' perceived control, perceived competence, and teacher support for autonomy. The implementation of work-based learning focused on building skills that met students' immediate needs and interests, to enter the workforce and start making money, developed a sense of hope in continuation school students (Taylor et al., 2015). An opposing view was provided by Nygreen (2013), contending that the tracking of continuation school students into vocational programs creates a more solidified lower economic class and a

clear division. According to Carstensen et al. (2003), students of high school age gained more motivation as they got older, as they got older and closer to a deadline for accomplishing their life goals. Self-efficacy came from staff members believing in their students and their ability to be successful in school, instilling hope in students that aided students in navigating the struggles of adolescence (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Henderson & Redmond Barnes, 2016; Moffatt & Riddle, 2021; Murray & Holt, 2014).

How were these needs propagated by school leadership? As stated earlier, school leadership acted as a model for the teachers to follow, and the students fall right in line in promoting a positive attitude and self-belief (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2008). Marsh (2015) asserted that learning improvements were regularly identified when administration, and schools in general helped students build confidence in themselves. Can students truly receive this guidance from staff without rapport and trust built through the life of the educator-student relationship? Murray and Holt (2014) discovered the ability to have a successful learning environment is all about the relationships, administrators with the staff and staff with the students. This same sentiment was shared in a scene from *The Bad Kids* (Fulton & Pepe, 2016), as the school staff sat in a meeting and identify student by student, each individual need and the staff members focused on the relationship building that was being done to support said student (Fulton & Pepe, 2016). This student intervention process was led by the principal and organized by the principal. The role of the administrator was key in this practice. Even the tone of the discussion in these meetings was not one of dissent or complaints, but rather solution-oriented and focused on actionable items (Fulton & Pepe, 2016). Again, the modeling of culturally responsive practices was foundational for a school leader (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). This

59

positive tone sets a model for the staff, which was transfused to the students, building a level of self-confidence not attainable in a negatively influenced environment.

Behavioral Support

Multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) for students were common practices in all schools, alternative or not. Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) (Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports [PBIS], 2022b) defined MTSS as "a framework that helps educators provide academic and behavioral strategies for students with various needs." Fallon and Feinberg (2017) studied the effects of a check-in, check-out system for students with behavioral disorders in the continuation school setting. This process was shown to improve student behavior, not just through student action, but a more meaningful engrossment of teachers and parents creating an environment of accountability (Fallon & Feinberg, 2017). Not all students built a relationship with a staff member on campus, or are engaged through work-based learning, or some other aspect of student life. How do administrators at the school site respond to these students in need of intervention and support for their undesired behaviors?

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based multi-tiered system of support committed to improving student performance (PBIS, 2022a). PBIS was the basis of Carmichael-Murphy et al.'s (2017) claims for decreasing disproportionate disciplinary actions for minority students in urban schools. Suspension data on CDE's (2022b) DataQuest is a repository of statewide educational data (CDE, 2022b). DataQuest reported that there were still sobering inequalities in suspension rates, specifically of African American students. When comparing suspension data from the most recent fully completed school year before the pandemic, 2018-2019, the percentage

of overall state enrollment to percent of students suspended was well out balanced for

African American students with only 5.5% of statewide enrollments, but 14.4% of

students suspended (CDE, 2022b). CDE (2022b) reported the next most imbalanced

demographic was American Indians, only making up 0.5% of the overall state

enrollments, and 1.1% of the suspensions. These data show there was still a long way to

go with getting more schools implementing PBIS interventions and ultimately approach

balance and equity in rates of serious disciplinary action. Carmichael-Murphy et al.

(2017) found that principals without experience in navigating discussions around race

struggled in connecting the impact of PBIS programs on their campus. CRL's themes of

persistence, persuasion, communicating, and modeling cultural responsiveness was a

perfect match for the needs of a continuation school principal in working to equalize

disciplinary practices. Positive behavioral supports rooted in PBIS required meaningful

teacher-student relationships, aligned with the tenets of CRL as described in the

following section.

Considering the relational approach of discipline, building rapport between staff

and students decreased negative behavior and increase on-task behaviors (Causton &

Theoharis, 2014). A more proactive approach to principal time and energy was in

creating comfortable and relaxed environments, as was supported in CRL's themes of

caring and relationship building, opposed to being called after challenging behaviors have

started (Causton & Theoharis, 2014). This direction of focus was shared by Ruiz de

Velasco et al.'s (2012) findings regarding discipline policies being clear and focused on

behavior support rather than zero tolerance. Meaningful behavioral supports were

grounded in MTSS (PBIS, 2022b). Behavioral interventions are bountiful, but specific to

each student's individual needs. Some behavioral support included counseling service, which is found on many continuation school campuses. This socio-emotional support was dissected next.

What Counseling Supports are Provided for Continuation High School Students?

Issues addressed in this section at length were focused on student need and the actions of administrators to support the school staff in servicing each student appropriately. It was also important to note the socio-emotional needs of staff and the importance of well-balanced staff members being more effective (Engelmann, 2014; Stockard, 2020). Many districts in Los Angeles County in California offered the Employee Assistance Service for Education (EASE) that provides mental health support through the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) (2022). The coordination of programs such as EASE was an employee version of McGregor et al. (2015) proposing the coordination of community resources for students. With a county-wide program available for employees, that begs the question, how were individual schools and school leaders developing programs and partnerships to support students?

What Were the Socio-emotional Supports Available to Students at Continuation High Schools? Socio-emotional interventions and school-wide socio-emotional learning provided support needed for students across continuation school campuses. Socio-emotional issues rooted in domestic issues, previous school experiences, and so on can be supported through a variety of counseling services provided by the school as well as community-based agencies. Galaif et al. (1998) brought to light the importance of counseling services and drug awareness programs in the continuation school setting, specifically focusing on the correlation between depression, suicidal

ideation, and substance abuse. The most effective socio-emotional support for all students was found to be the meaningful relationship or connection with a staff member on campus (McGregor & Mills, 2012; McGregor et al., 2015; O'Brien & Curry, 2009). Teachers at continuation schools expressed a strong commitment to the socio-emotional well-being of their students (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Mills et al., 2016). Successful schools servicing youth in need of socio-emotional support provide flexible learning plans that are innovative and wraparound social services (McGregor et al., 2015). Not all schools were able to provide the necessary support to allow students to focus their mental-emotional energy solely on their studies, as they continuously battle with external factors (Fulton & Pepe, 2016).

This service shortcoming highlighted the need for continuation school principals to act as advocates for socio-emotional support services at their school site (Carpenter-Aeby & Aeby, 2005). This could have included adding district staff or coordination with community resources to provide services through referral. Whatever the solution was for a specific school, the administrator must provide guidance and vision in the organization and coordination of the programmatic support (Engelmann, 2014; Stockard, 2020). Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2012) contended that the administrator's role is to blend the academic and social supports through community partnerships.

Many continuation schools were not able to meet the need for counseling services, the concept of leveraging community resources came to the forefront again when considering drug abuse and other derivatives of poor mental health (Fulton & Pepe, 2016). This included drug abuse counseling, addressed in the next section.

What Were the Substance Abuse Counseling Options for Students at Continuation High Schools? Continuation high schools enrolled students struggling with drug abuse at significantly higher rates than traditional schools (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). This finding highlighted the need for drug counseling offerings through the school and in collaboration with community-based agencies. Recurring small group drug awareness curriculum has also been shown to reduce drug use in continuation school students (Lisha et al., 2012). Sharma and Branscum (2013) found the length of the intervention was inconsequential, yet there were signs brief interventions were more promising. They identified the longer interventions as more difficult to execute and organize, thus leading to less promising results (Sharma & Branscum, 2013). These counseling characteristics were guiding practices for counseling services for alternative education programs, but when considering the larger landscape of substance abuse intervention, we must investigate the role of the school leader's influence on the campus-wide program.

The administrator's role in supporting counseling efforts in both of these areas does not change between socio-emotional and substance abuse needs. Stockard (2020) and Engelmann (2014), as earlier explained, helped define the importance of the school administrator's support, organization, and coordination of an efficient school's programmatic set-up. As Carpenter-Aeby and Aeby (2005) contended, this includes the comprehensive socio-emotional support options offered at alternative schools. Many times, the need of a school was broader than the on-site services available, requiring the set-up of organizational programming that reaches beyond the school's walls and direct resources. This was where the importance of the principal's skill and attention in building

relationships with service agencies in the community played an important role to scale-up the support provided to students (Larson et al., 2017). Providing reactive counseling support was a need in the alternative education environment, but is not sufficient. Socio-emotional learning must be built into the classroom curriculum, the school must provide opportunities to practice competencies, and engage family and community members (Grant et al., 2017).

As mentioned in the previous section, the ability of a school leader to coordinate between community agencies to provide services for the students alongside the school's efforts was paramount to the offering of services that consider the whole child (Larson et al., 2017). A principal providing this whole-student approach to the full academic program helped guide a school to student success, which is the topic of the next section.

Leadership and Student Success

When considering the multitude of interventions being implemented at continuation schools, it was evident that there is a need for strong leaders to help guide school communities in providing an excellent educational environment that services the whole child. When referring to the whole child, this included the academic, behavioral, and psychological interests of the student (Learning Policy Institute, 2021). When weighing the idea of "good leadership," Theoharis (2007) was quoted as describing why leadership in his work is more than just good leadership. Theoharis (2007) stated, "I caution us all to consider that decades of good leadership have created and sanctioned unjust and inequitable schools" (p. 253).

This led to the idea of actively influencing and changing institutional aspects to create equity and access for all. Brooks et al. (2007) described social justice leadership as

a more intangible practice that changes in form and routine with the school environment. Shields (2010) spoke of enacting change at the school level (in structures, culture and pedagogical practices) creating a more just and inclusive learning environment. Theoharis (2007) was more pointed with his examples of practices that created a more equitable and just learning environment. All of this led to the latent qualities of school practices enacted by one leader, but when new leadership comes in, how do those practices change? What is it that must happen to solidify culture and practices at the school site through governing board action, legislation, or other transformations that have staying power? This issue highlighted the need for socially just leaders to manifest the tenets of CRL, specifically in this case the persuasion and communication necessary to enact real, long-lasting change. Ultimately any of it can be overturned or changed without educating others, immersing them, and getting them bought in to change the whole cultural landscape through written policies, practices, and laws.

Qualities of Effective Principals in Traditional Schools

This study's focus was on the leadership qualities and practices of continuation school principals. While the studies laid out in this section were more broadly referred to as general school leadership, the settings for these studies were primarily staged in traditional schools. It was important to look at leadership through this lens to better understand the differences between traditional and continuation school settings, and the specific leadership qualities and practices that guide these different types of schools. Identifying the differences helped us recognize where the impact lies in the diversion of practice (Whitaker, 2020). In a report prepared for The Wallace Foundation, Wahlstrom et al. (2010) found that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction

influencing academic growth. This study included two six-year terms of data collection to solidify the findings and claims by Wahlstrom et al. (2010). In a similar conglomerate of research, Whitaker (2020) combined results from multiple studies over a 15-year period examining the actions that make great principals different.

Whitaker's (2020) findings led to the specific practices on which the foundation of leadership is built in a school setting. As we investigate these practices, it is important to remember this first section, focusing on the impact of less is more. With that, this study now turned its attention to clear and focused goals.

Clear and Focused Goals

Schmoker (2019) contended that there are only two things that a school leader should do to quickly turn around a school, and thus student outcomes. First, commit to a severely reduced number of initiatives, and second, select and focus on evidence-based instructional practices that are determined according to student performance data (Schmoker, 2019). Schmoker referred to Hansen's *Great at Work* (2018) which identified seven top factors that influence leadership performance. The number one component was focus, specifically cutting down on initiatives and obsessing on the cornerstone elements. Hansen (2018) and Schmoker's (2019) identification of focusing on one bedrock initiative provided a clear path forward for a staff and school. The clear pathway forward, and the annual goal that was set as a staff is a beacon for all other actions taken at a school (Whitaker, 2020).

Having a small list of initiatives was the first step, communication of that focus to the staff is the next. CRL's fourth tenet, communication, was a foundational theme in this section. As addressed earlier, Moore et al. (2015) found that clear expectations and

practices supported effective learning environments for students, and the same is true for adults and staff. A clear singular focused direction and goal for the school was best practice (Hansen, 2018; Schmoker, 2019; Whitaker, 2020).

Instructional Leadership and Student Learning

A focus on instructional impact on student learning, school-wide goals aiming the instructional effort, and professional development to support such endeavors were common themes in successful school leadership (Kafele, 2015; Schmoker, 2019; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; Whitaker, 2020). Whitaker (2020) said there are only two ways to improve a school, through hiring better teachers or improving the ones that were already employed at the school. In most public education settings, this meant the pathway to improvement was through professional learning. Kafele (2015) urged the principal to use staff meetings to solely focus on professional learning, as administrative matters could be handled through email communications. These findings aligned with the true measure of a school's success which was the academic progress each student makes. The bellwether goal for any school must be student learning, and in following that mindset, the instructional program and practices must take precedence through the instructional leader, the principal, and all practices and actions that come with the position. This was not to say there should be a culture fearful of academic failure, rather staff should have embraced failure as an opportunity to grow and learn, while modeling the same for the students (Mieliwocki & Fatheree, 2019).

Staff Considerations: Professional Development and Accountability

The Wallace Foundation (2013) report on principals as school leaders identified five key practices of effective principals: a vision of academic success for all, positive

school climate, developing leadership skills of others, improved instruction, and managing people and processes focused on school improvement. Whitaker (2020) shared some of these same areas of attention, including a positive school climate and relationships that drive the positive climate. Whitaker (2020) also explained different actions of great principals in supporting teaching, and more specifically, learning in the classroom. When considering engaging instruction and learning in the classroom, the train of thought led to accountability and performance. A common theme in the literature focused on the principal's role in keeping school staff members accountable (Kafele, 2015; Muhammad, 2009; Whitaker, 2020). Kafele (2015) explained that this role must be mirrored by the expectation the principal holds herself accountable for the successes and failures of the school, including student learning. This belief in self as the right person for the job was the same expectation that successful schools were propagating in the students, as described earlier. A principal that was laser focused and holding others accountable, while also taking on the responsibility of the performance of the whole would become solely focused on the specific goals of a school, embodying the obsessive characteristics highlighted by Schmoker (2019) and Hansen (2018). CRL's sole component focused on curricular instruction (there are many focused on socio-emotional components) was presence and communication. This was achieved by the study's participant, Faith, by leading collaborative walkthroughs (CWTs) and promoting collaboration between teachers to increase the use of best practices. There was also data collection built into the CWTs, allowing teachers to learn from data and share with those teachers that were observed (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

School Climate and Culture

A school's climate and culture are another responsibility that rested on the shoulders of the principal (Kafele, 2015; Muhammad, 2009; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; Whitaker, 2020). The culture of a school was built through many different variables and pathways. There were also differences in culture that must be addressed, the culture of students may be different than the culture of staff. Ultimately, the staff culture influenced student culture and daily practice (Mieliwocki & Fatheree, 2019). A school's culture reflected the leader; thus, it must be a constant focus of the daily efforts of a principal (Whitaker, 2020). How is a culture built, or more accurately, how is a culture changed from what it is to what it aspires to be? As all of these researchers agree, the culture started and ended with the people. Whitaker (2020) identified the difficulties in a new leader joining a school and not having seen the impactful events and experiences that shaped the culture the principal was working in and responsible for. This was partly due to a great leader's ability to quickly change cultural expectations and set a tone moving forward (Whitaker, 2020). Muhammad's (2009) study focused on identifying four groups that all staff members fall into, two being part of the cultural drive forward, one group just trying to survive each day, and another that is caught in the middle. The study defined the general behaviors of these groups and suggests ways to move staff members along the continuum to groups that were in line with the culture aspirations of the school (Muhammad, 2009). This was a constant effort in aligning staff culture with school-wide goals and action plans.

Navigating Difficult Situations and Using Each Issue as an Opportunity for Growth

No matter the cultural state of a school, problems will always arise, in communication, relationships, logistically, or otherwise. Fullan (2001) described "A Framework for Leadership" as a convergence of ideas and practices that helped find solutions to problems that do not have easy answers. Components of Fullan's framework can be traced back to transformational leadership, cultural wealth, self-efficacy framework, servant leadership theory, among others. The challenge for the leader was to identify the needs of the school and implement the leadership practice that best fits their personal leadership style and the learning community's needs to meet said goals. Garmston and Wellman's (2009) work in creating adaptive school strategies included a heavy dose of distributive leadership qualities, engaging all staff members in solving problems, thus creating ownership and buy-in to school-wide solutions and follow-up. Distributive leadership was centered upon leaders building capacity in others, making unifying decisions on student success, and developing a high-quality school culture (Gates Foundation, 2022). Aleman (2009) and Raisor (2011) addressed this same theme of difficult solutions to unique problems, but leveraging such situations to help an organization grow as a whole. Aleman's (2009) thoughts on involving the whole team to find solutions to the problem and create ownership was an area that extends beyond Raisor's (2011) dissertation. All of the research in the section supported the importance of distributive leadership, including voices from all community partners in the development of a solution, to not only build staff and process efficiency, but also positive culture.

When looking at the studies presented in this section, along with others across the educational landscape, the common themes identified as impactful leadership practices included a focus on instructional practices, relationships, and a focus on school vision and mission. This school direction or purpose must be driven by the principal to a degree that could be described by some as maniacal (Hansen, 2018; Schmoker, 2019).

Social Justice Leadership

Social justice must be a central theme in the continuation school setting with high percentages of historically underperforming student groups making up the majority of students enrolled at continuation schools. CDE did not report enrollment data specifically from continuation schools, but Ruiz de Velasco et al. (2012) reported a disproportionate amount of African American and English Learner students at continuation schools. The sole fact that this data was not widely available is a social justice issue, in that it did not provide transparency and clarity in assessing the current state of continuation schools across the state.

Social Justice Leadership (SJL) in the school setting had a strong foundation in recent literature and empirical studies. School leaders' promotion of equity and social justice pivoted on the trust, communication, and action experienced by the whole school community (Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014). This study's theoretical framework revolved around many of these same themes in assessing the leadership of schools in today's societal landscape. The focus turned to a look at social justice leadership profiles that several studies document and the common themes across the literature.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) identified their subject's six themes of Culturally Responsive Leadership (CRL) through a case study as:

- caring for others;

- building relationships;

- persistence and persuasiveness;

- being present and communicating;

- modeling cultural responsiveness; and

- fostering cultural responsiveness among others.

As noted early, this theoretical framework was the lens through which this study is being

viewed. As identified in the profile of a continuation school student, the value of many of

these themes were directly connected to Hernandez's (2017, 2018) and Noddings's

(2013) care, O'Brien and Curry's (2009) relationships, and Murray and Holt's (2014)

persistence. Surprisingly, this model did not include a component of reflection as did

many of the other CRL models. These models and the impact of reflection were explored

and reviewed in the following sections.

Reed and Swaminathan (2016) defined SJL as searching for ways to improve

academic instruction for marginalized students, encompassing a leader's disposition, and

the intentional acts required to ensure SJL. As SJL fills these school needs, they placed

historically marginalized subgroups at the center of their work. The study was tied

together with the three tenets of CRL: leaders must understand the existing culture, be

creative in addressing needs of their students, and balance between transformational and

transactional leadership (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016). Transformational leadership was

focused on facilitating organizational collaboration that helped move the vision of an

organization forward (Bass, 2008). Transactional leadership was focused on a system of

exchanges between the leader and the staff, with employees receiving positive reinforcement for meeting organizational or personal goals (Bass, 2008).

Larson et al. (2004) valued this sentiment of empowering school leaders (not bound by title) by breaking the traditional school leadership hierarchical model. This model highlighted multiple components that are immensely influential in a culturally responsive school culture and leadership practice: value-added leadership, including opposing views and differing lenses (Santamaria, 2014); use of data to guide decision making (Murray-Johnson & Guerra, 2018); and the use of contentious situations to grow as a school (Aleman, 2009). When considering the possible impact of CRL on non-traditional school leader practice, the most immediate connections were made in the tenets of persuasion focused on longer term change and fostering cultural responsiveness in others.

Reed and Swaminathan (2016) explained the value of a socially just leader being aware of, and tuned in to, the cultural landscape of a school, specifically when entering a new school with the charge of transformation. This was a theme that is not overtly addressed in the other articles reviewed beyond Aleman's (2009) findings of the importance of using difficult situations to set benchmarks for the development of culture and expectations in an organization. Addressing these difficult situations directly as an opportunity for growth required multiple soft skills specifically driven by relationships and culture-building (Whitaker, 2020). As each of these studies posed different characteristics of leadership that makes a difference when considering the educational social justice landscape, the literature pointed to a seminal study that was examined in more detail in the following section.

Khalifa et al. (2016) identified four strands of Culturally Responsive School Leadership (CRSL): critical self-awareness, teacher preparation, school environments, and community advocacy. The first aspect of CRSL, critical self-awareness, may also be referred to as critical consciousness. When used to explore and interrogate one's own beliefs, values, and biases towards low-income students of color, critical self-awareness counteracted the propensity to disengage with and otherwise avoid issues of race in education (Gay & Kirkland, 2003). Engagement with self-awareness allowed school leaders to disrupt racism, as demonstrated in Boske (2015) when school leaders who participated in guided critical reflection exercises subsequently acted against identified racism in their given contexts. Teacher preparation was a common theme across many of the studies addressed in this literature review and a pillar of CSRL (Khalifa et al., 2016), valuing professional development, clear instructional goals, and personnel actions including evaluation, hiring practices, and support of under-performing educators (Marsh, 2015; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012; Stockard, 2020; The Wallace Foundation, 2013; Wahlstrom et al., 2010; Whitaker, 2020). Positive school environments stemmed from the relationships that were built upon through daily practice, not a singular event (Whitaker, 2020). Khalifa et al.'s (2016) value of school environments, as were other studies, influential upon other areas of leadership effectiveness.

Common themes of social justice school leadership, and specifically CRL, were clear in the area of influence upon others to adjust their practice. Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) final tenet of CRL was fostering cultural responsiveness in others. This in turn, positively affected the learning environment and educational experience for all

students. These influential acts were experienced in many different forms, such as professional development (Khalifa et al., 2016), modeling (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012), and establishing school culture (Horsford et al., 2011). All of these actions were based on the influence of a school leader and their ability to influence staff daily practices. This, in turn, influenced overall school culture.

Horsford et al. (2011) defined the framework for culturally relevant leadership as a continuum or feedback loop that was continuously changing and adjusting the practices of the leader through identifying issues, setting plans, acting and reflecting on the outcome. This concept of reflection was a common theme across many of these SJL models (Boske, 2015; Horsford et al., 2011; Khalifa et al., 2016). Dailey (2015) based her reflection of professional practice on her positionality, specifically how her different identities impact her actions and decision-making. Garza's (2008) autoethnographic reflections on his experiences as a social justice leader focused on his learnings from a year of challenges, particularly the political and social factors that hindered his equity work. Reflection being the central theme of all of these studies highlighted the value of reflection in SJL and the importance of reflection being built into the regular practice of an effective school leader.

There were also components of self-reflection specifically identified by Khalifa et al. (2016) and Horsford et al. (2011). The importance of self-reflection was a central theme in social justice leadership. The sole SJL model that was not evident was the theoretical framework that is guiding this study, Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) CRL. Without it the leader was not adjusting to meet the needs of those historically

marginalized, being creative in finding solutions intended for their school population, and aware of cultural differences across a community.

Knowing the Continuation School Profile, What Do Schools Need from Their Leaders to be Successful?

There were no current studies comparing leadership at alternative schools and leadership at traditional schools. There has been limited investigation in the area of leadership at continuations schools in dissertation publications and some other peer reviewed articles in academic journals. The following literature addressed needs for awareness and action in diversity and equity, instructional components supported by professional development and the value of meaningful relationships with all stakeholders.

What Were Effective Principals Doing at Continuation High Schools? Bush's (2012) report on effective learning environments in California continuation schools shed light on three elements: balancing competing goals while aligning practices, specific school objectives driven by the principal to standardize classroom instruction, and districts that align professional learning opportunities between traditional and continuation schools. As the following literature showed, a focus on instruction was a common theme, along with the professional development that supported the classroom instruction.

Stoops (2012) examined the beliefs and practices of alternative education principals. Stoops identified five domains of school leadership including servant leadership, special education, mental health knowledge and delivery of service, social justice, and instructional leadership. Stoops (2012) connected the importance of a servant leadership model to the driving force of the development of a school climate, which in

turn provided a platform for academic achievement. This same study found that alternative education principals did not provide any special treatment to students with learning differences, nor did it have an impact on the leadership of their programs (Stoops, 2012). The domain including mental health service was a unanimous flashpoint among alternative education leaders from Stoops's study. Connecting students with necessary counseling services was an integral part of alternative education programs. Finally, in the area of instructional leadership, Stoops found no commonalities among the study subjects' instructional leadership practices. There was alignment with the need to collect data, but differences exist in what type of data and how it could be collected (Stoops, 2012).

It was important to understand the context of Stoops's (2012) study. Interviews were conducted with four traditional school principals and four alternative education principals, all from northwest Pennsylvania (Stoops, 2012). According to Stoops, alternative schools in Pennsylvania were focused on providing a learning environment for misbehaved students or those with learning differences, aptly titled Alternative Education for Disruptive Youth. The title of the 614 schools with this focus in Pennsylvania is grounded in a fixed mindset. One glaring hole in Stoops's study was the explanation of why the domains were identified as the most impactful. How did the school leaders know these aspects of leadership were making a difference or more important than others? This study tempted future research to identify how school leaders know that their actions are making a difference and leading their schools and students to success.

How Do Principals Know What They are Doing is Working and Making a Difference? Dall's (2016) dissertation identified practices that successful continuation

high schools implement, including: creating student-focused programs, utilizing a wide variety of strategies, building strong communities, and high levels of teacher self-efficacy. None of these actions were directly connected to leadership practices, but administrative actions are easily construed that could apply directly to these most impactful practices. Building strong communities started with strong relationships. High levels of teacher self-efficacy were promoted through challenging and supportive work environments through powerful leadership supported with professional learning opportunities.

Barajas's (2021) dissertation found the following components of continuation schools as making a significant difference in academic success for their students. The importance of relationships, awareness and discourse around equity and diversity, and support for planning for post-secondary life (Barajas, 2021). Barajas (2021) identified the need for "equity-driven leadership" (p. 97) to capture these aspects for a school's and students' best interest. Barajas (2021) and Dall (2016) both found common ground in the impact of relationships in educating students at continuation schools.

Leadership Styles. One past study that was similar in focus and scope to this one was completed by Delgado et al. (2018) as the researchers surveyed teachers from California Model Continuation Schools (MCHS) and continuation schools without this distinction. The California Model Continuation Schools award was the highest recognition for a continuation school in the state of California. The MCHS award was a joint process between CDE and CCEA Plus with schools earning a three-year term of notable achievement. After the teacher survey using the Multiple Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ-5X), the research team conducted interviews of school leaders from

MCHS and non-MCHS to compare leadership styles and practices between the two (Delgado et al., 2018). The team concluded that leaders at both MCHSs and non-MCHSs practiced transformative leadership (Delgado et al., 2018). The researchers also found common themes across all of the interviewed leaders, specifically in servitude, resilience, disruptive innovation, and advocacy.

Delgado et al. (2018) had similar outcomes as did Stoops (2012) with a focus on servant leadership. Barajas (2021) found impact in awareness and action in diversity and equity, as was Dall's (2016) findings focused on student-centered actions, in alignment with advocacy found by Delgado et al. (2018). Another recurring theme acting as a foundation for many of these studies' findings was the relational component that supports the efficacy of leadership work done by each principal. On the instructional front, there was a clear focus on a united and clear instructional focus supported by professional development and opportunities to collaborate across all school types, both traditional and continuation (Bush, 2012; Dall, 2016; Stoops, 2012).

A Synthesis of the Literature

As the literature reviewed has shown, there was still a gaping hole in research on leadership qualities of effective principals at continuation schools. There was a vast collection of general research on principal leadership qualities, normally through research conducted in the traditional school setting. Traditional schools are vastly different from an alternative school or continuation school, by definition. This difference in school purpose and function would seem to call for a different set of leadership qualities required for the principal, which was the reasoning behind this study. Te Riele's (2006) study on schooling practices for marginalized students found that educators in alternative

settings are not doing different work, only focusing their attention in specific areas that they find most impactful, as to not overwhelm themselves in the demanding environment with at-promise students. The aim of this study was to identify the specific skill sets most impactful for principals in the continuation high school setting.

Results from this literature review pointed to the value of administrative effectiveness being second only to classroom instruction when determining the most influential variables to student learning (Wahlstrom et al., 2010). A principal's focus on instruction was a common theme across both traditional and continuation school studies (Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Schmoker, 2019; Stoops, 2012; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). No matter the type of school, traditional or continuation, schools were meant for learning, and a focus on instruction means student academic growth. The value of relationships and building culture was also a widespread theme across many of the studies (Barajas, 2021; Dall, 2016; Fullan, 2001; Hernandez, 2017, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; O'Brien & Curry, 2009; The Wallace Foundation, 2013). While impactful principals were supporting instruction and building relationships that drive school culture, they must also be aware of the positionality of their students and be willing to challenge the status quo, advocating for the diversity and equity across the school community (Aleman, 2009; Barajas, 2021; Boske, 2015; Delgado et al., 2018; Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Khalifa et al., 2016; Larson et al., 2004; Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012; Murray & Holt, 2014; Reed & Swaminathan, 2016; Rivera-McCutchen & Watson, 2014; Santamaria, 2014). Advocating for others was a modeling technique by the leader that can lead to fostering cultural responsiveness in others, just as CRL calls for in its final two tenets (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Through all of the studies with a focus on continuation school setting, the only findings specifically related to socially just practices and advocacy were from Delgado et al. (2018) and Barajas (2021). This was an area for growth and opportunity for future research. The lack of depth in research in the area of continuation school leadership and the clear differences in continuation school needs was what calls this study to identify the qualities of effective school principals. Applying Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) CRL, along with self-reflection, as a framework for the building of a professional profile for continuation school principals will help narrow and illuminate socially just leadership in such a setting. Beyond the original six themes Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) identified in their study of Faith, the effective social justice leader, this study also explored the possible impact of self-reflection as an important practice for continuation school principals.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Data was collected in a qualitative manner through pre-interview questionnaires and interviews of principals of California Model Continuation High Schools. The aim of this study was to inform continuation school leader practitioners and mentors in their daily practice of supporting alternative education programs, and specifically historically marginalized students in need of a positive experience through the school system. Research on leadership in continuation high schools was needed because there are concerns that historically marginalized students at continuation schools receive a substandard education due to continuation schools not receiving the same level of support or resources as traditional schools. With continuation schools full of at-promise students, they deserved an excellent principal, and thus an excellent school. By completing this study, current practitioners and future leaders used the profile created to guide professional learning and self-directed reflection on daily praxis, leading to well-run continuation schools that provide a restorative and thorough educational experience for our students most in need.

Research Question

The development of each continuation school leader will look different in regard to their school's unique needs. However, there were general lessons to learn and specific questions that can be asked and answered when considering these variations. Bearing this in mind, in an attempt to identify a general profile of successful leadership in the continuation school setting, the major research question was:

What are the strengths and challenges of Model Continuation School principals

successfully leading their staff and at-promise youth?

Rationale for Conducting a Qualitative Study

The qualitative approach of this study aimed to understand as opposed to measure the qualities and practices of principals at continuation schools (Forman et al., 2008). It allowed for the collection of rich descriptive data about the unique experiences of each study participant (Patton, 2015; Seidman, 2019). Open-ended questions without predetermined answers allowed for respondents to use their own language, provide detailed responses, and take the question in any direction they choose (Leavy, 2017). Understanding the leadership strengths, characteristics, and styles of principals of Model Continuation Schools helped develop a profile that can be used to guide professional development and self-reflection for current and future leaders. The use of a qualitative model with a foundation in one-on-one interviews allowed for personalization that anonymous surveys could not provide (Leavy, 2017; Seidman, 2019). A small focus group model could have provided opportunities for participants to build off of each other's thoughts, but the social strain of inadequate familiarity between participants would have diminished their willingness to be candid in their responses and personal reflections. The implementation of the qualitative model also allowed for flexible investigation through emergent factors that would not have been possible through surveys (Seidman, 2019). This ability to pivot and follow unforeseen leads and characteristics not previously fleshed out in the limited research allowed for new findings to better inform current and future practitioners.

Method

Participants

      The study used purposive sampling to identify study participants who were principals of Model Continuation Schools in California. The researcher used a publicly-accessible database of principal contacts accessible through the CCEA Plus website (2022a) to access principals' email addresses. The researcher contacted possible participants via email in June of 2022 to solicit their participation in this study, aiming to have a minimum of eight participants in the one-on-one interview. In the end, this study consisted of data collected from nine participants. All participants replied to the email to communicate their intent to participate in the study. The email explained the purpose and possible impact of the study on the participants' daily praxis and that it was "completely optional, anonymous, and confidential." A follow-up email was sent at the end of July 2022, thanking those who already have responded, reminding others to do so, and including the approximate length of time needed to complete the interview (approximately 60 minutes). The investigator encouraged their response to prompt an interview to be scheduled, and assured them of anonymity. One final recruitment email was sent out in August of 2022 which secured the final study participants.

      Demographics and basic information describing the nine respondents can be found in Table 1. Names of participants have been changed to ensure anonymity. As referenced in the table, there was a wide representation of school principals across ethnic identity, gender identity, and experience as a continuation school principal. Only two of the nine participants did not have experience at a traditional school setting. Also, only two of the participants had six or less years of experience as an administrator across all

settings. This high level of experience, matched with the stipulation that all participants

are current principals at model continuation schools guaranteed that the insight and

feedback encountered during data collection was pertinent and applicable.

Table 1

Pre-interview Questionnaire Demographic Results

Participant Pseudonym	Racial Identity	Ethnic Identity	Gender Identity	Years of Admin Experience	Years as Continuation School Principal	Model School Awards
Dr. Silver	Black or African American	Not Hispanic or Latino	Female	11 years or more	3-6 years	1
Ms. Bay	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Female	11 years or more	11 years or more	2
Ms. Jeffries	Two or more races	Not Hispanic or Latino	Female	3-6 years	3-6 years	2
Mr. Hernandez	Other	Hispanic or Latino	Male	7-10 years	7-10 years	2
Dr. Love	Other	Hispanic or Latino	Female	7-10 years	7-10 years	2
Dr. Baker	Black or African American	Not Hispanic or Latino	Male	3-6 years	Less than 3 years	1
Mr. Locke	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Male	11 years or more	3-6 years	1
Ms. Virginia	Black or African American	Not Hispanic or Latino	Female	7-10 years	3-6 years	1
Dr. Lider	White	Not Hispanic or Latino	Female	11 years or more	7-10 years	3

Data Collection

Willing participants of the study were scheduled for a one-hour, one-on-one interview with scripted questions. Jack (2019) spoke of the impact of individual voices and the importance of using interviews to capture such powerful data, which applies directly to the unique setting of continuation schools and their fearless leaders. Jack (2019) also spoke of the importance of rapport with study participants and the balance of that rapport leading to bias as a researcher when stronger connections are made between researcher and participant. The influence of bias was addressed in a subsequent section.

The development of the interview questions was done over a period of time during which the researcher was developing the research study and studying general qualities of school leaders, comparing those outcomes to the limited research found to be focused on alternative education, and more specifically continuation schools in California. See Appendix C for a list of the scripted interview questions. The foundational comparisons between traditional and alternative educational setting leadership was evidenced in the literature review. Even though the interview questions were highly structured, a model of emergent questions was used as there were components of the interview results that could not be foreseen and required further investigation once introduced by the participant.

Before the interview, each participant completed a short questionnaire focused on basic demographic questions about the respondent and their school. See Appendix D for a copy of the questionnaire. The demographic designations were modeled after the United States Census Bureau's categorizations for race (Jensen et al., 2021). A question on gender was also modeled after questionnaire language and response options recently

published by the Census Bureau (File & Lee, 2021). The use of a questionnaire to precede the interview allowed the interview time to be focused on the content surrounding qualities and skills implemented by the leader in a continuation school setting. Responses were collected and reviewed before the interview to provide opportunities for emergent questioning built into the interview protocol allowing for unforeseen outcomes through the research process. Results from the questionnaire also provided a baseline demographic data profile for the participants.

The interviews were offered in different settings, both in-person and virtually, depending on the preference of each participant. All nine participants chose to complete their interview through a virtual meeting. Leavy (2017) urged providing a comfortable setting for the participant and quickly building rapport as an important component to successful qualitative research through interviews. Building this rapport came through active listening strategies including eye contact and gestures to show the interest, or through probing questions to lead to more vital information (Leavy, 2017). For virtual interviews, Zoom (www.zoom.us) was used as the preferential platform to capitalize on the ability to record and transcribe the interview using the same application. The use of virtual interviews provided similar abilities to read social cues and gestures as compared to in-person interviews (Leavy, 2017).

Analytical Plan

After all of the interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed and edited for clarity by the sole researcher. Data was stored in a secure digital format only accessible by the researcher behind password protection. Notes were taken during the interview process to highlight and flag possible themes to return to once data collection

was complete. The data were analyzed using deductive and emergent coding practices. Through the initial immersion of the data, and the coding process, the researcher used the *in vivo* coding approach, which allowed the coding to develop organically (Strauss, 1987). Memos were written as brief synopsis of each question and overall themes for each interview. Deductive coding was used to compare the results to Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) themes of CRL. This was achieved by developing a matrix to compare and connect major themes with Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) six tenets. This initial framework, guiding the thematic coding, provided a baseline comparison of leadership qualities and practices. Continuing with an emergent coding practice provided flexibility in the focus on themes and allowed for new findings that would have been constrained by predetermined themes. After the first few batches were completed, axial coding practices were administered to build up a wealth of knowledge around common themes. This step was achieved by written meta memos that incorporated themes across all interviews for a specific question. After coding was completed, the codes were categorized to group similarly themed codes (Saldaña, 2014). An interpretation of these themes was developed through the support of memo writing, looking for patterns, and connecting themes across categories (Leavy, 2017).

After the codes were categorized and themes were identified, the results were compared to findings from the literature review in regards to general leadership practices for school leaders, and confirmed or enlightened the small collection of previous research done specifically focusing on continuation school leadership practices and characteristics.

Limitations

Sample Size

The researcher included participation by nine principals from Model Continuation Schools in the state of California. With CCEA Plus (2022a) currently acknowledging 106 Model Continuation Schools in the state of California, and CDE (2021) identifying 425 continuation schools in the state, the pool of possible participants made up just under 25% of the total population. Nine participants from the 106 Model Schools represented 8.49% of the total possible participants and 2.12% of leaders at all of the continuation schools in the state of California. Malterud et al. (2016) suggested that the sample size of a qualitative interview study be determined by the concept of "information power" as opposed to saturation, indicating that the more information a sample holds the more indicative it is of the larger population.

Bias

It was important to note the position of the principal investigator as a professional colleague of the interview participants. Some of the participants worked alongside the researcher through professional organizations, at conferences, or through inter-district collaboration. This may have impacted the willingness to participate in the study or influence the way the respondents answered questions during the interview. Influential factors could have included a lack of willingness to be completely transparent or candid due to the pre-existing relationship and the perceived ridicule that would come with certain responses. To minimize and negate this variable, a statement was made by the researcher at the beginning of each interview explaining the anonymity of the process and the neutral stance of the researcher. With that said, no statement can completely negate

biases or influenced responses due to relationships with respondents, but structured questions combined with an iterative process in questioning guided by each participant's response aid in diminishing bias (Klenke, 2015).

Conclusion

This qualitative study, basing data collection in one-on-one interviews, aimed to develop a profile of principals' qualities and practices at Model Continuation Schools. The researcher conducted one 60-minute interview with a total of nine participants via a virtual platform. A questionnaire was completed by each participant before the interview to collect basic demographic data about the interviewee and their school. Data analysis was conducted using deductive and emergent coding, initially using Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) six themes of CRL, but being flexible to allow for new themes and ideas to be identified through emergent coding. Limitations were minimal, notably the sample size in comparison to the amount of continuation school principals in California and the bias of the researcher as a Model Continuation School principal during the study.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Background

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the beliefs and practices of continuation school leaders through the lens of Culturally Responsive Leadership in order to understand the strengths and challenges of these leaders in supporting at-promise youth. In California, continuation schools educated a significant population of students, approximately 10% of all high school students in the state. The majority of these students came from marginalized communities and have experienced significant barriers to school success. Even though federal statutes, state laws, education code, and local education agency policy were in place to protect and support students, practices related to administration and teaching in continuation schools must also be used in service of student success. In order to identify and understand the practices associated with student success, this study focused on answering the following research question:

What are the strengths and challenges of Model Continuation School principals successfully leading their staff and at-promise youth?

This chapter presents the findings of my research and has been organized into sections in alignment with the tenets of this study's theoretical framework, Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) Culturally Responsive Leadership. The daily school leadership praxis included the following six themes: caring; building relationships; being persistent and persuasive; being present and communicating; modeling cultural responsiveness; and fostering cultural responsiveness in others (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

In addition, this chapter presents findings representative of themes identified in the research literature on leadership in continuation schools, including:

- clear and focused goals;

- instructional leadership and student learning;

- professional development and accountability;

- school climate and culture;

- navigating difficult situations;

- practices of effective continuation school principals;

- how do you know what you are doing is working; and

- leadership styles.

Some of the data collected contained rich examples and guidance on how to navigate difficult situations, advocating for the student and school, and the importance of professional networks for personal professional development. Other areas were not as clear, lacking common responses across many of the participants, specifically in tangible examples of daily practices that fostered cultural responsiveness in others. This was an area for possible growth in the daily practice of these participants and others. The pre-interview questionnaire was used as a precursor to the one-on-one interview, collecting basic demographic data and identifying basic foundational beliefs in the areas of school leadership theory and daily leadership practices. The demographic data of the participants can be found in Table 1. Results from the final two questions of the pre-questionnaire focusing on each participant's self-identified leadership style and the three daily priorities most important to each participant can be found in Table 2. As seen in Appendix E, transformational leadership was directly identified by five of the respondents, with two respondents identifying a distributive leadership style, one participant chose social justice, and the final participant was a "blend of the above approaches." The list from

which they chose their answers was a derivative of the common themes in recent school

leadership research.

Table 2

Pre-interview Questionnaire Leadership Style and Priority Results

Participant	Leadership Style	Top Priorities in Their Daily Practice
Dr. Silver	Transformational	1. Clear and focused goals 2. Student self-belief 3. School climate and culture
Ms. Bay	Transformational	1. Behavioral support 2. Student self-belief 3. Professional development and staff accountability
Ms. Jeffries	Distributive	1. Student self-belief 2. School climate and culture 3. Culturally responsive schools
Mr. Hernandez	Transformational	1. School climate and culture 2. Clear and focused goals 3. Behavioral support
Dr. Love	Transformational	1. Culturally responsive schools 2. School climate and culture 3. Student self-belief
Dr. Baker	Transformational	1. School climate and culture 2. Student self-belief 3. Student socio-emotional support
Mr. Locke	Other: "A blend of the above approaches with an overarching philosophy of servant leadership"	1. School climate and culture 2. Clear and focused goals 3. Student socio-emotional support
Ms. Virginia	Distributive	1. Instructional leadership and student learning 2. Student socio-emotional support 3. School climate and culture
Dr. Lider	Social Justice	1. School climate and culture 2. Student socio-emotional support 3. Instructional leadership and student learning

Culturally Responsive Leadership

According to Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) Culturally Responsive

Leadership theory, school leadership's daily praxis lived within the following six themes:

caring, building relationships, being persistent and persuasive, being present and communicating, modeling cultural responsiveness, and fostering cultural responsiveness in others. Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) original study that helped develop and refine this theoretical framework was a case study aimed at defining CRL on three levels: personal, environmental, and curricular. The participants in this study verified that caring, relationship building, persistence as advocates for their schools, deliberate communication, and cultural responsiveness drive the practices of effective continuation school principals. There were shortcomings in the areas of modeling cultural responsiveness and fostering the same cultural responsiveness in others in this study. This could have been due to not answering directly or a need for focused growth in these areas.

In the next sections, I present data from the interviews I conducted with model continuation school principals. These data have been organized according to the six tenets of CRL and provide examples of how these concepts show up in the daily work of the principals in the study and indicate where strengths and weaknesses in practice occur. The data presented here led to a proposed addition to Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) CRL, a tenet focused on professional development, specifically using reflection and collaboration with job-alike peers as an opportunity to grow professionally.

Caring

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) defined their first tenet of Culturally Responsive Leadership, caring, as demonstrating a commitment to working with diverse student populations, a desire to see minority students succeed, and showing concern for the whole school community. Caring was a major theme in two of the interview

questions, but was commonly referred to across multiple questions and the participant answers throughout the data collection process. This tenet was foundational in the administration and development of effective continuation schools because caring for students was foundational to a student's connection to a school, and a student's connection to a school was foundational to school success. School leaders profiled in this study did a great job of creating connections through caring. Dr. Love spoke about this theme of caring and connected its value to student success:

> Our surveys always show that we are a very caring school. These surveys also show that teachers believe the students can be successful. This is important as we address self-belief for students. We put everything else aside and stand behind our students. We have had zero suspensions all year. Ten percent increase in graduation rate over the past 7 years. Attendance has maintained around 85-90%.

The data Dr. Love shared in this quip are great growth measures. The results from the survey connected staff members' belief in students to caring and student academic success. According to Dr. Love, caring is driving the increase in attendance, and subsequently graduation rates.

Seven of the nine respondents had concrete examples of socio-emotional learning and caring that are in place on campus. Two participants talked about rubrics and standards that the staff use to evaluate their level of care across campus. Another participant spoke about a benchmark survey the school uses to check in on student well-being. Ms. Bay was very reflective and candid in her answer about SEL supports on campus and embedded in classroom instruction, "We have started some clubs and activities surrounding these ideas. We have also embedded trauma informed practices

into the curriculum. We are not totally there, and not everyone feels comfortable with it."

She was forthcoming with the fact that not all staff are committed to nor are willing to

implement SEL strategies in their daily lessons, but the proactive implementation of

clubs and activities to build rapport with students was powerful. Other campus-wide

items that were highlighted included the implementation of Wellness Centers and their

associated staff members (i.e., social workers, psychologists, etc.) on campus; the use of

community circles in the classroom; and embedded SEL curriculum. This study's

participants showed a level of caring that created a positive aura on and around campus

that followed students throughout their day.

When considering the larger research concepts that were foundational in Chapter

2, school climate and culture played a huge role in previous research findings. Caring

sentiment across campus was one way to improve and enhance school climate and

culture. This begged the question, in which ways does school climate and culture start

and end with leadership? The following section will present participant data from the

one-on-one interviews with the continuation school leaders and each interviewee's

responses from the pre-interview questionnaire.

School Climate and Culture

School climate and culture was a common theme through a majority of the

interviewees' responses as the leaders spoke about a supportive and caring environment

that produces belief in each student. Much of the content on caring and student rapport

came through the lens of staff perception and actions towards or for the students. When

looking at the results from the pre-interview questionnaire item on daily priorities, the

overwhelming highest scoring response was "school climate and culture," with eight of

the nine respondents identifying it as one of their top three daily priorities. Four of those eight respondents identified it as their number one priority. During one interview Dr. Love was talking about the importance of school staff caring about their students. Dr. Love explained that, while curriculum and content instruction are important to the students' experiences in school, they paled in comparison to the creation of a welcoming environment. Specifically, Dr. Love shared:

> Culture is super super important, and it starts beyond the classrooms. Then it's contagious. It filters into the classrooms. It just needs to permeate. The other one is the belief that our students are not criminals. Our students are not bad, our students are not convicts.

In her statement, Dr. Love emphasized the need for all staff members to see their students in a positive light and maintained a growth mindset focused on students' abilities and special qualities, not their short-comings. This sentiment was explained to be a common theme with new families enrolling at the continuation school, due to the language and reasoning commonly given to families before transferring to the model continuation school. Dr. Love explained that it was her job to reframe for families the reason for leaving the traditional school site, emphasizing the value of the continuation school. Dr. Love identified the turn-around in student engagement in social interactions as being much quicker in the continuation school setting when students received a warm welcome ahead of enrolling in school. Dr. Love viewed students' level of engagement and social interaction as a direct return on investment of the care she showed as the continuation school principal and anticipated positive results in students' academic performance linked to her investments in climate and culture. While Dr. Love focused on the student

component of care and its resulting impact on school culture, Ms. Jeffries spoke about the importance of providing a welcoming environment for the families, which they do by:

> Making sure that we're taking care of our family [school community] like their family, and that goes a long way, considering that these kids have been ours. Most of them have been ours from kindergarten through high school. And they've probably been feeling this the whole time [disconnected from the traditional school culture] and their parents never felt a part of that community and so that's a real big push of ours.

In this quote, Ms. Jeffries spoke about the lack of connection some families experience in her continuation school. She took responsibility for her students and families and does not pass off any shortcomings or difficulties of the students' educational achievement as a fault, or due to the lack of impact from other schools. Her unified school district served students from kindergarten to 12th grade and she invested time and care into each student from the start to finish of their education. Ms. Jeffries spoke passionately about the small things schools can do to go out of their way to create a welcoming environment for all students and families:

> We create a campus culture that allows everyone to feel safe. We provide a storage area full of clothes and food for those in need. I want to provide every bit of help they need . . . and it normally isn't much . . . more like I want help applying for a job, etc.

She also addressed themes including building in decision-making opportunities for students, providing school communication in the home language, and providing full meals at parent events.

99

Continuing in the theme of care, Dr. Lider spoke about the importance of building a level of care between school staff and students before content can be taught in the classroom. Paraphrasing a common adage, Dr. Lider noted, "'They don't care what you know until they know that you care' couldn't be more true at a continuation school." In fact, building community and showing care were so important to Dr. Lider that she had her whole teaching staff only work on community-building in the classroom for the first two weeks of school after returning from distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. No curricular content was addressed until a caring environment and deep relationship was built between and among the school and students.

As the participants in this study evidenced, effective, socially just educational leaders showed compassion for all students and built a strong school culture centered around caring. Now the data pointed to the cultural responsiveness of the participants and how the demographic representation of the staff was viewed and valued by leadership.

Cultural Responsiveness and Demographic Representation

Cultural responsiveness was also connected to caring in participants' responses. Participants discussed the ways in which culturally responsive school staff supported their students, focusing on the importance of caring and trusting relationships among staff and students. Participants noted that it was important that staff like the students, believe in them, and care for them. Indeed, participants reported that they were surprised at how important care was--at times overshadowing instructional or organizational features that they expected to be most valued. Dr. Silver spoke about how she came to weigh the importance of caring in comparison to other factors typically involved in connection among students and teachers. While some of these five respondents acknowledged their

previous focus on the importance of mirroring hiring with student enrollment, a much more important quality was to ensure the employees like students, believe in them, and care for them. This was not an expected outcome when the study began, but became an expected response as it became more and more prevalent during the data collection phase. Dr. Silver spoke about her evolution on this topic over time:

I am going into my fourth year now. I am less concerned about the demographic makeup of the teaching staff than I was when I first started, because I thought that came before the way you relate to kids and do the kids like you. I was just like okay, it's all male guys here, I need guy teachers. Yeah, to a degree that matters, but do the kids like you, that matters more, and do you genuinely enjoy being with kids who come in with chips on their shoulders, who may not even like school, but they have to be here? Then, can you transform them into kids who care about what happens to them, but also what happens to other people?

Dr. Silver discussed how her understanding of caring has driven her decision-making in interviews and hiring. She noted the impact the last four years as principal of a continuation high school have had in changing this mindset of needing demographic representation, when in reality she stated the level of care is of the utmost importance.

Similarly, Mr. Hernandez emphasized the importance of care among his school community. He was proud of the diversity of his teaching staff, and felt it was important that his students interacted with teachers from different backgrounds. Mr. Hernandez said:

I want my kids not just to have Latino teachers, I want them to have a mix. We have a current makeup of three Asian teachers. One is of Japanese descent, two

are Chinese descent. We have two Caucasian teachers and I think everybody else

is Latino or Latina. But, at the end of the day, it's all about our kids and to our

kids, the favorite teachers are the ones that connect.

Mr. Hernandez's school was 99% Latinx. This was notable as you consider his vision for

representation on the school campus. Mr. Hernandez spoke about some of his ideas on

hiring and looking to hire a more diverse staff, even though it would not be representative

of the demographics of his students. He also referred to demographics through different

lenses, not just race, but also gender identity.

Dr. Baker had similar thoughts on the idea of student demographics represented in

the school staff. Dr. Baker said:

The demographics of our staff do not reflect our student population. It is okay,

because our staff understands, they put in the work to understand. They know

what our students need, and I think that is more important than some of the

demographic traits.

Mr. Baker's statement reinforced the importance of care, of knowing "what our students

need" and responding to those needs. Further, his and other participants' comments

evidenced reflective practice on the part of these leaders. All of these leaders were

reflective in their hiring practices, the exposure to staff diversity, and its effect on student

experience and learning environment.

The tenet of caring was addressed through two of the interview questions, and the

sub-construct of school climate in culture was also touched on in two of the interview

questions. In the area of caring through representation, there was a clear and common

theme demonstrated by the evidence collected, which will be evaluated in more detail in

Chapter 5. The heavy focus on caring between all school stakeholders led into the next

tenet of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) CRL: building relationships.

Building Relationships

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) defined their second tenet of Culturally

Responsive Leadership, building relationships, as the key variable in ensuring student

success. Relationship building was alluded to in two of the interview questions. Within

this tenet, another larger thematic component from the literature review is leadership

style, which had representation in six different interview questions. There was also a

direct question about each respondent's self-identified leadership style that was discussed

in more length at the beginning of this chapter.

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) went into more detail on the impact that

building relationships had on a school climate, and more important on whom and how

those relationships were solidified. Reducing anxiety among students can be achieved by

educating teachers on daily practices in the classroom that will lead to an unhindered

learning environment. Compassion could be built in a teaching staff through the use of

student testimonials to create a deeper understanding of who the students are and what

drives them. And finally, but just as impactful, is the important task of reducing anxiety

among the staff, which could be achieved by providing opportunities to connect, have

fun, and smile before meetings get down to business matters. This study's participants

were very adept in their work in the area of relationship building, with both demographic

groups, students and staff. Their adept navigation of social interactions and reading cues

allowed them to provide the support necessary to create a space devoid of anxiety and

pressure maximizing success rates of all stakeholders.

Leadership Style

In general, the participants shared a common theme of avoiding a tendency to micromanage. The principals' responses demonstrated trust in their staff and that they value their staff's professional ability. The qualitative data falling within this sub-construct of relationship building depicted transformative and distributive leadership styles that focused on the team as a whole working together and guiding school-wide decision-making. With seven of the nine study participants self-identifying transformative or distributive as their leadership style, it was no surprise their qualitative interview answers followed a similar line of reasoning. The pre-interview questionnaire defined Transformational Leadership as "focused on facilitating organizational collaboration that helps move the vision of an organization forward." With two of the nine participants identifying Distributive Leadership, it was the second most common school of thought. The pre-interview questionnaire defined Distributive Leadership as "concerned with interactions and communication among school staff to make decisions, drive instruction, and develop culture." One participant self-identified as a Social Justice leader and one participant answered this question by saying, "A blend of the above approaches with an overarching philosophy of servant leadership."

Building Relationships with Staff. The smaller environment of the average continuation school, suggested a need for different dynamics in the staff, requiring specific leadership practice and qualities. On the topic of leadership style, Dr. Baker shared the following thoughts on inclusion of the staff on decision making and other school-wide issues:

But after coming to a continuation school, I think the staff here understands what it takes to be an educator. It takes the job to a different level. They don't need as much support from those above or the administration, because they know what they're doing, and they enjoy what they do, and of course we're smaller so they can handle those things, and they want to handle those things.

Dr. Baker said he spent less time supporting teachers in the continuation school setting, as they were more in tune with the bigger picture and understand his time was better used in a different manner. The teachers at his school wanted to take on problem solving those bigger issues and all wanted to be a part of the process and the final solution.

Ms. Bay came from a similar school of thought, urging the value of shared decision making with her staff. As illustrated in the quote below, she liked to provide the power to the teaching staff, and she believed in their process and historical outcomes:

I want their input. I give the teachers a lot of power to envision the solution and usually it's pretty right on. I mean, they know their kids, they know what's going on with their kids. Sometimes the hard part is obviously getting everybody on board and consistent.

Ms. Bay also spoke about the struggles of getting everyone to see the same pathway forward. Some staff will commit to the team-decided plan, while others do not follow through on their responsibility. This would then be clear to the students that not all school staff members were on the same page with a policy or implementation. While there were always struggles with having 100% of a staff agree with all school initiatives and practices, the practice of staff input on decisions and overall direction sent a strong

message of trust, allowing the efficacy of the school as a whole to increase, thus improving student outcomes.

Mr. Locke also shared similar thoughts as Ms. Bay and Dr. Baker. The quote from Mr. Locke below was part of his answer about his leadership style. In his pre-interview questionnaire he identified his leadership style as a mix of all of the schools of thought that were available, with "an overarching philosophy of servant leadership." After qualifying his answer about servant leadership, Mr. Locke gave this description of his distributive practices:

> I don't know everything, so I have got to distribute my leadership. Everybody's got strengths and weaknesses, and so I try to give leadership opportunities to whoever wants to take it. And if nobody does, then I take it, but if I take too much, then it all becomes dependent on me, and that's not the idea. Right?

Mr. Locke's answer following this excerpt, focused on components of his work in regards to social justice and transactional leadership models. Another component Mr. Locke addressed in his interview was the importance of playing the role of protector for his staff. Specifically, Mr. Locke was referring to the protection he provides from disconnected guidance and policy from the district office. This role built trust and purpose between the staff and the principal, important in the effectiveness for Mr. Locke's leadership of the school staff. This topic was addressed in depth later in this chapter when the idea of focused goals was dissected.

All of these quips supporting the importance of relationships with staff were summed up with a quote from Dr. Silver relating to the importance of trust with staff, "We are adults and I trust that you will do your job. When I call on you, I need you." She

cited an example of former administrators that would stand in the parking lot to confirm the exact time staff members would arrive on campus. She wanted to respect each practitioner and their personal time, setting the expectation that she would not micromanage their day, but expected them to step up and be ready to fill needs, when called upon. Each of these leaders were well-served in providing a level of trust in their teaching staff, and it was repaid with strong professional relationships with their staff members.

Building Relationships with Students. The practice of building relationships between administration and staff practices trickled down to students and the same principals built their own relationships with pupils, there were many variables to consider. Again, this study's participants reveled in the student relationships they built and know it was paramount to their success as a school leader. The following data gave some direction and purpose to this endeavor.

Dr. Silver had many thoughts on the importance of relationships with students and the driving impact that has on student performance. In the following quote, Dr. Silver talked about how to start building relationships, then followed it with its impact on student learning:

> Tapping into what the students say they're interested in, and getting to know them
> as people and aligning that to a purpose, helps you and the student find common
> ground. Then, improved metrics will come out of that. But that's not what leads
> us.

Dr. Silver was very clear about her focus on relationships, but clear that the "improved metrics" that follow the relationship was not the reason for the foundational work. She

said the strong relationship led to academic success. Continuing in the theme of student relationships and success, consider another quote from Dr. Silver's interview:

> Do the kids like you? That matters more you know, and do you genuinely enjoy being with kids who come in with chips on their shoulders, who may not even like school, but they have to be here. Then, can you transform them into kids who care about what happens to them, but also what happens to other people?

This directly supported and connected to the theme of caring from the previous tenet. This was something that Dr. Silver said she was not only practicing herself, but also looking for when hiring new employees for open positions. This was another example of fostering cultural responsiveness in others that served the needs of all students, specifically those that had been historically marginalized in the continuation school setting. The question then emerged, if a staff member does not have this skill, how can these relationship building skills be taught? Or is it a skill someone either has, or does not have? Williams (2021) stated that relationship skills and the ability to build rapport in the workplace are based on skills like listening and showing interest in the other person's life.

Mr. Hernandez echoed similar thoughts about student safety on campus and the relationship of feeling safe to the ability to learn. Mr. Hernandez said, "If the kids don't feel comfortable and safe on campus, the rest doesn't matter. Once the relationship with students is built, and only then, can we focus on curriculum and instruction."

Continuing in the theme of strong relationships and the value it has on student success on campus, the qualitative data pointed to this quote from Dr. Lider as she explained the value of socio-emotional learning and the relationship building work that

she has all teachers practice in the classroom, "If the students don't feel emotionally safe on campus, there is no learning taking place." Dr. Lider went on to talk about the importance of removing barriers and how this is supported by Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs. She explained that the feeling of safety is not a constant in her students' lives, some coming from unstable home lives, so being able to provide a stable and safe learning environment provides the ambience necessary for academic success. All of these data showed the importance of CRL's tenet focused on relationship building. Again, this study's participants were strong in this area and leaned heavily on the social capital it provided them, both with staff and students.

Persistence and Persuasiveness

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) defined their third tenet of Culturally Responsive Leadership, being persistent and persuasive, as influential in convincing other educators to empower their students towards academic success, even in historically marginalized sub-groups, and to stay focused on the school-wide vision and goals. Persistence and persuasiveness were alluded to in two of the interview questions. Within this tenet, another larger thematic component from the literature review was clear and focused goals, which had representation in two separate interview questions.

Another emergent theme that was identified during the data collection process was the idea of a principal acting as an advocate for their students, staff, and whole school community. There were multiple references to the requirement to prove the need for more resources to those making decisions about resource allocation at the district office. Four of the nine principals interviewed used the word advocacy when speaking about fighting for equitable resources like financial, material, human, or other resources.

The skills and qualities of persistence and persuasiveness served these school leaders well. Persistence and persuasiveness bled over into the narrowing of goals and keeping school staff focused on the specific aims of each school, leading to a more focused daily effort from the staff as a whole, and not feeling overwhelmed by numerable district-level initiatives that may not apply in an alternative setting, one example being statewide testing. When considering the importance of advocacy, the leader's efforts in this area not only secured resources for their often-forgotten school, it also helped mold the public's perception of the school, its students, and staff. Some leaders were more active and adept at this than others, but when taking the whole of their efforts, it created a great blueprint to guide the conclusions that were unpacked in Chapter 5.

Clear and Focused Goals

Some of the respondents were very deliberate about the theme of clear and focused goals, as is evidenced with the quotes below. Other study participants did not address this theme directly. Three of the respondents chose clear and focused goals as one of their three main priorities for daily practice in the pre-interview questionnaire. Dr. Silver ranked it number one and Mr. Locke ranked it number two. When Mr. Hernandez was asked about his daily priorities in the pre-interview questionnaire, he identified clear and focused goals as his number two, and explained his reasoning as follows:

> Less is more, less is more. We cannot have five things. I'm a believer in Steve Jobs, write down 10 things, pick the top three and go for it. So, every year, we have a main focus. This year's goal is attendance and number two is graduation rate.

Mr. Hernandez went on to talk about how the goal is set each year. Sometimes he set it himself and he shared data on why that needs to be the goal. Other years he included staff members on the decision-making process. This was evidence of this participant's lack of practice of distributive leadership practice. He identified his leadership style as transformational, but did seem to have some strain in his relationship building with some staff and students, which was made evident through his irregular goal-setting process.

Dr. Silver also spoke about goals, specifically referring to district-wide practices, validating that continuation schools had instructional focus and goals, too. Dr. Silver talked about her staff "having a unified reason why we turn off our alarm clocks." Dr. Silver then dove deeper into the district-wide goal-setting and how they were communicated:

> Just because we don't track data in the same way doesn't mean that we don't have academic goals for our students. And our district, and our superintendent, specifically our assistant superintendent of educational services. Assistant principals while leading that work with principals, have mutual commitments. Our district has a primary focus on numeracy and literacy and every principal has to work with their stakeholders to produce goals that are in alignment with your site plan. The key areas of focus are math and English for African American learners, our special education learners and EL learners. And we have to put some real intention in conversation, with our teachers, with our site leadership team about what those goals are.

Dr. Silver's comments then transitioned into how this drives teachers' work and to inform students on the school's united front. This then transitioned into messaging for school-wide mottos and themes.

Mr. Locke had many thoughts on alignment of clear and focused goals. Here was a definitive statement from the one-on-one interview with Mr. Locke:

I did some time as a teacher in a residential program. It was often death by initiative, and they always changed. I read a wonderful book called The Internal Coherence Framework that really talked about lining up your ideas. Everything has to connect to what your mission is, and if it doesn't connect and you can't make it connect, don't do it. I've been real clear with my central administrators, that you know when there's a new initiative coming through. Even some of our equity work, I am like 'I'm not going to fold this in the way you want me to fold it in.' It has to fold into our other initiatives, or it's this other thing we're doing. Then we're doing twenty other things, and we're not doing anything, because once you do twenty other things, forget about it. You can't measure twenty other things! And so, I try to keep everything narrow, and I try to make sure everything folds back into what we've been working on since I got here.

Mr. Locke's answer went into school goals and the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the school's hindered progression on such goals. Mr. Locke brought the theme of clear and focused goals up again when asked about other thoughts he had at the end of the interview. Mr. Locke said:

I threaded it throughout, but really, it's about making sure that less is more, making sure that your stuff is all connected. So, I don't weave stuff in until I can

connect. I learned that in my previous school, when I would try to push some

initiative that the district wanted me to do, into what we were already doing, and

then it was always this disjointed fit, you know, and I realized I can't.

Mr. Locke had another quote that described his role in providing clear and focused goals

as, "shielding the teachers from unnecessary nonsense." This was in reference to district-

wide initiatives that were not aligned with school goals. Mr. Locke finished the interview

with some thoughts on his flexibility and support from the district office on trying new

things to meet student needs. More of this was dissected in a later section.

Looking at the participants individually, some did not address the idea of clear

and focused goals directly. Either they did not self-identify it as a skill and practice they

found important, or did not even consider it as a possible part of the equation.

Advocacy

Advocacy was not an original theme that came up on a regular basis in the

literature review, but was a recurring emergent theme through the interview process. Four

of the nine study participants used the word advocacy and spoke about their role as

champions of their continuation high schools when requesting equitable resources to

ensure student success. Dr. Lider spoke about different resources that she has had to

advocate for with the district office, "I will go to bat for why we need more economic

resources. I need more teachers. I deserve an additional instructional aid. Because it's

about meeting the needs of the students." Dr. Lider's acknowledgement of money and

staffing was repeated by other participants, as well.

Ms. Virginia was very direct with her experience and thoughts on acting as an

advocate for your school. Here was a quote from her interview:

Advocate, advocate, advocate. You know the money is there. They talked about

giving these other schools money for athletics, and I was like, "Well, I have

athletics on my campus, too. I don't care if you treat it like intramural. How much

you give the intramural kids give me the same." They gave me enough money.

We have a weightlifting facility now, and I said, "Well, don't you think the

wellness center needs to come to the continuation school?" Give it to an

alternative setting first before it even gets to another school. Why didn't you take

the most at-promised students and give them a wellness center? Well, I opened

my mouth and they gave me sixty grand for a wellness center. So now we're

going around looking at wellness centers so that we can see exactly what we want

to put together. We talked about not having CTE classes. Now we have CTE

classes, and we have the first child development program.

Ms. Virginia was very adamant that you have to ask, or you will never receive. She

followed up the previous quote with this statement, "If you don't open your mouth, you

don't get it. You need to open your mouth, and if you don't, then you will never know."

Dr. Love had a more student-centered focus when she spoke about advocacy. Dr.

Love was quoted during the one-on-one interview as saying:

I'm advocating for our students, and from the curb, you know, to the most inner

part of our campus, really trying to meet our students where they are, and building

from there. I think that's not necessarily something that you see in all alternative

education schools, but you definitely see it in ours.

Dr. Love's comments were more general, but were clearly addressing the need for

principals to act as advocates.

Ms. Jeffries took a different approach to the theme of advocacy and talked about the importance of the staff to build student voice and their ability to be their own advocates. Specifically, Ms. Jeffries said:

> I think just changing that mindset that you know we want you to be successful and we're going to give you everything you need to, but you need to advocate for yourself, you need to be able to figure out what you need and talk to us, you need to figure out what's hard for you.

Ms. Jeffries led from this theme into the topic of self-belief. Ultimately, this data was also connected to later themes of modeling cultural responsiveness and fostering cultural responsiveness in others. Ms. Jeffries went on to say that:

> I hope that people are tapping into every resource they can because our students deserve so much that we're not able to get for them. As a good continuation high school leader, one of the best things is to just continue to push for your kids to take any opportunity that comes your way. It might be a little bit more work on your end or grant writing or a little bit more supervision, but they deserve it, and so I would say just continue to look for opportunities for students.

In conclusion, the totality of the data from the interviews was represented through this last quote, from Dr. Silver, "Just being vocal to advocate for my kids, to ensure that they have the same opportunities that our comprehensive school students have." Ultimately, the interviewees alluded to an issue of equity. Specifically, that there was a lack of equity in access to physical and economic resources to create the best possible learning environment for all students. Their advocacy for their school and students led to more access to financial and material resources. Persistence and persuasion in the area of

advocacy paid off and will continue to pay off as advocacy is implemented by these current practitioners and future school leaders at continuation schools.

Being Present and Communicating

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) defined their fourth tenet of Culturally Responsive Leadership, being present and communicating, as visibility in classrooms, on campus, and participation in meetings. CRL also identified the importance of strategic communication with staff. Being present and communicating was alluded to in two of the interview questions. Within this tenet, another larger theme from the existing literature was navigating difficult situations, which had representation in two separate interview questions.

Some respondents in this study were very direct in referencing the impact of presence on campus, but most did not name this specific practice. The data indicated awareness of and practiced presence, and value the impact of meaningful communication on campus across all stakeholder groups. Once again, these values and implementation were directly in line with the tenets of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) Culturally Responsive Leadership theory. The general trend of messaging in this area connected the importance of presence and communication as an important building block of relationships and caring, as evidenced earlier in their impact on school culture.

Navigating Difficult Situations and Addressing Negative Stigma

Addressing negative stigma was a direct question from the one-on-one interview and was a common theme throughout the literature review. It was not identified as a common practice for continuation school leaders in the final item of the pre-interview questionnaire. Eight of the nine respondents had very clear steps and messaging they use

to address the issue of negative stigma attached to continuation schools. All of the participants alluded to the immense job it is to change the stigma of a school. Mr. Hernandez summarized it with this statement:

> The reality is, it's very hard to change the stigma. That is, there are the kids that come and graduate and so forth, they get it. I think slowly they've been telling other people, but when you have a district of three high schools combined, you probably have a combination of about 6000 students and our school has 250, it's like a drip, drip, drip.

This quote was specifically addressing the experience and perception of students and possibly parents, but this was not the only stakeholder group that needed this focus. Other respondents identified the impact of working with other demographic groups like district staff that do not work at the continuation school, community social groups, administrators that were not based at continuation schools, and the impact of social media. This work changed the perception of those outside of the school walls, and ultimately provided ease in advocating for their school and students, as discussed in the previous section.

Dr. Lider talked extensively about the importance of continuation school teachers representing and highlighting the influence of the principal on the teachers and how they represent the school in district-wide meetings. Dr. Lider was quoted as saying:

> My message to my teachers is when we go to the district meetings, you need to be the voice for our students. You know all those other teachers are sitting there and going, 'I could never work where you work,' because they're picturing the three worst kids that they had in their class last year.

Dr. Lider went on to specify that the role of continuation school employees was to make sure that others heard about how great continuation school students were. This theme continued through other demographic groups.

Ms. Jeffries was very proud of the work and time she spent presenting and communicating with community groups. Ms. Jeffries specifically said:

> I am the craziest person. I go to every single community group that I know, and I am always preaching about our school. Rotary Club, Kiwanis Club, Chamber of Commerce, anywhere, I can get my word out that my students are awesome and my school is awesome. I try to keep the website up as best as I can, I present at every board meeting, and I have two student representatives that present at every board meeting.

Two other respondents, Dr. Silver and Dr. Baker, also identified the use of student representatives at board meetings as an effective manner of spreading positive stigma about continuation schools. Dr. Baker expounded on this in the following quote:

> I know that it's not only my duty, but as I start to do more of telling our own story, and we can do that through social media, do that through our interactions with individuals. We have a student speak at the board meetings to talk about things that we do here, which is something that we've never done before. Trying new things that you typically see at a traditional school, to sell their school and sell who they are. We try to do those things, even though we are small. But doing that for us has a big impact on those who might have those perceptions about what a continuation school is.

This idea of small acts having a large impact on school perception and stigma, as described above by Dr. Baker, was addressed in the alternate forms of communication and addressing negative stigma in the paragraphs below.

One common tool for communication was the use of social media. Four different study participants spoke about different social media platforms and their influence on the community perception of the school. Ms. Virginia specifically identified her district's social media support, "What I do is branding. I just tell our story. Tell our story before anyone gets a chance to do it, and what's really cool is my district backs me up. So my district retweets everything I write." Ms. Virginia continued in her answer on communication and battling stigma by speaking about the use of podcast interviews to dispel rumors about continuation schools and their students, the use of Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Google Voice (https://voice.google.com) for family access, and the importance of integrating with traditional school sites.

Another common practice by the study participants was the practice of having campus visitors. These visitors, those that do not work at the continuation school, had a first-hand look at the school and what it is really like. Ms. Bay spoke about the intentional use of campus visitors to spread the word of the positive atmosphere, "We invite people to come on campus whenever they want. Come visit us, come see." Ms. Bay continued on the topic of public perception and the fact that the whole community has roots in their town, so the parents already had a preconceived notion of the school.

Mr. Locke spoke about the importance of influencing the principals of the traditional school sites in the district to change the narrative around continuation schools. Mr. Locke said:

It's a constant battle. I ran into this, but it's totally understandable, because the

sending schools, when the kids are bombing it out of the sending schools, things

aren't going well. What teachers and principals know is this kid's a disaster,

because they were a disaster in my school. They no longer see the kid as a kid.

They see the kid as a disaster, and this is disaster central because they come here

from the five high schools. And so, it makes sense that the progression is what it

is. They forget that I am not actually anyone's home school, that none of these are

actually my kids, and that they're actually their kids and that I'm actually a tier

three intervention.

This idea of having the principals focus on the impact the continuation school was having

on their former students created a lasting impression of success. Dr. Love shared similar

thoughts in explaining the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the

traditional school principals. If these traditional school principals think highly of your

school, they will spread the same sentiment to their staff and families.

All of this study's participants were aware of the impact of positive messaging

and battling the negative stigma associated with their schools. Some were better prepared

to talk about the proactive steps they take. Some of those same principals were also

willing to have tough conversations with other staff members to address the biases that

they carried and ultimately propagated through their beliefs, use of language, and other

detrimental actions. Those leaders not willing to have these tough conversations were

passively allowing and promoting the continuance of the negative stigma. How do we

ensure these tough conversations occur and the biases addressed? This is another area

that can inform the work being done in human resource departments at the district level as they train and support current and future leaders.

Modeling Cultural Responsiveness

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) defined their fifth tenet of Culturally Responsive Leadership, modeling cultural responsiveness, as the promotion of inclusive curriculum, acknowledging culturally responsive teaching, and consistency. CRL specifically called out the alignment and congruence between the leader's messaging and the staff's actual practice. Modeling cultural responsiveness was alluded to in two of the interview questions. Within this tenet, two larger themes from the literature review were "Practices of Effective Continuation School Principals," which had representation in four separate interview questions, and "How do you Know What you are Doing is Working," which had representation in two separate interview questions. One question focused on modeling addressed the support of professional development, teaching, and learning. The participants did not normally give answers that supported the idea of modeling, but did have wide-ranging thoughts on what those components look like in a continuation school setting. In this area, the question then led to how to promote the work on modeling cultural responsiveness, rather than awareness. This was a good sign that the awareness was there, but there was still much work to be done to create more effectiveness in the leaders' efficacy in actually putting it into practice to best support their schools' needs.

Practices of Effective Continuation School Principals

Modeling cultural responsiveness was a common theme when considering the practices of model continuation school principals. This was identified as visibility, setting a cultural expectation, and guiding the culture of the school. One area of inclusion that

was cited by two different participants, Mr. Locke and Ms. Virginia, was that both of their schools had librarians, and the librarian's main focus was the procurement and sourcing of culturally representative texts that mirror the student body enrolled at their schools. Both principals reported that their direction of the staff in this area led to higher overall engagement in reading on campus.

Mr. Hernandez was reflecting on his daily practices and considering the impact he had on students and staff. The following quote addressed his modeling and influence of school climate:

We greet every student with a fist bump. When I walk into the classes, I'm always smiling. As the principal, I think this is so important. I can never have a bad day. I'm the leader of the ship. As the captain I can't have a bad day. I'm there to support them, I expect them to have bad days, I cannot. I don't care what's happened in my personal life, today I'm volunteering to do this, therefore I need to know that everybody's looking at me. My attitude, my behavior, my mannerisms spread to the campus and that's every principal. I have to dress appropriately, I have to communicate properly and I have to smile. I have to be there for everyone, I can be tired afterwards so It all starts with the leadership. Then, it trickles down, and if it hits the teachers, the teachers will do it to the students.

Mr. Hernandez wrapped up this statement with some thoughts on focusing school-wide goals and how that has had an impact on grading practices on their campus. Dr. Baker was also very direct in his answer about the importance of having a calm and controlled

122

demeanor in dealing with staff and students to model expected behaviors. Other participants continued this theme of modeling in their interviews, as referenced below.

Mr. Locke used a very specific example in his own reflection of deliberate modeling while on and around campus. Here was an example of Mr. Locke's thought process when using self-reflection with his staff to model cultural responsiveness:

I use myself as an example when I screw something up and say something I shouldn't say. Right now, the thing that I'm messing up are pronouns, because I, for whatever reason, have the hardest time remembering which kids are which, they versus he versus she, if they're not biologically, he/she/they. I own it and correct myself in front of kids, in front of staff, 'I screwed that up again. I apologize. Tell me again.' So, I'm constantly modeling how we do that. I use my own life as an example in staff meetings. My own faux pas, and my own missteps and then use that in the equity training that I conduct. I wait until I find some way that I can use myself as an example. We had all this training the past couple of years on equity and cultural responsiveness. But it was information heavy. It can be information overload. Then it's just a thing, it's not real. So, it has to be personal for it to connect. I wait until a light bulb comes on about how I'm going to connect this idea personally.

Mr. Locke continued with his description of his staff members' development and sharing of an origin story, better understanding each other through this process to eliminate or decrease the feeling of identity threat or stereotype threat. Tajfel and Turner (2004) defined identity threat as the sense of threat that an individual experience due to the

challenge of positive perceptions. This could manifest as negative emotions or reinforcing behaviors that align with the group norms.

Continuing down the path of social justice practices and modeling for staff, Dr. Lider spoke about her commitment to social justice and learning new aspects of the work. Her preferred practice is to read about a new concept, getting her hands on whatever new text, studies, or books were available. Her quote explaining this practice is below:

It's always just been my go-to thing to go to the library and start reading, jump on Amazon, start buying books. In the old days, I would go to the bookstore and start buying books, go to the college bookstore if I needed to, and just really try to understand the issue better, and then solicit feedback from my staff, because I know that I'm not the same as all of them and I don't know everything.

This quote was describing the value of understanding different viewpoints and how that can guide how we support our students. Dr. Lider had referred to an experience she had with a sports team that had to travel out of town. The coaches could not relate with a behavioral outburst. Dr. Lider was connected to the student and understood the background. She posited that all staff must broaden their horizons in an attempt to better understand our pupils and empathize with their struggles. Ms. Jeffries had similar thoughts and shared the value of "understanding today's general teenager."

As identified earlier, to know the effectiveness of a practice or program, a form of reflection was necessary, whether it was formulaic and dictated by a series of steps, or just thinking about it qualitatively as you drive home from work. This was a missing component in Culturally Responsive Leadership tenets, as created by Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012), but a common theme in most other theoretical frameworks for social

justice leadership in education. Some of the participants were very direct in their

monitoring of practices and programs, while others did not reference it at all. This was an

area for continued growth for these practitioners and is something to consider as this

study moved forward in making recommendations in Chapter 5.

How do You Know What You are Doing is Working?

The evaluation of the effectiveness of programs and practices was woven into two

of the interview questions. Not only did this include program evaluation effectiveness,

but also the general assessment of student performance through standardized testing.

Only one principal spoke about the importance of school-wide benchmark assessments

driving the instructional program (Ms. Jeffries). On the other end of the spectrum, four

different study participants said they could not care less about their state standardized test

scores. Dr. Lider spoke more about this in detail below, directing her message to the

principals of the traditional schools in her district:

> Yes, my grad rate is not good. Yes, my CAASPP scores are horrible. But because
>
> of that, yours are better. I have been really fortunate to work with assistant
>
> superintendents of educational services and superintendents, who absolutely
>
> understand that. They consistently remind the other administrators in the district,
>
> 'that is part of why your scores, and graduation rate is what it is, because the
>
> continuation school isn't.' Even though we consistently come up as a CSI
>
> (Comprehensive Support and Improvement) school, because we can't hit that grad
>
> rate. They don't care because that's my role. And then that's the role of our
>
> continuation school here in the district.

All of the respondents that mentioned the importance of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) were very clear that those results have little significance and are not completely representative of their students' academic levels. CAASPP was a standardized testing system intended to provide information that could be used to monitor student academic growth and ensured students are prepared to graduate from high school and have the skills necessary to be successful in college and career endeavors (California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress [CAASPP], 2022).

When the study participants considered their experiences and practices in the traditional school setting, and compared them with their practices as a continuation school principal, many different themes came to the forefront. Some respondents spoke about the use of resources to provide access to different educational experiences like field trips or technology. Others spoke about the need to advocate for more and improved resources, both human and facility. Mr. Hernandez expressed this idea through this quote from the interview:

> As a principal at a continuation high school, I am much more involved with students, then I would be at a comprehensive high school. I do the suicide ideation not the assistant principal, I'm calling parents, not the assistant principal. You could almost say a continuation high school principal is more like an assistant principal at a comprehensive high school.

Mr. Hernandez continued with this sentiment of direct student service and knowing the ins and outs of each student on campus. Ms. Jeffries spoke about the intimacy at lunch and spending time with each student. Ms. Bay and Ms. Virginia also expressed their

126

focus on the individual. This brought us back to the idea of evaluation in that each respondent focused on these relationships and one-on-one time with students as a guide to what the school needed as a whole or what each individual student needed for them to succeed.

Fostering Cultural Responsiveness in Others

Madhlangobe and Gordon (2012) defined their sixth and final tenet of Culturally Responsive Leadership, fostering cultural responsiveness in others, as the promotion of conditions and opportunities for school stakeholders to become more responsive to one another. CRL specifically identified the collaborative classroom vision-building, professional development, and the unification of home and school experiences. Fostering cultural responsiveness in others was alluded to in two of the interview questions. Within this tenet, two other larger themes from the literature review were instructional leadership and student learning, which had representation in two separate interview questions, and professional development and accountability, which had representation in two separate interview questions.

Instructional Leadership and Student Learning

The guiding quote in alignment with this theme was from the interview with Dr. Lider, specifically pertaining to a section in which Dr. Lider was explaining her former supervisor and superintendent. This former superintendent reiterated and regurgitated this quote over and over with her schools, educators, and community, "demographics do not determine destiny." The intent of this motto was described as a rallying call to drive all educators at all of the schools, including the continuation school, to not allow previous historically marginalizing factors to stop their students from being successful today.

While all of the principals had responses and direction surrounding instructional leadership, it ranked as a tie for fifth highest priority through the pre-interview questionnaire. The more dominant concept, though more aligned with instructional practices in the classroom, was socio-emotional learning.

When looking at the results from the pre-interview questionnaire item on daily priorities, the fourth rated priority, "student socio-emotional support," received more overall votes than "clear and focused goals," but were rated lower and did not accumulate as many points. Socio-emotional learning practices and integration in the classroom varied per study participant's interview response. Some supports were completely outside of the class and were provided through a pull-out model, while other leaders had set up the supports to be embedded into class content. The principal with the most structured plans for socio-emotional learning embedded in the classroom was Dr. Lider. Some of her implemented practices across campus including the use of trauma questionnaires, community building circles, and a school social worker. In the following quote, Dr. Lider explained the direction she took with her staff upon returning to campus from the COVID-19 pandemic:

> I don't want you to teach how to be a student again. I want you to teach how to get along in a classroom. I want you to get to know the students. I want them to get to know each other, the content will come. I'm not asking you to give up a ton of curricular time. If you've got a curricular thing, you can insert here to make this work better. But this is my expectation, that you do nothing but three days of SEL stuff, and it served us really, really well. Other schools didn't go that direction, and had a significantly higher number of incidents last year. So now

there's an expectation that there's a weekly SEL theme that the school social

worker or one of the interns will come in and do.

Dr. Lider referred to the social worker or intern coming in to the classroom to do a

weekly theme or presentation. This was through a class that was provided to all new

students on campus that promoted a level of socio-emotional support and taught the

students coping skills, relationship building, and provided information on other mental

health resources and support to ensure they were engaged academically when on campus.

Other study participants had similar efforts they led on their school sites in the

implementation of SEL practices in the classroom:

- Ms. Bay guided her staff through the implementation of trauma-informed

  practices in the classroom. She identified that this is still a work in progress.

- Ms. Jeffries used standards from the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and

  Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022) to reflect on classroom practices and also

  build check-ins into daily lessons.

- Dr. Baker had all employees trained in running community-building circles

  and all classrooms implemented the practice.

- Mr. Locke created his own SEL rubric and had teachers self-reflect on their

  implementation of the components.

- Ms. Virginia added a class to her master schedule that provided opportunities

  for goal setting, meditation, and growth mindset experiences.

While each practice and implementation looked different at each school site, the common

thread amongst all of these practices was a focus on socio-emotional support and growth

through a community environment. Ms. Jeffries explained it best by saying,

129

"Continuation high school teachers are just incredible, in that they have to teach the content, but they also really have to rehabilitate the student." This rehabilitation was directed towards the need for students to have a high level of confidence and self-belief to truly engage in the learning process and make significant strides. When looking at the results from the pre-interview questionnaire item on daily priorities, the second highest scoring priority was "student self-belief," receiving votes from five of the respondents, one of which was their highest priority. It was clear this was an area of focus not just for Ms. Jeffries, but representative of the participant pool as a whole.

Again, this practice was a building block in forming relationships and rapport with students and staff and caring, thus impacting school culture and climate. There was less focus on instructional models and practices, which was something to consider when identifying future leaders. Knowing the exact area of expertise and strength will help the district leadership assign the right person for the job at hand. With that said, the focus now pivoted towards professional development and supporting instruction in the classroom.

Professional Development and Accountability

The sub-construct of professional development and accountability was addressed to varying degrees in the previous sections. As identified earlier, a common theme with many of the study participants was the idea of trust and how that is built with a staff. Maintaining a level of accountability without micromanaging was a central theme to Dr. Silver's thoughts on relationship building. Ms. Jeffries, Dr. Lider, and Dr. Love also spoke about the importance of having courageous conversations with staff members that

were not aligned with the school's vision and needed to be redirected and held accountable for their actions.

Moving into the realm of professional development, there were data collected that addressed support for school-wide needs, as well as individual development. One example of the work Mr. Locke did with one of his teachers in revamping the curriculum to be more culturally responsive was described in the quote below:

I've been working with the English teacher since I got here to get rid of the dead white men and to let students choose. Now, if a student wants to read, and we've got a couple who want to read *Grapes of Wrath* (Steinbeck, 2017) or *Of Mice and Men* (Steinbeck*, 2000)*, awesome! Read it because you're choosing to read it, but most students when in our library, choose something representing themselves. In libraries you have media technicians, and then you have librarians. Our media tech is a librarian. She has a soft spot for this population. She can make tons more money working as a librarian elsewhere, and she is a master at finding texts that relate to our different demographic groups.

Mr. Locke went on to explain the importance of his work done to hire this librarian and the impact it has had on Filipino students reading books with Filipino protagonists or teenagers experiencing gender identity issues. He was very proud to note that every student could read a book that speaks to them. Dr. Lider led a similar transformation at her school, making changes to the curriculum to better reflect her student body and create engagement and buy-in from the students:

We have moved away from the old white man authors that students were reading in English classes, and really embraced a lot more diverse viewpoints. The social

131

studies curriculum that was recently adopted also meets those new standards of

historically marginalized groups having a voice in what we're doing.

Dr. Lider attributed other success in the instructional awakening of the school to her

ability to hire 80% of her staff as new employees over her time as principal. Dr. Lider

said the staff were not deliberate in talking about culturally responsive teaching, and it

was ultimately a derivative of the previous superintendent's mantra identified earlier,

"demographics do not determine destiny."

The previous quotes and anecdotes provided evidence supporting the fact that

some of these participants were very influential in modeling cultural responsiveness to

others, but the data proved that there was still a lot of room for growth within this tenet

for the group as a whole. Pointed professional development in the modeling of cultural

responsiveness will lend to the school as a whole in terms of receiving guidance, and

finally foster CRL practices from all staff members.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings indicated there were many specialized practices that

principals of model continuation school principals were using on a daily basis to

guarantee their historically marginalized students received a top-notch education while

preparing for college and career. There were also some common hurdles that these school

leaders have navigated in an attempt to provide an equitable learning environment and

experience for all involved, both staff and students.

The focus of this study was to answer the research question in support of running

effective continuation high schools:

What are the strengths and challenges of Model Continuation School principals

successfully leading their staff and at-promise youth?

Culturally Responsive Leadership and its six tenets developed by Madhlangobe

and Gordon (2012) was the theoretical framework used to structure and assess the data

collected through this study. The daily school leadership praxis included the following

six themes:

- caring;

- building relationships;

- being persistent and persuasive;

- being present and communicating;

- modeling cultural responsiveness; and

- fostering cultural responsiveness in others (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012).

Emerging common themes included the need to advocate for human resources, updated

facilities, and fighting the stigma of continuation schools and their students. Some of

these sub-constructs were not only identified as challenges to success, but also led to

solutions offered by the study participants, such as the different thoroughfares with which

communication of the successes of a school can be shared. Additionally, the influence of

executive cabinet decision-making will be improved when the use of data to ensure that

the flow of resources does not skip over alternative education schools and their students.

All principals participating in this study embodied differing aspects of the six

tenets of CRL. The majority of respondents showed a deliberate focus on caring for staff,

students, and their families, which was foundational in their development of relationships

and trust with these same groups. Persistence and persuasiveness were achieved in

133

different manners, which is not surprising as there were multiple types of leadership styles each leader subscribed to. Presence and communication differed, as well, as each leader communicated with their school stakeholders in different ways. All participants agreed that the influence of their position in modeling and fostering cultural responsiveness was achieved through many different avenues: some being in one-on-one situations, coaching teachers to be more responsive and flexible, while others were about modeling culture and climate on campus. Ultimately, these leaders accepted the weight and responsibility of their position, knowing that everything starts and ends with them as the principal.

One missing component to this theoretical framework that was prevalent in other social justice theories was the formalized structure of professional development opportunities and the practice of reflection, individually and with job-alike peers. The study participants spoke about self-reflection, modeling reflection in front of students and staff, including a staff team on the reflection of school-wide or programmatic success, and overall flexibility in the support of student needs. Through this reflective process, and the malleability of most continuation school settings, school leaders were able to quickly pivot, think (and create) outside of the box, to ultimately meet the very diverse and wide-ranging needs of each student on campus. These ideas and themes were addressed further in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to support the professional development of future continuation school principals and the leadership work of current continuation school principals. With only 425 continuation schools in all of California according to the CDE (2020), and a very limited breadth of research knowledge collected through continuation school leadership studies, the results of this study were used to guide the up and coming leaders of alternative education in the state. The focus of this study was to answer the following research question in support of running effective continuation high schools:

> What are the strengths and challenges of Model Continuation School principals
>
> successfully leading their staff and at-promise youth?

The outcomes of this study were used to build a professional profile that guides current Model Continuation School leaders, help guide schools yet to be designated as Model Continuation Schools, and support district upper management in identifying and developing future continuation school principals. The development and hiring of great leaders is imperative to address social justice issues stemming from continuation schools regularly serving underperforming marginalized students (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012).

Discussion of Findings

As the evidence illustrated in Chapter 4, principals of model continuation schools embodied many, if not all of the tenets of culturally responsive leadership theory laid out in 2012 by Madhlangobe and Gordon. Even though the aim of this study was focused on

practices and qualities of principals, there were common school-wide practices that were also identified by the study participants. This discussion addressed both areas of practices by school and principal, as the practices of principals should be supporting the overall school direction. The following subsections lay out and discuss the findings from Chapter 4 and evaluate their meaning, in relation to the literature review from Chapters 1 and 2. Each section follows the tenets of CRL, with an added subsection focused on professional development, identified through data collection as a common theme that is an area for improvement in this niche area of education.

Caring

This was one of the most extensively addressed themes in the data collection process. This theme was by far the most commonly referred to during the data collection, along with the next section, Building Relationships. This complemented the common theme of school culture in the literature review. Nygreen (2013) found that students were leaving traditional schools without ever making meaningful connections to the school or staff. This work can be accomplished through work done both in and outside of the classroom (Stockard, 2020).

School-wide Practices

The following practices were identified as school-wide examples of effective student support. These findings can be used to drive school initiatives and administrative direction for current and future practitioners. Some of the participants spoke about their use of rubrics and standards to evaluate the level of care provided on campus. Noddings (2013) posed that leaders that embrace caring are able to see through multiple lenses, through their own reality and that of the one they care for. This was also supported by

surveys conducted throughout the year checking on the students' well-being, which was paramount in supporting such a large student population battling socio-emotional factors (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998). The previous practices involved the overall implementation of a wellness center and/or their associated staff implementation of such educational support components, but there was still a large majority of continuation schools not providing sufficient socio-emotional support services to attain academic success (Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012). Along with out-of-class support, there was also an identified need to embed SEL curriculum into daily lessons across all subject matters, which aligns with studies previously explored in the literature review (Grant et al., 2017). Gray's (2022) work supported the impact of building relationships and connections through caring which had a positive impact on engagement in the classroom.

Leadership Qualities and Practices

This subsection specifically lays out the findings and their meaning for the daily practice of the principal. While this section supported the overall implementation of initiatives and practices from the school-wide practices above, it was more acutely focused on interpersonal and leadership practices directly emanating from the role of the school leader. In building caring environments, principals must remember their actions set the tone and mood for the whole school. Setting a welcoming and caring environment trickled down from upper management to every person on campus (Noddings, 2013). This can also be accomplished through the hiring process. Many participants spoke at length about the value of hiring staff members that truly care about and are excited to work with at-promise students. The participants in an overwhelming majority identified that the care that a prospective employee would provide and the belief in their students

well-outweighed the value of providing representation to match the demographics of the student body. Previous research laid out in the literature review shows that believing in your students leads to belief in themselves (Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Henderson & Redmond Barnes, 2016; Moffatt & Riddle, 2021; Murray & Holt, 2014).

Building Relationships

As was explained in the previous section, Building Relationships, along with Caring were the most commonly referred to tenets in the data collection phase of this study. This section ranged from relationships with staff, to students, to fellow principals, and to parents. The takeaway from this section is that the time spent building relationships with all of these stakeholders is time well spent and is an investment in the future. Dr. Lider was clear on this topic with her staff, providing a full week of relationship building with students before getting to curricular content upon return from the pandemic in 2021.

School-wide Practices

Schools that put relationship building at the forefront of their school provided time for it during the instructional day. Building of relationships was also done as a precursor to foundational curricular instruction. Building relationships between students and on-campus staff members was the most effective socio-emotional support (McGregor & Mills, 2012; McGregor et al., 2015; O'Brien & Curry, 2009). As school principals work with their staff to build the school calendar, identify campus-wide activities, and solidify curriculum maps, it is imperative that they consider time set aside for this relationship building and that it is planned in conjunction with basic introductory topics, or before any of that is even introduced. Through collaborative planning time, content-

heavy lessons can be developed that include relationship-building components to support this process.

Leadership Qualities and Practices

A big lesson from this study was the overwhelming popularity and power of distributive and transformational leadership identified through the data collection process. Not only were these the most commonly identified leadership styles in the pre-interview questionnaire, their practices littered the participants' responses across the board. Adaptive school strategies developed by Garmston and Wellman (2009) focused on the unified decision making across a campus. Distributive leadership practices unified decisions on student success and developed a positive school culture (Gates Foundation, 2022). Some examples of this included decision-making processes and building trust through an avoidance of micromanaging. Distributive practices are more inclusive, and therefore an overall lean towards more socially just leadership. Overlap of this theme was dissected in a subsequent section on communication. Ultimately, the daily relationship building was supporting student efficacy across campus at all levels (Whitaker, 2020).

Persistence and Persuasiveness

As described in the section below, the persistence and persuasiveness reached beyond the gates of the school. The principal must act as an advocate with district leadership, must sift through communication and keep the staff focused on school site goals, and ensure all of these actions are in alignment with the school mission and vision. Managing and balancing these tasks allowed for students to receive the resources they need, when they need them, with a school staff all rowing in the same direction.

School-wide Practices

The glaring take-away from this tenet is the need for schools to have school goals that are aligned with the mission and vision of the school, and subsequently continuously reminded of the unified direction to guide daily practice and purpose. Building on the previous section, the impact of distributive leadership in this realm, specifically focused on the joint decision-making and direction towards a school mission and vision was most effective (Garmston & Wellman, 2009).

Leadership Qualities and Practices

Though not heavily identified in the literature review, advocacy was found in this study to be powerful. There was no shortage of literature that laid out the historical treatment by district leadership of continuation schools in getting the short end of the stick such as Ruiz de Velasco et al.'s (2012) findings, but there was no clear previous work done in the area of advocacy to right the wrongs of current practices. A leader that can be persuasive with the powers that be, must also keep an eye on the direction of the educational program on the school site, ensuring the goals are clear and focused. Previous literature described a leader that teetered on the edge of maniacal behaviors focused on one or two driving goals and factors the school works towards in everything they do (Hansen, 2018; Schmoker, 2019). The overwhelming amount of goals and initiatives presented by the larger district can become too much for many educators and ultimately only makes things worse. The principal's role is to weed through these district-wide communications and direction to unify their school site foci and keep the staff as a whole focused on the prize . . . the few achievable site goals that have been carefully aligned

with their students' needs. These needs should be aligned through multiple documents including the WASC action plan, the School Plan for Student Achievement, and the district's Local Control Accountability Plan goals.

Being Present and Communicating

Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) original study was focused on the inner workings of a school's success used to develop CRL. This study found almost all of the components to this tenet focused on the communication and development of a positive narrative of the school, its employees, and its students in an attempt to change the public's perception. This alternate lens does not change the dynamic of the tenet, but is important as practitioners consider where to place their effort and resources.

School-wide Practices

This study was able to identify some easy practices for schools and administrators to implement in addressing the stigma of continuation schools. There were many sources of the negative reputation continuation schools carry, from students to staff (Hernandez, 2017, 2018; Nygreen, 2013). While there was a plethora of studies that cataloged the impact of negative stigma on the continuation school setting, there were not well documented suggestions for reversing the narrative. This study found some of the following opportunities. Multiple participants spoke about the impact of having students speak at board meetings. This opportunity for district staff and the community to see the students in action, with disregard to the topic of presentation, was a reminder that these students are no different than those at the local traditional high school. The use of social media was another way to celebrate school success in the public eye. Presenting these same tidbits on school achievements with local organizations and community partners

furthered the positive impact the work has on public perception. While this was not addressed by any of the participants of this study, it is important to maintain this same focus of positive messaging within the school's walls. Sussman et al. (1995) learned that while students reported plans of higher education for life after graduation, their teachers reported a future more aligned with getting a job, starting a family, or joining a gang within a year of graduating from school.

Leadership Qualities and Practices

Along with the school-wide practices above, current and future continuation school leaders should focus their efforts on the public perception of the school. One of the most impactful means of communication for such information can be achieved through positive messaging and relationships with the principals of the feeder traditional schools. If the principals are speaking highly of the continuation school, then the rest of the staff will start to do the same. This idea is a direct example of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) tenets five and six, which modeled cultural responsiveness and fostering cultural responsiveness in others. There was also mention of the value of being seen on campus, being present, and impacting school culture through availability, modeling desired culture, and positive mindset. In larger school settings, it is difficult for a principal to get facetime with every staff member on a regular basis, considering that a traditional school with 1,800 students or more will have well over 100 staff members. In continuation schools like the ones led by this study's participants, the average staff size was 40 (this includes both classified and certificated employees). That was a much more manageable number providing, and requiring, a more personable experience that called for being seen by staff on and around campus on a regular basis. Even students notice if

their principal is not on campus for long stretches of time. This ability to be present at drop-off in the mornings, release at the end of the day, or out on campus at lunchtime creates an opportunity to influence students and the school culture.

While the public perception of a school, its students, and staff was important, the self-belief in each individual weighed just as heavily on a school leader. Khalifa et al. (2016) stated that looking through a lens of equity and inclusion is a necessity when working with historically underserved students. These inequities were particularly acute when considering the student population at continuation schools and the systemic injustices their students have endured before arriving at the alternative setting (Mills et al., 2016; Pennachia et al., 2016).

Modeling Cultural Responsiveness

This was one tenet that was less discussed by most participants and did not seem to be integrated into their daily practices that were focused on modeling cultural responsiveness for others. There were studies beyond Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) theoretical framework that supported the importance of modeling, namely Santamaria (2014) found the impact of culturally responsive modeling trickled down to other staff members on campus. Some best practices were gleaned from data collection from some of the participants, leading to the following findings.

School-wide Practices

This tenet had few examples and representative practices from the data collection. One practice that was identified by multiple participants was the use of a school librarian to curate a representative reading catalog to engage the students and build interest in authors and characters that the students can see in themselves. This study discovered that

principals did not believe hiring teachers who look like their students is of primary concern, but more importantly their care for and ability to connect with the students. This study also found that principals believed ensuring students have supportive access to educational materials written with specific student-determined intersectionality in mind, was of high importance.

Leadership Qualities and Practices

Considering there were some shortcomings in the answers to the questions related to this topic, there were some great practices and qualities uncovered that can drive future implementation from school leaders. There are also opportunities to influence other staff members to reflect on their own practices and improve through self-reflection. By highlighting an instance of vulnerability in front of the staff, the principal was sending strong messages to the faculty and staff that it is okay to make mistakes, although we must be reflective and ever-improving to best serve our students and community. Multiple studies had similar findings in the impact and value of guiding staff through their own reflection (Boske, 2015; Garza, 2008). Ultimately, this study was short on concrete examples of modeling cultural responsiveness as a leadership quality or practice by the study participants.

Fostering Cultural Responsiveness in Others

As in the section above, there was a lack of concrete examples of practices across all participant data. There were valuable data points that lead the continuation school community in a direction of improved practice and further research, as described in the subsections below.

School-wide Practices

Similar to findings from the modeling of cultural responsiveness, school-wide practices that support this tenet were operationalized via offerings of courses and their curriculum that support CRL both for the staff and the students. This study did not collect enough data to refute previous research findings that continuation schools were providing substandard curriculum delivery and attainment of standards (Barajas, 2021; Hernandez, 2018; Nygreen, 2013; Ruiz de Velasco et al., 2012; Shea & Muir, 2012; Sussman et al., 1995).

Leadership Qualities and Practices

The beacon of professional practice for this tenet was in having difficult conversations with staff when their practices do not align with the school's mission and direction. The data collected stresses the importance of the ability to try new things and provide support where it was needed. Understanding where students were and what they needed to move forward was identified as an important skill. The role of an administrator was to provide guidance and support in placing services, supports, and practices that lead to student success (Larson et al., 2017).

Professional Development

This study has added to the original tenets of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) theory on Culturally Responsive Leadership. Other social justice leadership theories included a component similar to professional development, but Madhlangobe and Gordon did not. With the common theme of collaboration and a lack of job-alike peers working

together in continuation school settings, it was imperative to add these findings,

recommendations, and implications.

School-wide Practices

A practice that is implemented school-wide, but must be guided by the principal is

the opportunity for school staff (certificated and classified) to have regular opportunities

to share best practices and collaborate with job-alike peers at other school sites within or

outside of the district. The researcher's own experience was that it was best received

when the opportunities were sourced in yet another continuation school setting. The

scope of this study did not address the components of professional development for staff,

but it is important to note the literature review found that socio-emotional learning was

the most important component to a professional development plan for a continuation

school (Davis et al., 2021; Fulton & Pepe, 2016; Galaif et al., 1998).

Leadership Qualities and Practices

The practices above also apply to the principal. The participants were all very

clear that there were limited opportunities for collaboration with job-alike peers and

would benefit from more opportunities. The responsibility to engage other staff members

in professional learning also lies with the principal. This can be identified and driven

home when the goal is singular and connected to everything happening on campus

(Hansen, 2018; Schmoker, 2019; Whitaker, 2020). Whitaker (2020) found that there are

only two ways to improve a school, by either hiring better teachers, or improving the

ones already in the classroom through professional development. Kafele (2015) found

that this was done through staff meetings having the sole purpose of professional

learning. These ideas were solidified in the theoretical framework laid out in Culturally

Responsive School Leadership, with one whole tenet based in the area of teacher preparation (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Limitations

As is the case in empirical research using qualitative data collection, the data and their meaning were limited due to limitations that are innately built into the methodology. While the study brought to light the most effective practices of effective model continuation school leaders, limitations of the research design should be considered. The size of the possible participant pool included 106 different high school principals. This study collected data from only nine of them, representing about 8% of the eligible population. This limited sample size could be deemed too small to be a true representation of practices and qualities representative of the 106 model continuations school principals across California. Another notable limitation was based in the bias of the principal researcher as a colleague of the study participants. The principal researcher worked in alternative education for the past six years and played a role at the local and state level in continuation school professional organizations and on a statewide leadership council. This position may have affected the responses of each participant and their candidness while answering questions during the interview.

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Implications

</div>

There were various implications across multiple realms that have resulted from this study, as described in the following. There were theoretical considerations that have been reinforced by this study, along with suggested additions to the aforementioned Culturally Responsive Leadership model. These revelations then led to adjustments in daily practice. Professional development, human resource management, policy, and

professional organizations can use these findings to improve the learning environment at continuation schools across California and beyond. The sections below explained these implications in more detail, building from theoretical impacts and progressing to the influence these findings have on daily praxis.

Theoretical Implications

Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) Culturally Responsive Leadership theory, and its six tenets, complimented the needs of continuation school leaders and their schools. The data were clear that care and relationships were a top priority for the participants in this study. There were also many data collected that were representative of the importance of communication and persuasion, specifically in the realm of advocacy for access to resources. There were limited evidentiary examples of modeling and fostering cultural responsiveness in others, but this was clearly an important part of effective leadership in the continuation school setting.

One missing component of this theory that was prevalent in most other social justice leadership theories was the practice of reflection. There were opportunities for participants to address this concept at multiple points throughout the interview and it was addressed to varying degrees. Ultimately, most of the reflection that was identified was in an unstructured capacity, many times done alone. A more standardized, structured process that includes feedback from other team members or school stakeholders may well impact the leadership effectiveness of these already incredible leaders. Many participants acknowledged the professional learning opportunity the study provided, specifically in self-evaluating and reflecting on their own schools and leadership practices. Knowing

this step in self-reflection is important, including a reflection component in the theory on Culturally Responsive Leadership is advisable.

With these identified theoretical adjustments and other adaptations as highlighted throughout the study data, the principal profile's key elements, including developing professional learning opportunities and structures that support the professional growth of current and future continuation school leaders. The next section delved further into specific impacts on the implementation and praxis of school site practitioners, district support personnel, and professional organizations.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The implications for practice extending from this research project inform the areas of professional development, human resource management, policy, and professional organization advancement. Some of these areas were clearly informed from this study's results, while others may be guided in their work by the new questions and further research that came to light through the findings in this paper.

Professional Development Improvements

As future professional development plans are created, this study should help guide the direction and focus of such programs. These professional development opportunities can and should include implementation of lessons from this study in conference presentations, webinars, county office of education trainings, one-on-one mentoring programs, and publications. Outside of general school leadership offerings, and the annual CCEA conference, which was explained in more detail in the section on professional organizations, there were no professional development opportunities focused on continuation education leadership.

One project that was currently in development was a certification program for continuation school principals modeled after current ACSA Academies (J. Ruiz de Velasco, personal communication, October 25, 2022). At the time of the writing of this dissertation, ACSA ran job-alike academies to support new and aspiring leaders in a specific area. Examples include principal, human resources, student services, special education, superintendent, and so on. This learning experience would prepare the new leader for running a school in which the laws and policies are different than are applied in a traditional school setting, as well as supporting the unique needs of at-promise students. This learning opportunity was still in its infancy but could be monumental in supporting early learning for continuation school leaders.

Professional Organization Advancement

Considering the current study's findings, there was a need for more opportunities in professional organizations for continuation school leadership, in general. Many of the participants identified the need for more professional collaboration, sharing of best practices, and someone that understands their world, within continuation education. With most learning education agencies having no more than one continuation school, the traditional professional learning communities within a district do not apply. What continuation school leaders need is a model more akin to director, assistant superintendent, and superintendent professional groups that provide a space for collaboration, calibration, and sharing of best practices.

Professional organizations like ACSA did not have a high rate of membership from leaders from continuation schools, nor alternative education settings in general. CCEA was specific to continuation schools, but does not have full time employees. It was

a professional organization completely run by fulltime practitioners, thus does not have the same organization, communication, or impact as larger organizations, such as ACSA. CCEA split the state of California into four regions, meaning each region had well over 100 continuation schools (CCEA Plus, 2021). There was no set communication protocol, regular regional meeting, or a smaller section of area schools to create professional cohorts. This shortcoming, along with the feel of each school administrator "being on an island" as the only continuation school principal created a professional support void that professional organizations can fill.

There are many ways to support professional development through professional organizations like CCEA and ACSA. One missed opportunity is in mentoring support. This is an offering currently identified on the CCEA Plus website, but was not tended to by the organization and is not being provided. This is another reason CCEA Plus does not provide sufficient professional development support, stemming from the fact that those new to continuation education were not aware of the support or where and how to connect with it.

ACSA maintained a statewide council called Educational Options that included all alternative educational settings, but specifically focuses on continuation schools and independent study schools. The principal researcher is a current member of this council and has found it very beneficial for his own practice, but there are concerns of its effectiveness for those school leaders that are not a part of the council. This can be improved by standardizing the communication protocol from council representatives to regional constituents. This also requires increased participation of continuation school

personnel in professional organizations like ACSA and improving the offerings in organizations like CCEA.

Human Resource Management

Human resource management is an important sector of focus for the outcomes of this study. One of the aims of this research was to inform upper management on the qualities and practices of effective continuation school principals to inform their decision in hiring and retaining the best candidates for such positions. It can also help guide the development of future leaders as they groom talent from within in preparation for future positions. Using the principal profile presented in this chapter can help guide the support and evaluation of the site level leader as well as improve the actual educational learning environment of all students in the continuation school.

Policy

When weighing the current hurdles continuation school principals and schools face in the educational landscape, paired with the educational code and district policies that compound the situation for the most at-promise students, considering changes in policy and educational code can make a big difference in the success of a school leader and their school. Laid out below are the areas of strength and need for growth in current policy.

Some current strengths and support that were outlined in written policies and law supporting continuation school range from finance, graduation rate calculations, curriculum offerings, and scheduling. That school attendance in continuation school was calculated cumulatively over multiple days allows for these schools to still earn a respectable percentage of average daily attendance, thus maintaining financial solvency

for the school and district. This was paired with the flexibility of a shorter school day for students, laid out in Education Codes 46170 and 48200 (1976/2020) requiring only 180 minutes of instruction a day compared to traditional school's requirement of 240 minutes of instruction daily. This shorter school day, when needed, provides an opportunity for students to be at school during their most productive time of day, be flexible around a work schedule, or to meet home and family care needs. Educational code that provided for flexibility in student coursework meeting graduation requirements is helpful when students arrive at the doorstep of a continuation school with partial credits from many different institutions and possibly repeated courses. Lastly, the calculation of graduates using a one-year cohort model, rather than the four-year cohort model applied to traditional high schools was more representative of the successes in such a setting. A common theme in the literature review was the negative stigma attached to continuation school students, their staff, and the school as a whole. Reporting more representative data to the public-facing statewide data website is a step in the right direction as the whole educational community works together to rectify the image currently projected on continuation education.

Areas for growth in the realm of policy also span a wide range of topics and themes. The data made it clear there was a need for a more supportive model of resource allocation to continuation schools ensuring student needs are met. Multiple participants spoke of the need to present data and reasoning behind their request for more staffing, improved facilities, or increased services. While it is always good practice to base these decisions on relevant data, the question was whether traditional school administration is following the same process or instead have a means to resolve without involving district

leadership and their school board? While there is no doubt that today's school leaders want the best for every student, there needs to be systematic checks and awareness of continuation school requirements to ensure resources are funneled correctly.

Future Research

In light of these limitations and the current movement away from the traditional instructional leader modeling in classrooms and being the content expert, and moving towards leadership that is reliant on a whole staff that brings expertise and guidance to the table, future studies should consider the balance of these leadership practices and the programmatic offerings, along with professional development that impacts student success in the continuation school setting. The importance of this lies in the continuity of best educational practices and does not rely on a singular individual as leadership changes at a particular school. Using a research design centered around measuring the correlation between student success and specific educational practices on a campus would further the standardization and clarify the area of focus for school leaders, support providers, and classroom teachers. Some hurdles that come with this form of study in this setting include the difficulty in defining the meaning of "success." Are you focused on letter grade attainment term over term? Should standardized test scores be the measurement, even though results from this study show statewide standardized tests are not prioritized by current leadership? What about measuring graduation rates or actualization of plans after high school? This route is more difficult as the scope of the study would stretch many years and could prove difficult to track with the historical transiency of the student population in continuation schools.

None of these variables should discourage future research, but should be seen as a reason for the need to continuously focus research in the continuation school realm to improve educational outcomes for our students most at-promise. Considering these obstacles when designing future research will help the principal researcher focus and hone in on school components that most directly address student learner needs.

Another area of future research may be to include the voice of all stakeholders that the school leader impacts:

- Considering the student experience, what practices and qualities lead to student academic success in school and beyond?
- In the opinion of the teachers, what principal leadership practices best support learning in the classroom and across campus?
- According to parent feedback, what do families need from school leadership to be involved at school and support student learning from home as students move to and through high school graduation in the continuation school setting?
- Accounting for post-secondary needs, what ideas and experiences do higher education representatives and community employers identify as needs from high school leadership in preparation of the students for life after high school?

Including these voices in building a profile for continuation school leadership creates a more rounded lens and considers the experiential component, and not just the narrow vision of the leadership practitioner.

Considering the impact of research focused on the voices of the students and staff is paramount in this work, specifically noting that this study and overall genre were

focused on social justice, equity, and providing a platform for mobility through education. If we only consider data from the leader on what makes them effective, we omit the thoughts of teachers in the classroom, out-of-class support guiding students, and most importantly, the students themselves. It is imperative future research considers and includes student voice in data collection around the practices and qualities of successful continuation school leaders. Some other areas of future research are in the subsections below, which align with themes originally presented in the literature review.

Disciplinary Practices

Some of the participants spoke about and were proud to note that they had not suspended a student from school in years. Using alternative methods or other means for correction for disciplinary action rather than suspension was not only required by law as laid out in California Education Code 48900.5 (1976/2020). Baldridge et al. (2011) and Bal (2016) had similar findings in that alternative settings can flexibly meet the academic and social needs of young Black males in historically marginalized non-dominant communities, respectively. The participants of this study responded with similar sentiments, specifically valuing the ability to be flexible in their practices and to change the direction of a program or the whole school to best fit students' needs.

Self-belief

Many different theories supported the myriad of aspects that negatively affected the educational experience of a student at a continuation school. Let us examine a path of positivity, one that empowers our students, one that believes in the abilities they already possess. Bandura's (2004) Self-efficacy Framework helped explain that all individuals can build the confidence necessary to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior

and social development. Adolescents that expressed purpose in their lives were more engaged in community, religion, and a deeper sense of meaning (Damon et al., 2003). Freire (2018) echoed this same concept as he said, "The pedagogy of the oppressed, a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed (whether individuals or peoples) in the incessant struggle to regain their humanity" (p. 48). Educational transformation will not happen if done for the students, the students must realize their own power and ability to enact change for themselves and future generations. Some of the research cited in this literature review was conducted in collaboration with the subjects, in an attempt to include them in the process, thus empowering them to make choices for themselves in their life path to success. The natural question to then ask is, how do we provide these students with a boost in confidence and self-efficacy?

Many of the most influential experiences negatively affecting continuation school students were variables that are outside the control of the continuation school. Poor educational experiences, community strife, familial unrest, drug abuse, and so on were some of these variables. The solution was found in Bandura's (2004) Self-Efficacy Framework. Educators cannot eliminate the demons some at-promise students battled, yet continuation schools can build self-confidence and belief in oneself to be triumphant, meet goals, and be successful in and beyond high school.

Continuation schools were consistently battling a negative stigma in the educational and general community. This negative aura impacted educational opportunities and climate for the students, in turn weakening their confidence and belief-in-self. The generation and development of self-efficacy in students gives them tools to manage rough stretches in life. Relationships built between staff members and students

157

reign supreme and in many different sub-contexts: students performed better academically, had a greater level of belief-in-self, improved behavior, and were more socio-emotionally balanced when strong bonds have been formed with school staff members.

The literature was very clear that staff connections developed students with a higher self-efficacy. What exactly is it that aids students in making those connections? What can be done to counteract the negative stigma that engulfs continuation schools? Would this be an internal effort built on home-grown school pride or an external marketing campaign with the intent to change the public's mind about alternative education? All of these questions could lead to identifying the next piece of the puzzle in building a positive image of continuation schools, a positive outcome in the educational pathway, and a positive self-image of continuation school students.

Interventions Before Continuation School

The concerns posed in this section evoked the following questions:

- What can traditional schools offer in school culture, interventions, and support, to right the socially unjust practices in their current systems?
- What do alternative schools and their leadership do to right these social wrongs to provide a quality education?

The first question can lead to very important research in preventing the need for students to move to an alternative education, and as Pennachia et al. (2016) contested, the very existence of alternative programs could be a barrier to such educational reform. Bascia and Maton (2016) found that best practices at alternative schools did not always translate well to traditional schools due to the size of the school and the lack of communication

among such schools because alternative schools were on 'islands' without school peers within the same district or without connection to similar continuation schools in the same region. The second question was the focus of this study and the guiding question that will be addressed through the literature review and data collection. More pointedly and directly, the course of this study asked, what leadership qualities and practices do continuation school principals embody and implement to provide a rich and socially just education for the most marginalized of student groups?

**How do You Know What You are Doing is Working?**

Ultimately, the structured process of evaluating program effectiveness was never addressed in any of the interviews, although there were multiple times study participants talked about the shared decision making at their site and the inclusion of staff in making decisions. The broad viewpoints of the staff helped in identifying needs, efficacy, and future impact, but the process was not based on a structured process of data evaluation and cyclical change. This same void has been seen in social justice and equity work, many times explained as a non-linear process that is not bound by time or clear progressive steps (Castillo, 2022). Castillo described the process as messy and full of detours, but constant movement forward with an end goal in mind was what helps drive continuous improvement when doing equity work in a school setting.

Practical Applications

Figure 2 is a derivative of this study intended to be used as current continuation school leaders self-evaluate their own practice and their schools, while also being used as a guide for district leadership as they look to identify future school leaders.

Figure 2

Professional Qualities and Practices of Effective Continuation School Leaders
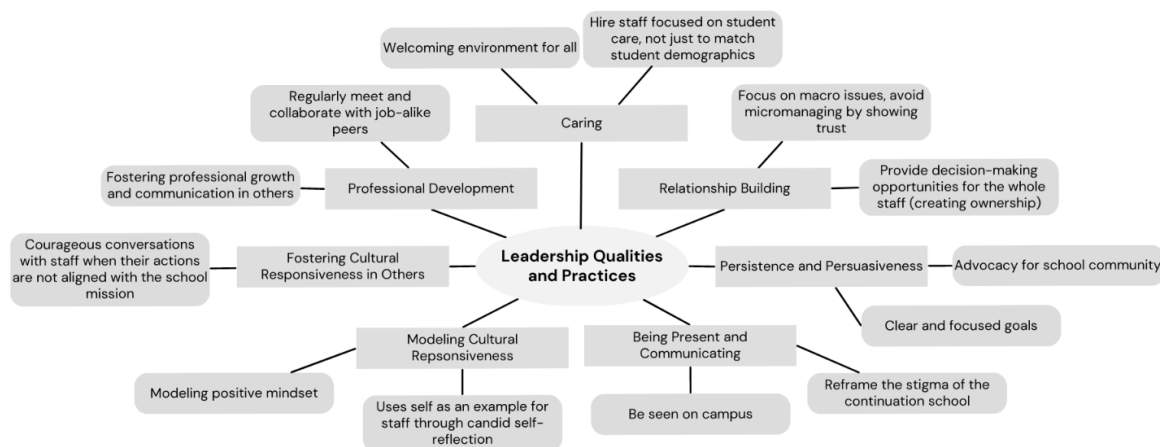
These same themes and information were presented in a matrix format in Appendix F.

This rubric can be used for a myriad of different applications. It could be used to

complete a self-evaluation for current practitioners, reflecting on their practice and

possibly using it to spark professional development opportunities with job-alike peers.

Continuing in the professional development realm, this tool could also be used to guide

the writing of curriculum for a class, seminar, presentation, or academy series focused on

continuation school leadership. This document can also be used as a guide for district

level personnel in identifying a new school leader, or in developing a current practitioner.

Human resources may also use it in developing an evaluation tool specific to continuation

school leaders.

Considering the professional profile (Figure 2) that was born from this study,

there were many different components, skills, and qualities that can help guide the daily

practice of a continuation school principal. As a fellow continuation school administrator, the principal investigator learned some of the following new lessons (with the paired CRL tenet):

- Hire staff focused on student care, not just to match student demographics. (Caring)

- No one else is advocating for your students, staff or school . . . it is up to you! (Persistence and persuasiveness)

- Meaningful professional development must be constructed with the audience in mind. (Professional development, not a part of CRL)

Taking it a step further, there were also some strong reminders of components of social justice leadership in a continuation school that can be easily forgotten:

- decision-making opportunities for the whole staff (Building relationships);

- reframe the stigma of the continuation school (Being present and communicating);

- presence on campus (Being present and communicating); and

- clear and focused goals (Persistence and pervasiveness).

The challenge for continuation school leaders will continue to be to coordinate opportunities to collaborate on the items listed above, along with addressing the specific needs of their school and community. Using the recommendations above, along with a transformational or distributive leadership style (the leadership styles most commonly identified by this study's participants), continuation school principals will be able to maintain constant professional growth and provide a sense of direction that will best serve their school community.

Conclusion

As a current model continuation school principal, some of the findings were expected for the principal researcher, while others were a great reminder to never stop the quest for improved practices and new ways to best serve a school community. In returning to the commencement of this study and its central theme of the social justice issues surrounding the educational right for all students, including those students identified as at-promise, the importance of a skilled, prepared, and caring leader to guide a continuation school was paramount to the educational advancement of its students.

Considering the professional profile (Figure 2) that was born from this study, there were many different components, skills, and qualities that can help guide the daily practice of a continuation school principal. As a fellow continuation school administrator, the principal investigator gained the following insights (with the paired CRL tenet):

- Hire staff focused on student care, not just to match student demographics. (Caring)

- No one else is advocating for your students, staff or school…it is up to you! (Persistence and persuasiveness)

- Meaningful professional development must be constructed with the audience in mind. (professional development, not a part of CRL)

Additionally, there were also some components of social justice leadership in a continuation school that can be easily forgotten:

- decision-making opportunities for the whole staff (Building relationships);

- reframe the stigma of the continuation school (Being present and communicating);

- presence on campus (Being present and communicating); and

- clear and focused goals (Persistence and pervasiveness).

Considering these new lessons and fresh reminders addressed in Practical Applications, there were many initiatives across which effective continuation school principals divide their energy and efforts. This study did not uncover current examples of modeling cultural responsiveness and fostering cultural responsiveness in others. Both of these tenets were less concrete in the data collected. Without purposeful modeling and fostering of culturally responsive practices, no marked growth will be realized by a school staff or community.

Considering the future application of CRL in the continuation school setting, there are opportunities to fortify the theoretical framework through an expansion in the area of reflection, which was a common theme in most other mainstream social justice theoretical frameworks applied in the educational setting. As stated earlier, the participants in this study provided data that did not support a common practice of formulaic, structured, and scheduled reflection in groups, teams, or as a staff. While there isn't a written order for this practice, the data suggests that most principals were regularly reflecting internally to help guide adjustments and improvements in their professional practice and to determine improvements for their school.

Alongside reflection, there is also a need to increase the meaningful professional learning opportunities provided for principals and by principals for their staff. How will we connect our principals across districts? How will we make professional learning communities commonplace in niche positions like the continuation school principal? What options do principals have to provide relevant professional learning experiences?

How can the continuation education world inform and influence district leadership to provide more flexible policies to best support alternative education employees in their professional development?

The answers to these questions will help the continuation education world take the next step in professional practice efficacy, thus improving the learner outcomes. This brings us full circle from the introduction in Chapter 1, in which this study's value was situated on the fact that it is a matter of equity that all students are afforded the opportunity to live and learn in a positive school atmosphere like those provided at model continuation schools. Students at continuation schools were traditionally marginalized and stigmatized, leading to historically poor academic outcomes.

This was what brings the findings of this study into the spotlight. This is what should guide district leaders on what defines future search profiles. Our students deserve the best, and the profile sprung from this study will create, develop and guide compassionate and skilled leaders that embody the tenets of Culturally Responsive Leadership to usher their school communities to future success.

APPENDIX A

Types of Alternative Schools

Alternative schools fill a small yet important niche in the educational landscape. According to the California Department of Education (California Department of Education, 2020), an alternative school is a voluntary option that provides alternative means of meeting grade-level standards and meeting student needs. CDE uses the term "Education Options" to refer to alternative education (CDE, 2020). Campuses like continuation schools, independent study programs, community day schools, camps, and prison schools all fall under the umbrella of alternative schools (CDE, 2020).

What is an Independent Studies School?

An independent study school provides an alternative educational setting that provides an opportunity for students that have a schedule that does not allow them to attend in person on a daily basis. Students complete most coursework at home on their own time and through their own guidance. Teachers and tutors are available, along with limited class time, but the majority of work is completed in an independent manner.

What is a Community Day School?

A community day school meets in person on a daily basis and provides a very small setting for severe high-risk students referred through expulsion, probation, or a School Attendance Review Board. A School Attendance Review Board (SARB) is a process in which students with severe attendance issues are referred for a council of district representatives, community-based agencies (like mental health services), and government agencies (like a district attorney, police officer, and/or diversion programs).

These panels make decisions about the school placement of students after their referral to SARB, such as community day school.

What is an Adult Transition School?

Adult transition schools are special education programs for students with individualized education plans that are 18 to 22 years old and did not graduate from high school with a diploma, instead they earned a certificate of completion. Students in adult transition schools range from bound to a wheelchair, non-verbal and on a feeding tube to those will live on their own in the future. Student learning outcomes normally include the ability to be mobile in the community, communication skills, building vocational skills, and building independent living skills.

What is an Adult School?

An adult school provides for community members ages 18 years old and above. Common programs include English Language Development, high school diploma programs, high school equivalency test preparation, and workforce entry preparation. Most adult schools work closely through regional occupational centers and community colleges to create a vertical pathway from adult school into a program at one of these higher education programs.

What is a Home and Hospital School?

Home and Hospital schools and programs provide students an opportunity to maintain instructional continuity during a student's temporary disability. Students that may be hospitalized for a semester due a physical or mental ailment. This provides instruction five hours per week from a teacher to continue the student's studies.

APPENDIX B

Continuation School Administrative Responsibility Chart

This organizational and responsibilities chart is from a California Model Continuation High School in Southern California. It depicts the combined roles and responsibilities as a result of smaller administrative staff and also being in charge of other alternative education programs across the district. These issues are explored in more detail throughout the study.

Administrative Responsibilities			
Administration		*Student Services*	
Principal	**Associate Principal**	**Intervention Specialist**	**Counselor**
Administrative Projects & Liaisons			
Independent Studies	**Adult School**	Academic Intervention	Academic Intervention
Academic Intervention	**Adult Transition Program**	Counseling/College and Career	Classroom Presentations
Activities	Attendance	Field Trips	Counseling/College and Career
Budget	State Reporting	Homeless/Foster	Graduation (eligibility)
Campus Supervision	Campus Supervision	Male Success Alliance/Young Women's Empowerment	Homeless/Foster
Collaboration	Collaboration	Parent Nights	Parent Nights
Counseling/College and Career	English Language Development (ELD)	Positive Behavior Intervention & Supports	Parent-Teacher Organization
Data Processing & Records	Facilities	Permits/Expulsions	Student Recognition
District & Community Liaison	Family Engagement	Probation and Quarterly Intervention	
District-Site Leadership Team	Food Services	Student Attendance Review Team &	

167

		Student Attendance Review Board	
Enrollment/Withdrawal/ R&P	Graduation Ceremony	Saturday School	
Facilities	Instructional Materials	Senior Activities	
Faculty Handbook	Registration	Student Recognition	
Master Calendar / Events Scheduling	Safety/Disaster Preparation	Website, Marquee, & Social Media	
Master Schedule	Special Education		
Professional Development	Student Recognition		
School Accountability Report Card	Summer School (Extended School Year)		
School Site Council	Supervision of Staff		
Summer Mailer	Technology		
Vision and Mission	Testing		
Western Association of Schools & Colleges			
Summer School			
Supervision			
Associate Principal	Instructional Aides		
Principal's Secretary	Special Education Department Chair		
Plant Manager	ELD Coordinator		
Security Lead	Adult School Teachers		
Counselors and Social Worker	Adult Transition Teachers		
Intervention Specialist	Classified Staff		
Data Processor			
Attendance/ Records Clerk			
Community Liaison			
Other Teams and Responsibilities			
Intervention Team	**Leadership**	**Instructional Support Team**	
Intervention Specialist	Principal	Principal	
Counselor	Associate Principal	Associate Principal	
Social Worker	Counselor	Digital Learning Lead	

Principal	Intervention Specialist	Academic Language Lead	
Associate Principal	Renaissance Lead	Equity Coordinator	
Psychologist	Community Liaison	Intervention Specialist	
Safety Lead	Special Education Department Chair		
ELD Coordinator			

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol and Questions

Hello, my name is Ben Wardrop. Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for my class activity. This interview is intended to explore the qualities and practices of Model Continuation High School principals and how their praxis supports at-promise youth.

During the interview, I'll ask you to tell me about your development as a leader, your leadership style, your daily practice as a continuation school principal, and how these experiences affect your students' all-around school experience. You have already completed a pre-interview questionnaire that I have used to collect basic demographic data about you as an individual, a professional, and your school site. These questions are not intended to be intrusive or make you feel uncomfortable, but if I ask a question that you do not feel comfortable answering, please just tell me that you do not want to answer and we will move on to the next question.

I anticipate the interview will take approximately 60 minutes. With your permission, I will record video and audio via Zoom so that I can transcribe the conversation and use the transcript for analysis.

[BEGIN RECORDING.]

Do you have any questions before we begin?

[ANSWER QUESTIONS TO THE BEST OF YOUR ABILITY. IF THE PARTICIPANT CAN'T ANSWER OFF HAND, ASK IF THEY'D BE COMFORTABLE WITH YOU GETTING BACK TO THEM WITH THE ANSWER AFTER THE INTERVIEW]

Thank you again for joining me today for this interview. Okay, let's get to it!

1. Tell me about the aspects of the continuation school principalship that you enjoy most.

    a. Prompt: What do you feel you are most successful at in your job?

    b. Probe: Are these the same items that drove you to move into alternative education in the first place?

2. Explain your leadership style. Which qualities and practices of this style promote your school's success?

    a. Prompt: What strengths or qualities do you bring to this role?

    b. Probe: Have you changed your leadership style at a point in your career? What prompted that change?

3. Moving away from personal characteristics or qualities, what have you been taught that allows you to be successful in this role?

    a. Prompt: What is a skill or knowledge you didn't have before entering your principalship that you have since learned that positively impacts your job performance? Why is this so important?

    b. Probe: Has similar professional learning (person or learning format) been helpful in other areas?

4. Considering your experience at a traditional school, how do you spend your time, energy, and resources differently at a continuation school to best support student needs?

    a. Prompt: What are the issues, problems, and projects that consume the majority of your time? Is this different from previous positions you have held at other schools?

    b. Probe: In your opinion, how does your job differ from that of a principal of a traditional high school?

5. How do you battle the negative stigma attached to continuation schools, their students, and staff?

    a. Prompt: What misconceptions do people have about your continuation school?

    b. Probe: Which groups (students, staff, families, and others) are easiest and most difficult to change their mind on mindset, school outlook and why?

6. How does your role as advocate play out at the district level and with the board of education in the development of policy that supports your school's endeavors?

    a. Prompt: Do school and district administrators that do not play a daily role in your school have a deep understanding of continuation school education?

    b. Probe: What are examples of policy development you have played a role in to create a just educational environment for your students? Talk about that development process and how it may be different for continuation schools.

7. What qualities of continuation school principals are most impactful and best fit your perceived needs of continuation school students?

a. Prompt: What is the most important work you do? How do you know it is important?

b. Probe: Were these qualities learned? What is the best way to share these qualities with other continuation school principals to improve their practice?

8. What are the most challenging hurdles continuation school principals come across and what skills allow you to successfully navigate these challenges?

a. Prompt: What is the hardest part of your job?

b. Probe: Were you professionally equipped to navigate these challenges when you first became the continuation school principal, or were these skills developed over time while in the position? If there was development, explain the process.

We need to start wrapping up our interview now, but before we do, is there anything you would like to add that I didn't ask about?

[STOP RECORDING.]

Thank you for your time and your thoughtful responses. My next step is to transcribe this conversation so I can use it in my data set for analysis. Is it ok if I reach out to you if I have questions or need clarifications about this conversation?

Thanks again. If you think of any questions or have any concerns, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

APPENDIX D

Pre-interview Questionnaire

The following questionnaire will be completed by each participant before their interview to collect basic demographic information about the interviewee and their school. You will also notice a few questions that foreshadow the questions on leadership qualities and style that are seen in the interview protocol. By conducting this questionnaire, it also saves time on less impactful data that help build a profile of leadership for a continuation school.

1. In which year were you born?

    a. Before 1967

    b. 1967 - 1976

    c. 1977 - 1986

    d. After 1986

2. What is your racial identity?

    a. American Indian or Alaska Native

    b. Asian

    c. Black or African American

    d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

    e. White

    f. Two or More Races

    g. Other

3. What is your ethnic identity?

    a. Hispanic or Latino

b. Not Hispanic or Latino

4. How do you currently describe yourself?

   a. Female

   b. Male

   c. Transgender

   d. None of these

5. How many years experience do you have as a school site administrator?

   a. Less than 3 years

   b. 3 - 6 years

   c. 7 - 10 years

   d. 11 years or more

6. How many years experience do you have in your current position?

   a. Less than 3 years

   b. 3 - 6 years

   c. 7 - 10 years

   d. 11 years or more

7. Have you been a school site administrator at a traditional school in the past?

   a. Yes

   b. No

8. How many students are enrolled at your school?

   a. 80 or less

   b. 81 - 160

   c. 161 - 240

d. 241 or more

9. How many staff members do you have at your school site?

   a. 15 or less

   b. 16 - 30

   c. 31 - 45

   d. 46 or more

10. What is your leadership style?

   a. Distributive Leadership - concerned with interactions and communication among school staff to make decisions, drive instruction, and develop culture

   b. Social Justice Leadership - promote equity while pivoting on trust, communication, and action experienced by the whole school

   c. Transactional Leadership - focused on a system of exchanges between the leader and the staff, with employees receiving positive reinforcement for meeting organizational or personal goals

   d. Transformational Leadership - focused on facilitating organizational collaboration that helps move the vision of an organization forward

   e. Other

APPENDIX E

Pre-interview Questionnaire Priority Rank

Priority	Int 1	Int 2	Int 3	Int 4	Int 5	Int 6	Int 7	Int 8	Int 9	Total	Priority Rank
Student self-belief - self-efficacy and success comes from staff believing in and fostering students' self-confidence	2	2	3	-	1	2	-	-	-	10	2
Behavioral support - Multi-tiered systems of support creates an environment of assistance and accountability through the involvement of educators and parents	-	3	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	4	5 (tied)
Student socio-emotional support - Mental health services provided outside of the classroom and socio-emotional learning embedded in the classroom	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	2	2	5	4
Student substance abuse counseling - This can encompass the alignment of outside agency support and school-based services	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	9 (tied)
Clear and focused goals - A smaller list of initiatives is more impactful, focusing communication of these key goals	3	-	-	2	-	-	2	-	-	7	3
Instructional leadership and student learning - Promoting teaching strategies and school-wide practices that advance student academic success	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	1	4	5 (tied)
Professional Development and staff accountability - Professional learning opportunities for staff and holding yourself and the team accountable	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	8
School climate and culture - The guiding beliefs and values that drive how a school functions	1	-	2	3	2	3	3	1	3	18	1
Using difficult situations as an opportunity for growth - Address concerns as a group and use the process and outcome as a springboard for learning	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	9 (tied)

Culturally responsive schools - Identifying and including the assets and strengths of all students in the classroom and across campus to improve learning through relevance	-	-	1	-	3	-	-	-	-	4	5 (tied)
Assessing school program success - This component includes the monitoring and measurement of programmatic impact on student learning	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	9 (tied)

Note. Int 1=Dr. Silver, Int 2=Ms. Bay, Int 3=Ms. Jefferies, Int 4=Mr. Hernandez, Int 5=Dr. Love, Int 6=Dr. Baker, Int 7=Mr. Locke, Int 8=Ms. Virginia, Int 9=Dr. Lider. Scores on this table were tabulated giving three points for being selected as "most important," two points for being selected as "next most important," and one point for being selected as "third most important." No points were awarded if the item was not chosen by the participant. The total points were aggregated to determine the Priority Rank according to the results across all participants

Professional Qualities and Practices of Effective Continuation School Leaders

Tenets of Culturally Responsive Leadership	Leadership qualities and practices	School-wide practices
Caring	● Welcoming environment for all ● Hire staff focused on student care, not just to match student demographics	■ Rubrics and standards to evaluate the level of care ■ Surveys checking student well-being ■ Mental health support staff ■ Embedded SEL curriculum
Building relationships	● Focus on macro issues, avoid micromanaging by showing trust ● Provide decision-making opportunities for the whole staff (creating ownership)	■ Opportunities for student-staff relations to be built during the school day ■ Relationship building is focused on before getting to curriculum
Persistence and persuasiveness	● Advocacy for school community ● Clear and focused goals	■ School goals are connected to school mission and vision
Being present and communicating	● Reframe the stigma of the continuation school ● Be seen on campus	■ Students speak at board meetings ■ Social media celebrates successes ■ Celebrate school successes with community partners
Modeling cultural responsiveness	● Modeling positive mindset ● Uses self as an example for staff through candid self-reflection	■ Use of representative authors and texts in curriculum
Fostering cultural responsiveness in others	● Courageous conversations with staff when their actions are not aligned with the school mission	■ Course offerings and curriculum align with culturally responsive practices
Professional development*	● Regularly meet and collaborate with job-alike peers ● Fostering professional growth and communication in others	■ Regular opportunities for staff to share best practices and collaborate with job-alike peers at other school sites

Note. *=Professional Development is not a tenet of Madhlangobe and Gordon's (2012) theory on Culturally Responsive Leadership, but a recommended addition from the findings of this study.

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