

“MOVE, PLAY, REGULATE”:
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY-
BASED SEL CURRICULUM’S TRANSFORMATIVE
IMPLICATIONS AT A LOW-INCOME PUBLIC
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

By

JINAN EL SABBAGH

Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History
University of Tulsa
Tulsa, OK
2012

Master of Education in Reading
Northeastern State University
Tahlequah, OK
2016

Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate College of the
Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
December, 2021

“MOVE, PLAY, REGULATE” :
A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY-
BASED SEL CURRICULUM’S TRANSFORMATIVE
IMPLICATIONS AT A LOW-INCOME PUBLIC
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Dissertation Approved:

Dr. Erin Dyke

Dissertation Adviser

Dr. Hongyu Wang

Dr. Donita Shaw

Dr. Corinne Schwarz

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In many respects this has been the page I have agonized over the most because as with most labors of love, time, and hard work, there are so many people to thank for supporting and helping me to get to this point in my life. From the professional to the personal and all in between, so in no order of necessarily importance but with immense gratitude, I begin my acknowledging the invaluable presence that my advisor and the faculty at Oklahoma State University provided. I know that the scholar I am becoming is due to the mentorship, friendship, and knowledge shared with me. It has been an immense privilege to be in classrooms and navigating the roles of student, co-researcher, facilitator, and of course, friend with my esteemed committee members. Dr. Erin Dyke, the best advisor anyone could ask for and model of what I hope to embody with my future students/advisees and whatever educational/ learning spaces I join. Dr. Hongyu Wang for your astute leadership and modeling mindfulness as a way of life and encouraging me to challenge my theoretical self; Dr. Corinne Schwarz for abolitionist theorizing, book talks, and keeping me connected to activist circles; and Dr. Donita Shaw for your kind support, interest, thoughtfulness and welcoming me in literacy education spaces. Thank you all for being there for me throughout my journey and being the best committee, a dream team and model of thoughtfulness, critical scholarship, and utmost support. Thank you, Dr. Annie Mason my “unofficial” committee member whose scholarship and care contributes to this piece and extends community building outside of Oklahoma. An additional thanks to Dr. Tracey Pyscher who gave me invaluable advice and resources and took the time to talk with me and think through some of the challenging parts of trauma-informed literature and discourse analysis. Thank you for taking the time and helping me formulate my theorizing. And to Dr. Joseph Bradley for keeping in touch, inquiring about my progress, and providing a historian’s perspective on things.

To Emma and the amazing staff at Marbury Elementary School. Thank you for welcoming me and inviting me to be part of your school during such a challenging time and introducing me to the wonderful families you serve. You’ve taught me so much more than just the scope of this project. It was an honor and a privilege, and I don’t take my role as storyteller and interpreter lightly.

To the writing groups and Facebook Groups I have joined and felt in community with who showed me the finishing line does exist and that I am not alone. Thank you for providing a space to write, vent, encourage, and write some more. To the Solidarity in Leadership group led by Dr. Josh Bornstein where I enjoyed getting to know equity-minded educators and principals as we talked through important topics and issues

encouraged one another during this pandemic. And to all the co-presenters and panelists I have been in conversation with and those I was privy to listen to, being in such spaces undoubtedly had an impact on both my scholarship and outlook on life. To the OSU Writing Project 2021 group and its organizers, thank you for your stories, insights, and jokes and for cultivating a space for reflexivity, creative writing, and collaboration.

To the scholars, activists, parents, and community organizers whose work and passion influenced this project's trajectory as I gathered data and gave me insight into the ways that this work translates into the real world. This includes the necessity and impact liberatory and transformative practices have to dismantle systems of oppression and marginalization: Kakali Bhattacharya, Mariame Kaba, Erica Meiners, Bettina Love, Dena Simmons, Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz, Patricia Jennings, Zaretta Hammond, Shawn Ginwright, Paul Gorski and the countless organizers within and outside academia. I am constantly humbled by your passion, expertise, and scholarship.

Thank you to my OSU family with whom I hope to have lasting friendships and could not have survived these last few years without knowing I would see your wonderful selves in classes or through Zoom screens. Your encouragement, jokes, and camaraderie kept me going when I wanted to just give up and my negative self-talk felt too consuming. Thank you, Sasha, Jessica, Temi, Sarah, Jennifer, Steven, Stacie, Jo, and all my classmates turned friends whose presence and discussion undoubtedly impacted my scholarship and outlook. Megan and Mark, especially, for being awesome conference buddies, co-authors, sounding boards, and supports, and building travel memories with me. And for everyone else, I hope to do the same in the future!

To my friends who have encouraged me, inquired about my work and scholarship, and let me talk about theory and practice without falling asleep. To Aimee, Brittany, Dylan, Frankie, Jacob, and Julia (in alphabetical order). Thank you for keeping me connected to a world outside academia and showing me that school is not the only space for deep philosophical conversation, the best humor, and eye-opening book talks. To Amina, Jennifer, Shafa, Suhaila, and Shabana who helped me be a better teacher and more importantly provided me with a beautiful sisterhood. To fellow school staff, thank you for the encouragement and aid. To Zaheer who encouraged me to experiment and try new things and talk through theories and ideas as I applied them to my classroom. Thank you for trusting me with our students and encouraging me to get to this moment. And, to my amazing, hilarious, and tenacious students who taught and challenged me so much and were patient with me as I juggled paper writing, researching, and grading.

To Chinwe who while unable to read this, encouraged me from the start and who I know would be loudly cheering me on and celebrating with me from above. Miss you dear friend.

I am so immensely grateful to the family that has been my support system from the onset. To my grandparents, both those who have passed on (Aisha and Mahmoud) and those who are still with us (Zainab and Abed Mokalled). You've been there for every milestone in my life, and I know you will continue to be there for me even from afar. To my cousins and aunts and uncles who celebrated my successes as well.

And last but certainly not least, to my mom, dad, and sisters. When it came to dealing with the emotionality of this journey you were on the front lines and for that I am grateful that you stuck with me and were willing to be an ear as I talked through a moment I got stuck or frustrated and celebrated with me when I moved forward. Thank you for having my back, supplying me with unfiltered love and encouragement. I am so blessed to have you in my life.

This project is one of collaboration, community-building, passion, and love and none of it would have been possible without those listed here and the countless others I have met in so many online and off-line spaces. My utmost gratitude and sincerest thanks.

Name: JINAN S. EL SABBAGH

Date of Degree: DECEMBER, 2021

Title of Study: “MOVE, PLAY, REGULATE”:

A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY-BASED SEL CURRICULUM’S
TRANSFORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS AT A LOW-INCOME PUBLIC SCHOOL

Major Field: CURRICULUM STUDIES

Abstract: As trauma-informed and socioemotional learning (SEL) continues to gain traction in public schools (Cipriano, 2019), studies emerge to attend to the growing critiques related to the absence of systemic racism and other oppressive structures as part of this curriculum (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; Simmons, 2019). The context of this study includes the dual crisis of a pandemic and the intensification of economic, health, and educational turmoil as well as continued state-sanctioned murder of Black and Brown bodies (Dunn et al., 2021). This critical ethnography conducted in the 2020-2021 school year, explores, and analyzes the possibilities and challenges of an equity centered, transformative SEL program as it is implemented in an urban Oklahoma public elementary school. With the inclusion of Abolition Teaching Network (ATN)’s SEL tenets to this curriculum (2020) and ongoing conversations on abolition and culturally responsive-sustaining educational practices, this study offers educators, principals, and those in and outside the classroom competing and simultaneously employed frameworks for implementing transformative SEL. These frameworks inform not only further research on the possibilities and limitations to SEL in the school setting, but it also introduces key lessons for future consideration. After an eight-month study which included virtual and in-person classroom observations, interviews, survey data, and artifacts, two major themes were identified. The first was competing frameworks of “safety” at the schoolwide level. The second was expanding on the theme of safety by interrogating “belonging” and community building efforts both virtually and when students returned to in-person learning. Ultimately, this study adds a practical and theoretical component to conversations and efforts around SEL, trauma-informed pedagogies and the school-to-prison nexus.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Setting the Scene for SEL, Trauma, and Transformative Justice	1
Purpose of the Study	5
Contextualizing the School Site and the SEL+ Curriculum	6
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Methodology	12
Introducing Themes	14
Conclusion	15
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	17
Introduction: Kayla’s Story.....	17
The School to Prison Nexus: Law, Discipline Policies and the Guise of Safety...20	
“Cops and No Counselors”: Trauma-Informed Schooling and Oklahoma.....	22
Motivation, Grit, Character Education.....	24
Critiques Using an Equity Framework, Towards C-R SEL Curricula.....	30
Restorative Disciplinary Practices and Transformative Justice Introduced	33
Towards transforming disciplinary practices with SEL in schools (or not!).....	36
Conclusion	37
III. METHODOLOGY	39
Introduction.....	39
On Biopolitics and the Disciplining of “Child” hood.....	42
The Pathologization of Youth and Trauma.....	46
Culturally Sustaining Practices to Center Students’ Voices	47
Research Questions	50
Recruitment Process: Hallmark of Pandemic Challenges + Real-time Changes...52	
Sample and Data Collection Procedure	54
Analysis.....	60
Ethics/Reflexivity	61
Significance.....	64

Chapter	Page
IV. FINDINGS: SCHOOLWIDE EFFORTS TO INTEGRATE TRANSFORMATIVE (SEL).....	67
Crisis in Urban School Intensifies (and Strengthens) Community.....	67
MTSS: Contextualizing the SEL Program and Schoolwide Approach	71
School Safety: Competing lens.....	75
Safety as supporting families: the tale of the not-so-threatening State agent	76
Safety as cultivating relationships: The tale of parental support and SEL+’s role	81
Pre- and Post-Distance Learning: When “Their Behaviors Were Just Too Big” ..	85
Gun Threat: When Safety Protocols are Ineffective, and Transformation is Possible	89
Concluding Remarks.....	93
V. FINDINGS: CULTIVATION OF BELONGING AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE CLASSROOM WITH SEL+	96
Contextualizing Belonging and Community Building Efforts (in Classrooms)....	96
Mr. Styles’ Fourth Grade Class: Firm and Consistent Discipline	104
Ms. John’s Third Grade Reading/Social Studies Class: Clinical Disciplinarian .	114
Ms. Warren’s Third Grade Math Class: Novice Teacher Experience	122
Mrs. Eagle’s Fifth Grade Class: Stern and Loving.....	124
SEL+: Looking ahead and Conclusion	127
VI. CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE	131
Summary of Study	131
Research Questions Revisited.....	134
Interpretation of Findings	139
How “safety” and “community building” move schools toward an abolitionist future	139
The limitations of safety and pitfalls of belonging	143
Lessons Learned.....	146
Future Research	150
Future for the School	152
REFERENCES	155

Chapter	Page
APPENDICES	185
APPENDIX A: Guided Visualization Narration Example	185
APPENDIX B: Student Survey Data Sample	186
APPENDIX C: Individual Teacher Interview Protocol Example.....	187
APPENDIX D: Administrators, Coordinators, Wellness Team Interview Protocol	188
APPENDIX E: Parents/Caregivers Interview Protocol	189
APPENDIX F: Student Interview Protocol Example	190
APPENDIX G: Summary of Participants (featured in this dissertation).....	191

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1. Marbury Elementary SEL Program Components	74
2. SEL+ Strategy Graphic	86
3. Mr. Styles' Community Circle Opening.....	106
4. Juxtaposition of Protest Images	108

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“For we have, built into all of us, old blueprints of expectations and response, old structures of oppression, and these must be altered at the same time as we alter the living conditions which are the result of those structures” -Audre Lorde (as cited in Cobb, 2019, p. 241).

Setting the Scene for SEL, Trauma, and Transformative Justice

As a student, I learned rather quickly that following the rules is the best way to make it through school. And as a secondary school teacher, I carried that script of being well-behaved and following the rules with me. While I did not always agree with the policies, I still felt it important to teach students life skills like punctuality through a tardiness policy, professionalism through adherence to the dress code policy, and social skills through consequences when subtly and overtly disrupting class. However, in graduate school, I was introduced to mindfulness after reading Patricia Jennings’s (2015) *Mindfulness for Teachers*. She defines mindfulness from a neuroscientific and secular tradition as “a particular state of consciousness that involves awareness and acceptance of whatever is happening in the present moment” (p. 1). With this in mind, I think of my newfound heightened awareness in the relationship between these internalized scripts (or, as Lorde refers to them in the epigraph, blueprints), and how they affect my behavior and responses in the classroom. As part of her conversation on scripts and classroom management, particularly, Jennings (2015) argues “there is a mistaken belief among

many teachers that we can and must control our students' behavior...a setup for power struggles...leaving us frustrated, exhausted, and ineffective" (p. 139). Thinking about classroom management as less about control and more about fostering community, shifts the paradigm from individual accountability (teacher versus students) toward a collective accountability (teacher with student). As she suggests ways that teachers can cultivate mindfulness and compassion within themselves and eventually with their students, Jennings (2015) makes the case for inclusion of socioemotional (SEL) modeling and behavior in interactions with students, fellow teachers, and parents, as well as disciplinary practices.

In the past decade, especially, there has been a rise in the proliferation of socioemotional programs and literature evaluating, categorizing, and promoting these programs for various purposes and for helping administrators decide what their schools need (Dusenbury et al., 2019; S.M. Jones et al., 2017; McKown, 2017). While, according to Christina Cipriano (2019), director at Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, SEL has been in the literature for at least two decades, it started to gain traction as more institutions (especially schools) note that SEL provides the underlying framework of character education, peace studies, and conflict resolution curricula. And so, stemming largely from empirical work within the fields of psychology and human development, SEL trickled into school systems making the case for soft skills (i.e., prosocial behaviors and interactions) being just as important as academic ones (i.e., math/reading) for overall psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing (Aspen Institute, 2019; CASEL, 2019). Moreover, SEL's potential as a *preventative* mechanism and also as a means of addressing disciplinary issues non-punitively, with more attunement to outside stresses and trauma marks it a strong alternative to the legacies of zero tolerance policies including the continued over policing and disciplining of marginalized youth of color (Cheek & Bucchio, 2017; Curran,

2019). Notably, SEL's broad definitions complicate but also demonstrate an innate adaptability wherein depending on whether one is a school administrator, policymaker, researcher, for example, the program can be adjusted to fit the needs of the population (Cipriano, 2019).

These programs have led to the proliferation of assessments, materials, and curricula amounting to 640 million dollars a year. Krachman & Larocco (2017) further estimate that teachers invest 21-47 billion dollars through their time via professional development and time spent per week on SEL-related tasks, which they estimate to be about 4.3 hours or 8% of their workload (p. 4). Such estimates stem from survey data conducted across the United States and representative based on size and geography. All this to say, the authors recommend due to the sheer size of investment to analyze the return (i.e., results that indicate whether it is cost effective or not). Such economic terminologies and positionalities resonate with critiques that decry SEL programs as a "shiny object" to cure systemic ills at the individual level when in reality further harm and marginalize students (Shah & Gorski, 2019). In addition, literature dedicated to mindfulness-specific programs also exists (Baelen et al., 2019; Weare, 2018). Such programs speak to another instrumental and theoretical approach to address trauma and students' misbehaviors. Ratnayake (2019) notes how the spread of such programs in schools and their ubiquitous nature lends to a "focus...on the contents of an individual's mind and the alleviation of their distress, rather than on interrogating the deeper socioeconomic and political conditions that give rise to the distress in the first place" (para 18). Wash (2018) adds a neoliberal lens to Ratnayake's (2019) critiques, arguing that mindfulness "conditions practitioners to favor strategies of adaptation and adjustment, allowing them to function better in the world, rather than work to change it" (para 17). Analogous to the growing critiques of SEL's emotional regulation, individualized care, and absence of sociopolitical context, mindfulness also faces its own

opponents, and begs the question of how schools are combatting (or abetting) the transformational potential of schooling. That is, as a space to learn skills that simply help people survive in their status quo or give them the tools and frameworks to dismantle them.

Integrating the language of trauma-sensitive schooling as the larger context in which many such programs are being implemented, I argue that in some ways SEL is a positive shift towards supporting students, especially those who have been traumatized or have experienced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), such as domestic violence. Nevertheless, as I trace the theoretical origins of SEL and how it enters school systems as part of the literature review in chapter 2, I am wary of the ways that it can be used to further marginalize students and perpetuate carceral logics (Kaler-Jones, 2020; Love, 2019; Meiners, 2016). This comes to mind especially when students are instructed about compassion, calmness, and positive interpersonal relationships without discussing them in the larger context of structural racism and social adversity issues (Simmons, 2019), or when trauma is addressed individually rather than systemically (Khasnabis & Gordin, 2020). This latter point is especially poignant as teachers are given professional development embedded in trauma-informed or trauma-sensitive language, but it becomes dangerous when teachers are only seeing their students as traumatized, damaged broken bodies that need fixing or healing (Pyscher & Compton, 2020).

The rest of this introductory chapter will consist of the purpose of the study and contextualizing the study within the school site along with discussing the SEL curriculum's origins and ways that it has been implemented thus far. Afterwards, a brief overview of my theoretical framework, methodology, findings, and concluding thoughts will point to the significance of this work within the broader context of socioemotional learning, equity, and carcerality in conjunction with its counter, abolition.

Purpose of the Study

A holistic view of the ways that an antiracist and antibias SEL program is implemented and developed requires the voices of multiple stakeholders. Students, parents or caregivers, teachers, and administrators all play a role in the development and implementation of this program. In many ways, this research fits the mold of the challenge of theory to practice as teachers (and students) engaged in reflexivity. It was a rather open-ended conversation between myself and the participants I sought to learn from, that is, a methodology reflective of the kind of interactive and flexible underpinnings of this project. The purpose of this study, then, was to document and challenge the tensions both intrapersonal and interpersonal, the redressing of harms, and particularly disciplinary practices, as a public elementary school with economically marginalized populations¹ implemented a community-responsive antibias and antiracist social-emotional learning curriculum called SEL+². With this in mind, the following questions guided my research:

1. How does the implementation of SEL+ help students, their caregivers, teachers, and administrators understand injustice to better transform school culture into one that centers healing, families' voices, and uplifts teachers' embodied experiences?
 - a. How are students' community circles reflective of redressing harms/building community through celebrating one another?
 - b. How does SEL+ account for transformative language and dialogue around oppression, discrimination, and both personal and social conflict.

¹ Gorski (2018) writes that "economically marginalized...emphasizes that poverty is a form of marginalization, the results of a series of conditions that deny some people access to resources and opportunities granted to others" (p.8). And so, this dissertation follows Gorski's (2018) example and uses "economically marginalized," "people experiencing poverty" primarily, while using "low-income" sparingly.

² All names including people, schools, and curriculum titles are pseudonyms.

2. How are students' cultural identities addressed in and impacted by the curriculum? How are teachers' understandings of their students' cultural identities affected by the curriculum?
3. What are caregivers' and parents' feedback and reflections on this antiracist, healing-centered, equity-driven curriculum's transformative implications, if at all.

Contextualizing the School Site and the SEL+ Curriculum

In 2005, the SEL + curriculum launched. Founded by Emma and Tulsa area yoga practitioners, educators and community leaders, this program is based on the nationwide Yoga, Ed. Model (Blevins, 2009). The curriculum centers on teaching and learning techniques designed to address trauma, anxiety, stress, and behavioral issues, and to foster self-regulation to counter negative and harmful factors in the lives of students (and adults) (SEL+, n.d., p.2). As Emma mentioned in an initial interview for a pilot study in Fall of 2019, the purpose of SEL+ was to “get at the heart of poverty. Children are the most impoverished people in this country. And they lack the resources, often within the family of how to deal with stress, and there's a lot of stress (pp. 3-4). When the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020, classes (including those related to SEL) moved online and led to even more innovative and creative ways to ensure that students (and teachers) were given tools to help students at home coping with the stress of the “new normal.” The school also made sure to have Emma call specific families who needed “extra support” for check-ins (personal communication, 2020).

Marbury Elementary School is a public elementary school. It serves pre-school to fifth grade (as of 2020) and has approximately 300 students. The students come from diverse racial backgrounds including African American (43%), Latinx (32%), White (12%) and Native American (3%) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Its students are almost all experiencing poverty, with nearly 100% receiving free or reduced lunch. The school is located

within walking distance of Section 8 housing apartments and most students walk to school. The school is located just at the edge of an area with a reputation for high levels of crime, violence, and drugs, however, a couple of blocks south lies high end shopping centers with a Whole Foods and luxury storefronts. When I started the pilot study in the Fall of 2019, the school was starting its fourth full school year as trauma informed (personal communication, 2019). It has an onsite social worker, several behavioral specialists, and coordinators for other social services.

SEL+ integration began at Marbury Elementary School a semester prior to the 2019-2020 school year. The 2019-2020 school year was its first year of full implementation. The first year entailed Emma providing at least 30-minute lessons in each classroom from Pre-K to sixth grade. As students (and teachers by virtue of being in the classroom and participating), learned new movements, regulation techniques, and games; the teacher (or student) would have a post-it or write with marker the activity under the correlating column. On a large poster labeled “SEL+” and under the title, the words “Move, Play, Regulate” appeared in separate columns. The purpose of the poster was for easy reference for both Emma and the teachers and students who could then utilize these tools and activities in her absence. The posters vary in size and position in the classroom but are usually around classroom rules or by discipline ladders.

Emma’s other roles in the 2019-2020 school year included responding to emergency interventionist situations, such as a child hurting themselves or others, destroying classroom property, or a child resisting their suspension or detention through refusal of doing work, sleeping, or ripping up work. In these cases, sometimes Emma would be unable to go to the classroom to conduct a lesson. Hargreaves’ (1992) Intensification thesis alludes to Emma’s experience at school in the first of year of implementation as she was hindered by extra responsibilities outside of teaching such as substituting for absent teachers, supervising lunch,

supervising students for specials (art, music, gym), and creating an after-school program targeting students who “need extra support” to build leadership and self-confidence, to name a few. As Jennings and Greenberg (2009) contend in their “burnout cascade” theory teachers are stressed and then students’ misbehaviors add to this stress. It comes as no surprise that there were times when I would enter her classroom and just be asked for a hug as she felt emotionally drained from all the responsibilities and activities she engaged in with students. It is with this in mind that continued conversation and interactions center on her wellbeing as well. Jennings (2019) and Baicker (2020) define the burden of vicarious or secondary traumatic stress (STS) on teachers and emphasize how such stress must be addressed especially in relation to burnout and overall wellbeing of teachers.

The administration’s trauma-informed approach led to conversations with teachers about students and families and bringing in community leaders who specialize in trauma and its effects. At its core, Emma describes being trauma-informed as asking “What’s going on in this child’s life that we need to know about that will further inform how to best educate and care for this child?” rather than simply, “What’s wrong with this child?” (Interview, October 13, 2019, p. 2). Such a distinction resonates with many trauma scholars who push against the biomedical or physiological understanding of trauma and instead advocate for sociocultural understandings (Golden, 2020; Khasnabis & Goldin, 2020; Pyscher, 2019). While trauma-informed has a medical or clinical connotation, Jennings (2019) advocates for trauma-sensitive practices, which speaks to the cultivation of a safe learning environment through the use of educational practices and approaches that *support* students rather than treat them (as a therapist or mental health specialist would) (p.3). Such support also adds to Wright’s (2014) thesis regarding the

importance of strength-based, non-labeling approaches to young people experiencing trauma or extreme stress.

With the rise in Black Lives Matter protests and other uprising in the wake of George Floyd's murder, the school administrators published a statement on equity, acknowledging White privilege and the desire to deconstruct and challenge it along with implicit (racial) bias in preparation for the upcoming school year (personal communication, 2020). Throughout the summer, administrators led staff through antibias, and antiracist training and exercises and I joined two of the six sessions³. Through conversations throughout the summer, I collaborated with Emma to develop the SEL+ as an antiracist, antibias transformative curriculum for the upcoming school year. This includes lessons on abolition, asset-based language, the development of "Peace/Calm Centers/Corners," restorative justice parameters (as opposed to detention), and community circles (Yusem, 2019). According to CASEL (2020), the Peace Area (which became a designated space in each classroom) would be a place for students to calm down and to discuss conflicts with one another. These spaces would aim to build restorative justice capacity, a term articulated this year as part of the school's equity-centering initiatives around discipline and the reduction of suspension rates. According to the administrators, the school's major goals for the 2020-2021 school year as part of an equity and an antiracist school climate was focusing on sense of belonging and community building (notes, 3.2020). As such the SEL tools and spaces made in the classroom would address these needs as well as give opportunity for restorative justice practices (e.g., community circles). In fact, the school's vision shifted from putting an

³ These online Zoom sessions I attended were Implicit Bias (identifying and sharing strategies on how to combat this bias in the classroom) and Unpacking that Bias. Teachers read aloud definitions, listened to a Ted Talk on the what, why, and how of implicit bias and then went into break-out rooms to strategize. Teachers were prompted to remember Trayvon Martin whose murder epitomizes the fatality of implicit bias and that every child *deserves* to be in their classroom. The second session focused on unpacking bias and Racial Equity Detours (Gorski, Hammond, Olsson) all to highlight the drive for antiracist teaching in the classroom.

onus on the students and families with language such as “Marbury Students and Families will” to instead, stating, “Marbury staff and administrators will.” In doing so, the administration aims to address the deficit-laden culture of the poverty mindset (Payne, 2005), which they determined was a root racial justice detour at the school (notes, 7.16.20).

This study attends to the fact that students, especially those who identify as Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color (BBIPOC) continue to be given new tools and ways to regulate⁴ their bodies in the absence of conversations about external oppressive systems. Such practices can be more detrimental and less empowering. Seeking to find alternatives to the current punitive systems enforced in public schools such as suspensions, detentions, and expulsions, this study also grounded its work in the interlocking nature of carceral logics and restorative justice practices. With Weis and Fine’s (2012) critical bifocality in mind, which points to a “contextual[ized] and historic[ized] understanding of economic and social formations” (p. 186), I argue that using this localized setting, I can extrapolate and make connections to larger issues related to carcerality, poverty, and societal trauma as they interweave with the socioemotional program and interventions at the school. Notably, Weis and Fine’s (2012) emphasis on connecting to larger neoliberal systems adds to this study’s attention to the underlying critiques of SEL, as yet another monetized intervention.

⁴ The term “regulate” has multiple meanings within mindfulness and social-emotional learning literature. Notably, when regulation becomes instrumental (i.e., breathing techniques alone), then it is no longer mindful but about a controlled discipline that can be interpreted as conforming to norms rather than agency-building. This instrumental approach and terminology can limit the potential of mindfulness in students facing adversity thus continued research and analysis of ways to build SEL+ “regulation” capacity and perhaps update the terminology altogether to fit the desired agency-building outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

As scholars speak to the transformative nature of socioemotional curricula in connection to disciplinary practices and approaches (and empowerment of students), we must use a critical eye to ensure that these approaches are in fact transformative and empowering to students (Gorski, 2016; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018; Shah & Gorski, 2019). We can then use the intersection of equity, restorative discipline, and socioemotional learning to develop new pedagogical practices attending to culturally sustaining traditions, which support students' multilinguistic and multicultural backgrounds (Paris, 2012). For example, Golden (2020) advocates for trauma to be understood as ecological, in which trauma grounded in environmental and sociocultural understandings opens a "humanizing pedagogy" for students. Golden's (2020) data illuminates the positive impact of caring, supportive networks that move beyond "individual cognitive powers of self-regulation" and make clear social inequities that need to be fixed rather than the individual "broken" person. His work with Mexican American students bears recognition for its connections to the intersections of culturally responsive pedagogy and strength-based trauma-informed pedagogy, two areas I built my theoretical framing around.

While socioemotional learning, mindfulness, and trauma-sensitive policies entered school systems in a non-linear fashion, restorative discipline practices are the latest iteration of discipline reform. Many scholars have written about the detrimental effects and legacies of the 1980s and 1990s "zero tolerance" policies that strengthen the funneling of marginalized students to prisons (Curran, 2019; Love, 2019; Rios, 2011). Seeking to find alternatives to the current punitive systems enforced in public schools such as suspensions, detentions, and expulsions, this study grounded its work in restorative practices and focused on the intertwining ways that teachers, SEL coordinators, and administrators supported student success through non-punitive

methods while still confined in a larger carceral context. Students' voices were uplifted as they traversed these spaces of trauma-sensitive (Jennings, 2019), antiracist, culturally responsive and sustaining lessons (Paris & Alim, 2014). In this way, a holistic understanding of the school in much the same way one would study a culture also defined the parameters of this study. The methods used reflect many that are employed in ethnography with the added element of a critical, participatory researcher role.

Methodology

Critical ethnography grounds itself in a critical epistemological leaning and mobilizes ontological categories rather than realities (e.g., subjective, objective, normative-evaluative) (Carspecken, 1996). According to Carspecken (1996), the subjective refers to existing states of mind that only one actor has direct access to such as "I/you feeling such and such." The objective, on the other hand, refers to "existing objects and events...all people have access to," meaning these objects or events could be noticed by any observer. And finally, the normative-evaluative category claims that "others should agree to the rightness, goodness, and appropriateness of certain activities" and that "there is an agreement about such labels on the activities observed" (p. 20). He goes on to discuss the nuances of the truth claim and the ways that the consent of those involved affect the validity of the truth claim (including the ontological category that is observed). But the result is that there really is no "truth" claim, and more relevant to a critical epistemological perspective, unequal power distorts truth claims and corrupts knowledge. I grappled with my own shifting positionalities and power differentials at play as I worked to support this work through my role as "resident researcher," as well as Emma's friend and a volunteer at the school. I sifted through these positionalities with Fine's (1994) distinctions regarding critical researchers in mind; that is, that activist-minded researchers

should seek to “unearth, disrupt, and transform ideological and/or existing institutional arrangements (as cited in Carspecken, 1996, p. x). In this way, as will be discussed further in chapter 3, such considerations, including the delicate balance of bias, value-laden results, and other categories that affect validity of the study, were considered.

This critical ethnography added parent voice and feedback. As SEL + is a community-responsive socioemotional program, adding parent voice exemplified a key piece that included the extent to which SEL+ connected to culturally sustaining practices, if at all. While I first planned to send a letter home to parents to recruit student participants as well as parent participation in both a town hall style meeting followed by a more intimate focus group setting, the school’s virtual setting and just frontloading of distance learning preparations, made it challenging. Instead, I sent out a survey in the fall semester which included a space for parents to put their email or phone number for me to contact them. After I sent the survey directly to parents as well as teachers sending word directly to families to complete the survey (since teachers could not send through their account due to the district IRB protocol), I moved on to recruiting for the group interviews. Parents’ feedback and suggestions or ideas on the SEL+ curriculum created a collaborative atmosphere during the one group interview. As Gorski (2018) notes, citing Milner (2015), contrary to popular deficit-laden labels regarding parent involvement with students’ education, families experiencing poverty are more involved than their wealthier peers when in-home involvement and on-site involvement are calculated. This fact further strengthens my argument that parent voice is a necessary aspect of this project, especially since uniting the school population is foremost the shared economic struggle of its students regardless of race and diverse cultural backgrounds.

The second group, students, were also central voices to this work. Whereas in my pilot study, I focused on interviewing the adults at the school and left students in my observations, I had not talked to students about their feelings, thoughts, and reflections on the curriculum itself. Moreover, their voices as the central agents (along with teachers and administrators) who are learning (and perhaps applying) emotional management techniques, provided a necessary nuance. With the explicit antibias and antiracist language, the question arose as to how much of that intentionality translated into students' own understandings of their identities, relationships with others, and relationship with the larger world/community. Teachers' voice provided much-needed feedback on the curriculum, its practicality, and the ways that teachers understood the underlying frameworks they are teaching and modeling. Ultimately, this study utilized a combination of ethnographic methods such as in-depth observations and field notes; focus group interviews of teachers, students, and parents; and artifacts of the curriculum itself included material handed to students and teachers as they progress in their antiracist and antibias journey. The study consisted of 13 total interviews, 5 of which were individual. It also included 83 hours of observation in the (Zoom and in-person) classroom. Staff meetings and professional development sessions added at least 20 hours to this total and conversations with Emma throughout the study added 25 hours.

Introducing themes

After coding data and charting connections, two major thematic topics were identified⁵. These topics ultimately helped me further interrogate the possibilities and limitations of what a transformative SEL curriculum could look like in schools, especially during a unique

⁵ See @drkakai's Twitter thread on the use of "identifying" instead of "emerging" themes as a decolonial, critical scholar (January 24, 2019).

circumstance such as enforced distance learning (online spaces) and the dual crises of a pandemic and intensified racial tension. In Chapter 4, I look to schoolwide implications and thus, share multiple examples that exemplify the competing and at times simultaneously employed frameworks of “safety”. These include the ways that safety embodied care and support through a social worker and then parents’ testimonies. Secondly, safety as prevention (and compliance) after an SEL+ lesson. Finally, safety as both transformative and punitive through a gun incident. In Chapter 5, I then dive deeper into four elementary school classrooms and interrogate the ways that teachers and students understood community and “belonging”. Observing and analyzing key incidents in these classrooms helped me glean insight around how tensions between (horizontal and vertical) accountability and the push towards culturally-responsive-sustaining pedagogies (CRSE) (see Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative or EJ-ROC) leads to both pockets of transformation and continuation of pre-pandemic punitive structures (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). The combination of safety and belonging in community illuminate the ways that Marbury Elementary was the site of transformative policies as well as when it relegated to the status quo (e.g., punitive state or deficit-laden narratives).

Conclusion

It is now more than a year since the pandemic began in March 2020, while schools will likely return to in person teaching this upcoming Fall (2021), debates ensued throughout this study’s timeline (August 2020-April 2021). BBIPOC communities continue to rally against police brutality and white allies and co-conspirators educate themselves and others on abolitionist and antiracist ideologies and frameworks. In the midst of all this, adults and children alike are (hopefully) challenging their worldviews, their privileges, and more importantly the oppressive State structures that maintain the status quo (courts upholding evictions, federal

troops clashing with peaceful protestors in Portland, schools reopening despite the risk of coronavirus). As Judith Levine said in a recent talk about her book co-authored with Erica Meiners, *The Feminist and the Sex Offender*, the “State doing more violence is not going to stop [sexual violence] and is antithetical to a more peaceful, compassionate and more mutually ethical world” and thus restorative justice’s core tenets (2020, 56:51). In the context of this study, we cannot continue to rely on carceral logics reinforced through draconian and racialized (both explicit and implicit) disciplinary policies and responses to misbehaviors at school. Disrupting the school-to-prison pipeline includes schools, and this study documented the ways that one public school challenged these carceral logics through focusing on implementing SEL-based interventions and curriculum. Accordingly, this project adds to the literature an organic, critical, and holistic understanding and uncovering of the ways that SEL can both challenge and bolster carceral logics, equity-centered work, and culturally-responsive-sustaining pedagogies.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction: Kayla's Story

Kayla is a funny, tall, and expressive fifth grader. The oldest of five children, she has the main share of the caretaking responsibilities in her home since her parents take turns working day and night shifts. She has a history of skipping class and sometimes school altogether, so much so, that she is having to repeat the fifth grade. She has a parent who has gone to jail for at least a year while she was in elementary school. While faced with growing up early due to circumstance, Kayla is still a child and loves to talk and play with her classmates. I met her my fourth time observing a math lesson (in Spring 2020) and that happened to be the day that Kayla decided to try everyone's patience. The following narrates an incident right before Kayla is sent to the office, presumably for punitive disciplinary measures, such as an in-school suspension.

Kayla was twirling her pencil and looking around as Miss F was sharing today's lesson on proportions. Going through a worksheet, the class was about to get to the part of group work, when Kayla turned around and started whispering to her classmate, Jada leading her other classmates to also begin whispering. Miss F looked up and then asked for zero level voices and complimented students who were following directions. Miss F pointedly looks at Jada and Kayla since the two hadn't finished chatting and Kayla was still turned sideways, not facing the front. Miss F then looks at them and says "Kayla that's it, you've been disruptive all morning, you are disrespecting everyone and the rules. You need to face the front now!" Jada giggles and Kayla rolls her eyes as she faces the front. Several other students giggle as Kayla smirks and looks

around noting the attention she is receiving from her classmates. Miss F sighs, look down, take a deep breath, and tells Kayla (sternly), “You need to grab your things and go to the office. I will stop by lunch to see what we can figure out with some other adults, too. This isn’t working.” Kayla gets up slowly, dragging her feet. Miss F repeats “You need to leave now....please.” Kayla’s tall frame rises and she walks out the class, looking straight ahead, slamming the door behind her.

Kayla’s story is a composite reflection of both escalating behaviors and background of some students at Marbury Elementary and in countless other public schools. Many times, teachers (and substitutes) can either deescalate or escalate situations and when students are disorderly, the hours of training should come into effect and a restorative curriculum is put into action. This story resonates with Morris (2015) who writes about the “pushing out” of Black girls in schools. In this case, Kayla was literally removed from the lesson and presumably will miss out on the rest of the day’s interactions and lessons if not more. Much like in the juvenile justice system where one’s record works against them as they repeat offenses or add new offenses to the list (Wang, 2018), at school, more infractions usually lead to harsher disciplinary measures. The discipline ladder used in classrooms at Marbury Elementary is reflective of this approach. When more restorative elements are interwoven in the ladder, does that make the discipline ladder obsolete or just put a Band-Aid on the real issue, that of what is causing the disruptions in the first place as well as whether or not such misbehaviors are reflective of broader implicit (racialized and gendered) biases? Does the language of restorative justice then lead to reform or re-forming of carceral logics? Moreover, what would school look like if discipline ladders were there, but the purpose of the ladder is less punitive and more about uncovering root causes, redressing harm, accountability and strengthening relationships (i.e., as interconnected

community members)? McGlynn & Westmarland (2019) highlight this concept of reframing justice when they look to victim-survivors of sexual violence. For them, like in schools, justice for the “crime” or disciplinary infraction should not be punishment but rather other elements such as meaningful consequences that do not necessarily mean punishment. These consequences stem from a “kaleidoscopic” perception of justice where “justice” is nuanced, evolving and shifts based on the lived experiences of all involved (p. 185). Unfortunately, as Pyscher and Lozenski (2017) examine the throwaway youth phenomenon, Kayla’s story on paper portends the possibility of entering juvenile detention and thus the carceral state⁶. This conclusion also stems from literature on “at-promise” youth (McKenzie, 2019; Ragsdale & Saylor 2014; Samuels, 2020) and on the ways that schools can either accelerate or intervene in the school-to-prison nexus (Osher et al., 2012). In this way, the literature review, beginning with Kayla’s story, reflects the thousands of stories involving youth of color and their interactions with their teachers and schools. In many ways, these individuals (teachers) and systems (public school districts) are the gatekeepers and spaces where the transformation, disruption, and finally dismantling of the school-to-prison pipeline must occur.

Overview

In the following, I intertwine the literature of juvenile justice and school discipline, socioemotional learning (SEL), trauma-sensitive schooling, and restorative discipline (both nationally and in the Oklahoma context), including their origins and critiques, to contextualize and historicize these interventions and concepts as they emerge in schools. Then I discuss transformative justice and the work of anti-racist and equity scholarship as it connects to this

⁶ See J. Cohen’s (2020) article on Grace, a 15-year-old girl sentenced to juvenile detention, the judge arguing that not doing her online schoolwork violates her probation. Three months later, Grace was released and returned to her mother (LeBlanc & Martindale, 2020).

SEL program's focusing on equity and healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018) as a means of addressing and promoting a strength-based, non-pathologizing (Pyscher, 2019; Pyscher & Lozenski, 2017) approach to students. Thus, exemplifying elements of how a transformative SEL framework should view students.

The School to Prison Nexus: Law, Discipline Policies and the Guise of Safety

Stemming from efforts in the 1980s and 1990s to curb perceived unruliness and reflective of the nationwide "war on drugs," school administrators began adopting zero tolerance policies that doled out suspensions for minor offenses to deter high crime (Teske, 2011, p.88). Defined in part as policies which "mandate the application of predetermined consequences, most often severe and punitive in nature, that are intended to be applied regardless of the gravity of the behavior, mitigating circumstances, or situational context" (American Psychological Association Zero Tolerance Task Force, 2008, p. 852 as cited in Hulvershon & Mulholland, 2018), these policies' legacies still exist in school discipline practices today as well as in prisons. These policies also were connected to the broader "juvenile superpredator" conceptualization in which academics like DiIulio *anticipated* an influx of violent crime by 14-17-year-old boys given the population surge (Wang, 2018, pp. 201-202).

Wang (2018) continues by examining the connection between biopolitics or the management of populations under 'the apparatus of security' (Foucault, 1976) and juvenile delinquency where race is a factor despite it being conspicuously absent in DiIulio's thesis. In fact, the codes of race were there implicitly in his highly sensationalized descriptions of street gangs, inner-city violence, and general depravity (p. 204). Connecting the advent of life punishments for juvenile crime and the changing logics behind the criminal justice program in which juvenile offenders were given life sentences without parole, Wang (2018) also notes how

the paradoxical logic which was supposed to protect these vulnerable juveniles could only do so when “juridically folded into the domain of adulthood” (p. 201). The school plays a similar protective role, and society expects schools to be responsible for their students’ wellbeing. But as adjudicator, it ends up functioning like the judicial system/prisons do, when it expels and suspends students from the school community in much the same way that juveniles were sentenced to never return to society at large.

Many scholars have written, specifically of the racialized and gendered disparity in disciplining students in connection to the legacies of such policies (Curran, 2019; Gregory, Bell & Pollock, 2014; Gregory & Fergus, 2017). Curran (2019) points to the fact that districts with larger marginalized populations (BBIPOC) are more likely to have “mandatory expulsion policies for minor offenses” (p. 321). Scholars in education have also noted the detrimental effects of these policies on marginalized populations including black males (Ferguson 2003), Black males in special education, specifically, and other students of color such as Indigenous and Latinx students (Gregory & Fergus, 2017). For perspective, according to a 2016 ACLU report, black girls were four times more likely to be arrested than White girls and Black students three times more likely to be arrested than White students (with some states having a rate of eight times more likely). Such racialized (and gendered) disparities start as early as preschool, as Black students who comprise only 19 percent of preschool children ultimately represent 47 percent of students with one or more out-of-school suspensions, according to a 2014-2015 report (Gregory & Fergus, 2017, p.119). In Oklahoma, specifically, Black girls are three times more likely to be arrested than their White counterparts. Oklahoma school districts also reported an 82% increase in law enforcement referrals from the years 2013 to 2016 (ACLU, 2016, pp.32,36).

As Hulvershon and Mulholland (2018) cite, these policies do little to get at the root cause of the disciplinary issue and fail to make schools safer. Not only are zero tolerance discipline policies exacerbating racial and gendered differences also noted in mass incarceration (Gottschalk, 2015; Meiners, 2016; Morris, 2015), but they are also ineffective in fixing or addressing the social-emotional aspects of a child's life. Essentially, our schoolchildren are suffering under these zero-tolerance policies which do nothing but perpetuate a carceral state in which children are criminalized and seen as offenders rather than just children who have made mistakes (Meiners, 2016). These disciplinary policies are also ineffective in the ways that they address, if at all, the SEL aspect of a child's development. As such, in a state like Oklahoma, with certain systemic factors such as high incarceration rates, increases in law enforcement referrals, and above average exposure to trauma, it becomes more important than ever to help provide services that mitigate Oklahoma students' adverse conditions.

“Cops and No Counselors”: Trauma-Informed Schooling and Oklahoma

Enforcement of these policies includes both an increase in funding and in student resource officers both of which have done little to alleviate the trauma that many of these students bring into their schools (Weisburst, 2018). With an estimated 72% of U.S. children experiencing a traumatic event before they are 18 years old, it becomes important more than ever to have services in place to help support these children (ACLU, 2016, p.6). In Oklahoma, where this study takes place, approximately 47% of public-school students have police officers in their schools and 39% have police but not a psychologist, nurse, social worker or counselor at the school. Both reported percentages place Oklahoma as above national average for both categories. This distinction makes it even more significant to study the alternative ways in which we can address trauma in schools through the use of mental health professionals rather than police

officers who are “trained to focus on law and order, not student social and emotional well-being” and whose enforcement tools include “pepper spray, handcuffs, tasers, and guns” (ACLU, 2016, p. 7). Notably, the data depends on self-reporting, which implies that the numbers could be far greater.

Schools in Oklahoma have been emblematic of the nationwide trend towards trauma-informed schooling. Stemming from counseling and human development literature, trauma-informed pedagogies note the ways that students (and teachers) are affected by traumas in their lives. Some forms of trauma are individualized (SAMHSA, 2014), while others are generational leading to dissociative tendencies in students (Danieli et al., 2016) or stem from being exposed to repeated trauma through hearing the traumatic stories of individuals regularly. Humanitarian work and teaching are both described as primary professions who are exposed to a kind of repetitive trauma (Anderson, 2018; Lander, 2018). Oklahoma has had the distinction of having the most female inmates in the nation for the last 25 years and ranks second in the United States in total incarcerated individuals (Elliot, 2018). The state also ranks 47th in education quality, which includes areas such as state spending, educational opportunity, and student achievement (Eger, 2017). These numbers are made more troubling for State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister who testified to state legislators on how incarceration rates, especially, undermine and adversely affect students’ emotional and social wellbeing. Her testimony highlighted the ways in which the legislature could support trauma-informed practices in schools and the positive impact such practices play (Krehbiel, 2019). She also convened a statewide education forum on trauma-informed schooling (Hermes, 2019). Such a statewide discussion of ways to assess and support trauma-informed schools illuminates the significance of this issue.

While trauma-informed has been the verbiage in connection to therapy and mental health specialists, Jennings (2019) advocates for a trauma-sensitive schooling experience, instead. Positive experiences, in a *trauma-sensitive* climate make the case for schools to be central to recovery work. The term describes “educational practices and approaches that are intended to cultivate a safer learning environment and mitigate the impact of trauma symptoms on students” (Jennings, 2019, p. 3). Trauma-informed, on the other hand, stems from a public health perspective. Adding to this holistic approach, Ginwright (2018) introduces healing-centered engagement (HCE) or a “strength-based approach to trauma that promotes a collective view of healing and recognize the importance of culture in the promotion of well-being” (as cited in Jennings, 2019, p. 3). Trauma-sensitive and healing-centered engagement are terms and frameworks that connect to mindfulness and the increased awareness, empathy, and decrease in stress that can come from utilizing such techniques. They also are antithetical to the punitive, cop-enforced way of addressing issues likely linked to trauma.

Motivation, Grit, Character Education: Setting the Stage for SEL Curricula in Schools and its critiques

Researchers have been studying the impact of student engagement on multiple fronts since the 1980s and 1990s interposing this research with the rise of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) “academic tenacity” (Dweck, 1998) and the psychology of motivation (Rigby et al., 2002). Within education settings, the debates as to whether motivation is intrinsic or extrinsic or whether motivation lies on a spectrum underlie conversations of education policy and school support (Rigby et al., 1992; Murray, 2011). For example, if research proves supporting policies that build intrinsic motivation (i.e., the inherent desire to learn for the sake of learning) leads to desired outcomes for students, then the school will invest in those programs, curricula, and policies (Voke, 2002). The most cited definition of student engagement

is as “psychological investment in learning. [Students] take pride not simply in earning the formal indicators of success (grades), but in understanding the material and incorporating or internalizing it in their lives” (Newmann, 1992, pp. 2–3). Voke (2002) adds, “an engaged student is one who is *intrinsically* motivated to learn” (para 3). Consequently, “engaged students are more likely to approach tasks eagerly, to persist in the face of difficulty” (Stipek, 1998, p.88) and have “greater satisfaction with school experiences, [maybe] leading to greater school completion and student attendance rates, as well as lower incidences of acting-out behaviors” (Voke, 2002, para 3). The benefits of student engagement (as an intrinsically motivated behavior) and the desire to help students be successful led to the rise of grit, character education, and resilience frameworks as ways in which teachers, school officials, and mental health experts help students who have faced or will face adversity and/or trauma.

Psychologist Angela Duckworth (2013) introduced grit as “perseverance and passion for long-term goals” to millions with her TED Talk after writing about it for years. Around this time Tough (2012) published his widely acclaimed book in which he argued, “There is no antipoverty tool we can provide for disadvantaged young people that will be more valuable than the character strengths ... [such as] conscientiousness, grit, resilience, perseverance and optimism” (p. 25). Grit, in particular, illuminates how schools can be more equitable across gender, racial, and class divides. Duckworth emphasizes that adopting grit frameworks in schools demonstrates a “pendulum swing away from the single-minded focus on standardized testing and toward a broader view of the whole child” (Gough, 2013, para 34). Duckworth and her colleagues generally claim that students with grit can overcome adversity and complete programs/school/career paths. To test the veracity of their claim, they used both schools in high poverty, low performing districts and schools with higher student socioeconomic populations and

stronger performance. Arguing that their self-questionnaire Grit Scale was able to predict which students would graduate high school in both low-income districts and who would finish their West Point education (for example); Duckworth and her colleagues gained more positive attention with the questionnaire's use expanding to include National Spelling Bee contestants and first-year teachers in tough schools (Gough, 2013). These expansions speak to the education community and larger public's fascination and buy-in of grit (and character education) frameworks.

However, critics (Cohen, 2015; Datu, 2021; Love, 2019; Snyder, 2014) cite the proliferation of grit programs and experiments within KIPP (Knowledge is Power Program) Charter schools as problematic and emblematic of yet another reform to “fix” youth of color. KIPP's co-founder, Dave Levin introduced educators to the character growth cards and character performance assessments (CPAs) to be used by future employers and college admissions counselors (Love, 2019) and claims that it does not “evaluate, diagnose or compare” students (Snyder, 2014). However, with this card in hand, students would be “better workers” and “better controlled” if “their character was tracked throughout their life” (Love, 2019, p. 76). In this way, grit frameworks can be deemed a focused iteration of the character education programs of the 1980s and 1990s that believed “dark and poor students lacked good character” and needed to be taught how best to obey, to comply (with the status quo that oppresses people of color the most) (Love, 2019, p. 70). As Snyder (2014) notes, this performance-based character education practiced in KIPP schools and other “no excuses” charter schools (as well as public schools), “excludes empathy, justice, and service” and kindness; all essential traits for creating a human being that uses their grit, self-discipline, and perseverance to better society not simply for “money, status, and the next merit badge” (para 14). And to add to this point about measurement

(and its limitations), Love (2019) asserts, children of color do not lack grit or zest, they simply need adults and communities who will “protect it, not measure it” (p.86).

To further this critique, Love (2019) introduces the educational survival complex as she discusses KIPP, Duckworth, and character programs like those dedicated to teaching students grit, zest (defined as “an approach to life that is filled with excitement and energy”), resilience and other positive psychology tools and concepts (Character Lab, 2020). This complex essentially teaches students how to survive through “learning how schools mimic the world they live in...making schools a training site for a life of exhaustion” and instilling tools that do nothing for “kids growing up poor, who experience the stresses and traumas of poverty (i.e., toxic stress)” (pp. 27, 73). The complex is built on “dark children’s suffering” and consequently, cannot be remedied as long as schools judge students’ behavior based on character. Thus, the onus is on individuals to “pull themselves from their bootstraps” while historicized, institutionalized, and systemic racism, sexism, and barriers exist (p.73). Citing a Georgia State Student Achievement award named “Beating the Odds,” Love (2019) argues that character education tools such as grit and zest perpetuate the educational survival complex for students (and their families) as long as schools insist that “dark children need, do not have, and can function on those characteristics alone” (p. 73). The award rewards in, “*Hunger Games* fashion,” students who “overcome” the odds, that is, the “barriers that hinder students’ educational growth” and which are “outside the school’s control” but not through eliminating those barriers that an oppressive system created in the first place (p. 73). Love’s scathing critique stems from frustrations with educators and schools choosing a framework that still puts marginalized students in a deficit state, that still sees these students as lacking.

And finally, critical equity-minded scholars including Paul Gorski (2005) and Bomer et al., (2008) repudiate Ruby Payne's culture of poverty thesis as a theoretical undercurrent for many character education programs such as those Levin and Duckworth propagate. Her thesis promotes the notion that those students living in poverty are lacking resources and experiences and moreover can benefit from being taught middle class norms dubbed "hidden rules." Payne (2003) summarizes her thesis for educators interested in attending or bringing aha! Process to their schools. This company disseminates knowledge on how best to teach students of poverty by arguing among other similarly problematic logics, that students must be given the opportunity to learn middle class hidden rules to be "successful" in school, work, and society. Their choice follow will fall on the students (and so presumably the individual is accountable to their "success"). The inherent deficit narrative of Payne's work made Gorski assume it was satirical but seeing the positive response to her work and its proliferation in professional development programs (including those aimed at equity in schools) proved otherwise (Shah & Gorski, 2019). Recently, in a webinar between Gorski and Dr. Vidyah Shah, Gorski returns to Payne's work as emblematic of well-intentioned yet misguided school officials who adopt the next "shiny object," such as growth mindset, grit, and zest, to help students "succeed" but who do within a poverty mindset. Gorski encourages schools to evaluate such programs through social justice, economic justice, and racial justice lenses, for example. Shah adds to Gorski's criticisms by asking of school officials, "Are we solving the wrong problem? What problem have we identified and if these are in the families, students, and communities, then we are solving problems that don't even exist? How do we solve these problems in connection to systems?" (2019, 15:07). It is with these questions in mind that we turn to SEL frameworks, implications for equity, trauma-

sensitive schooling, and the development of mindfulness as a thread and framework for future equity-minded work in schools, especially related to disciplinary practices.

In 1994, psychologist Roger Weissberg, Daniel Goleman, Eileen Rockefeller Growald, and others founded CASEL or the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, a non-profit organization, that “works to advance the science and evidence-based practice behind social and emotional learning” (CASEL, 2020). Since its founding, the collaborative has been the leading authority on SEL and its integration in schools. Within CASEL’s extensive research repertoire are many studies cited in editable presentations to promote the inclusion of SEL in school culture with multiple audience members in mind (i.e., principals, teachers, parents). For buy-in, much of the research seeks to correlate SEL with both in and out of school outcomes. For example, SEL interventions (in school) can connect to reduction in use of social services such as public housing, receiving public assistance, involvement with police and entering a detention facility (Damon Jones et al., 2015). In schools, there is literature connecting SEL practices to reduction of stress for students and teachers (Dusenbury & Weissberg, 2017; Greenberg et al., 2016); a decrease in student disruptive behavior, and in teacher burnout due to stress (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; S.M. Jones & Doolittle, 2017); and finally, as an added bonus for academically minded (high-stakes testing-ridden) states and districts, a positive connection to grades and state test scores (Durlak et al., 2011). However, the correlation between SEL and state tests, specifically, is inconclusive with some confirming Durlak et al.’s (2011) findings and others negating it (Hart et al., 2020). With an estimated 74% teachers reportedly teaching SEL more than they did five years ago and two-thirds asking for more time in school dedicated to this instruction, the next step turns to assessing and evaluating SEL programs, interventions, and whether such programs enable or dismantle social inequities (McGraw Hill, 2018). All these

conversations around “buy-in” also reinforce growing equity-centered critiques because when SEL is individualized, students name their feelings, mindfully breathe, or focus on their breath, but do not internalize and develop resistance (and perhaps activist) dispositions. Students (when not instructed) in interlocking systems of oppression and a wider context of oppression outside their individual emotional regulative practices, risk assimilationist type conditioning in which their individuality is subsumed into the larger neoliberal paradigm of adapting to rather than disrupting the status quo (Walsh, 2018).

Critiques Using an Equity Framework, Towards Culturally responsive (C-R) SEL

Curricula

When researching SEL as a field (in schools), one traces how SEL at first adopts the edicts of character education (i.e., to help students overcome adversity out of their control), but then through the intersection of equity-minded educators citing SEL in their work (e.g., Gorski & Swalwell, 2015; Jennings, 2019; Milner, 2018; Shah, 2019), school counselors, mental health specialists, and administrators expand its boundaries. SEL includes trauma-sensitive schooling, “community-centered practice” (McKown et al., 2019), a whole child, adaptable, strength-based approach that supports students and staff and inclusionary discipline practices and policies (Jennings, 2019). And, moreover, SEL serves as an umbrella framework that “should not be viewed as a corrective measure for students of color and marginalized youth, but rather as an opportunity to ensure all children experience the benefits of a quality education that includes opportunities for social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD)” (Simmons et al., 2018, p.2). The additional verbiage of “opportunity” “for all” illustrates SEL’s emphasis on an equitable framework. For proponents of SEL integration in schools such as the ASPEN Institute

(2018), this promotion “is not a shifting educational fad; it is the substance of education itself” (p.6).

Defining SEL poses its own challenges. For the past twenty-five years, CASEL has been the leading resource for SEL-related conceptualization, research, and as a tool for schools seeking to implement this in their schools. According to CASEL, there are five major frameworks for SEL. These areas are: *self-awareness* (identifying emotions, accurate self-perceptions that influence behavior); *self-management* (managing stress and controlling impulses and aspects of executive function, such as self-motivating and setting goals); *social awareness* (perspective taking, empathy, and appreciation for diversity); *relationship skills* (interpersonal communication and cooperation to establish and maintain healthy relationships); and *responsible decision-making* (skills like identifying problems, evaluating, reflecting, and acting with consideration for the well-being of oneself and others). These mixtures of skills (e.g., communication), attitudes (e.g., empathy), and concepts (e.g., self-motivation) are what make SEL such a comprehensive and challenging term (and area of study) to define (Kamenetz, 2017; S.M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012). In fact, Harvard University’s EASEL lab’s Taxonomy Project (2019) uses interactive maps and a burgeoning website dedicated to easing the transition from theory to practice through marking the overlap and distinction among SEL programs, interventions, and links to other fields such as criminal justice, discipline, and civics. All these frameworks lead to the definition of SEL as “the process through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions” (CASEL, 2019). As an umbrella framework, SEL could also encompass mindfulness, trauma-sensitive policies, and

restorative practices (CASEL, 2019). Jones et al., (2017) seeks to simplify and divides SEL into three major areas for clarity: cognitive regulation, emotional processes, and social/interpersonal skills. Skills, concepts, and ideas that fall under these categories can be found in many SEL programs (Jones et al., 2017).

One area where SEL is expanding is in response to critiques from equity-minded scholars such as Gorski and Swallowell (2015). Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski (2018) define transformative SEL as “a process whereby students and teachers build strong, respectful relationships founded on an appreciation of similarities and differences, learn to critically examine root causes of inequity, and develop collaborative solutions to community and societal problems” (p.3). Some of the critiques argue that SEL does not engage in the sociopolitical issues and tend to be in absence of such issues. Moreover, according to Khasnabis and Goldin (2020), “all trauma is nested within a racist world” and thus addressing racial trauma or any trauma for that matter must acknowledge the pernicious influences and systems that enable such trauma in the first place (p. 47). They go on to note that children of color experience trauma in a *hyper-visible* way as opposed to their White counterparts. Meaning that, in the authors’ experience, “Black children and families are more likely to be seen for their trauma, even when trauma is not present” (p. 48). And so, advocating for a pedagogy of systemically trauma-informed practice is worth noting. With such a practice the push tends to be against necessarily always assuming that the child’s misbehavior is coming from a place of trauma and, more importantly, that we are not defining or over-identifying students as traumatized.

While some may argue that elementary school students are not developmentally ready to discuss heavier topics of systemic oppression and racism, Gorski and Swallowell (2015) disagree. When discussing equity, elementary school students may be deemed too young to discuss social

adversity or racial injustice outside school, but as Gorski and Swalwell (2015) write, as early as preschool, “Many students already knowingly experience bias and discrimination, and those who don’t often learn that it’s impolite to mention any distinctions” (p. 38). As one of the five principles for promoting equity, they argue that starting young is essential begs the question of who is being protected by not engaging in these kinds of conversations. With the site of this study in an elementary school, it becomes important to note that such conversations can occur and to see if and how they do. With this in mind, analyzing the ways that restorative justice manifests in schools and the latest trajectory of transformative justice as well bears recognition.

Restorative Disciplinary Practices and Transformative Justice Introduced

The core principles of restorative justice from which restorative discipline practices emerge is of the offender redressing or repairing harm, taking responsibility for their actions, and then eventually reintegrating into society (Braithwaite, 1989; Zehr, 2002). Moreover, the essence of restorative practices holds similarities with mindfulness as it focuses on interconnectedness and the awareness of harming one can harm the whole (Zehr, 2002). Accordingly, schools can work to repair the harms of previous discriminatory disciplinary policies and reduce future infractions (Kline, 2016). The implementation of school-wide restorative practices can entail students, administrators and teachers use circle processes, affective language, and conferences that are also culturally responsive to students and families and maintain the dignity and respect of all stakeholders (Milner et al., 2019). Morrison and Vaandering (2012) contend that restorative justice is designed to help “address ‘power and status imbalances’ that shape a young person’s perspective on legitimacy and fairness of discipline in the school” (as cited in Fronius et al., 2016, p.6). Fronius et al., (2016) continue by noting how this legitimacy and fairness coupled with communal empathy and collective bonding support the underlying tenets of restorative

justice as implemented in United States' K-12 settings. Hulvershon and Mulholland (2018) found in their review of the literature on restorative practices and the integration of social-emotional models, that in order for significant changes to occur, paradigm shifts amongst personnel must also be addressed (p.120).

Critics of restorative justice claim that it does not go far enough, positioning transformative justice as a more radical and therefore more revolutionary practice. Transformative justice is an abolitionist framework that sees the inherent violence in prisons, detention centers, and the like and also as systems of social control (Mingus, 2020). Within this framework, abolitionists in this field acknowledge the fact that “violence does not occur in a vacuum” and thus also seek to also change the systems that enable this violence such as capitalism, poverty, racism, and trauma to name a few (Kaba, 2021; Kim, 2018). Moreover, this community-based practice means that if a harm is committed, transformative justice then seeks to “create safety and healing outside of state systems” (Mingus, 2020, para 3). Dixon (2020) argues in her co-edited book that transformative justice work and reduction of State harm can occur simultaneously. She calls for ways to build community safety through the combination of compassion and critique, especially in response to internal conflict where some (victim-survivors or family members who have been harmed) push for no cops ever (i.e., do not call 911) and others are still seeking justice through the court system. For Dixon (2020), knowing when to educate and when to support prevents pushing people out of the community and warrants dialogue among community members. In this way, she introduces a nuanced approach to community and solidarity building that does not simply translates to a “do not call cops” approach, though that is one of the ultimate goals. Kim (2018) adds that the emphasis on community leads to more *collective* accountability efforts in contrast to restorative justice (and

the criminal justice system), which focuses on the individual actors. And so, community becomes a site for “prevention, intervention, and transformation” and where interventions are “imagined, initiated, and implemented” (p. 227). As transformative justice gains traction, it then functions as an important framework to think about the ways that we can transform school spaces to also not endanger and (re)traumatize students through its connections to oppressive state powers (i.e., juvenile detention centers and prisons).

Abolition’s role in this conversation bears recognition as well. An abolitionist framework can also be described as one that “recognizes that criminalization and incarceration as strategies for addressing violence usually bring more targeted policing upon Black and immigrant communities without providing meaningful safety for survivors” (Bierria et al., 2018, p. 7). That is that just as abolitionist frameworks seek to make punitive measures and prisons obsolete, these same frameworks work in schools to build community, redress harm, and remove the expansion of these carceral logics in schools. For example, Vitale (2018) describes how youth of color are the primary target of gang units and are many times arrested and accosted in the name of “public safety” simply for walking down the street and moreover, out of a perceived risk factor, dubbed “predictive policing” (p. 169). Similarly, in schools, students who are placed in “emotionally disturbed” classrooms or labeled as such run the same risk of being pushed out of classrooms for their risk factor as their very presence in the classroom and subsequent “embodied literacies of resistance” are read as “problematic” rather than a logical reaction to oppressive adult expectations and behaviors (Pyscher, 2019, pp. 42, 51). Pyscher and Lozenski (2017) further this conversation when they illustrate Mac’s story. Despite her tumultuous story rife with “extreme and sustained” domestic violence, the authors reject this narrative as simply “broken” (p. 56). Rather, they argue that through these incidents, Mac developed low and high resistance to the

near constant disciplinary actions to control her body and behavior. In her own words, she “got in trouble, but [she] really didn’t get caught” indicating her agency as she fought against school’s oppressive attempts to conform her behavior and thus in many ways her liberation from the confines of the school (through suspensions) (p. 62). And thus, an abolitionist framework encourages a systemic way of seeing institutions such as schools as spaces for transformation. Schools seeking to transform their vision and outlook must recognize the time and commitment such endeavors take as well as that transformation cannot occur as long as punishment mindsets remain (see Mariame Kaba’s extensive work on dismantling the punishment mindset).

Towards transforming disciplinary practices with SEL in schools (or not!)

While students benefit from feeling respected and visible in their school, and schools can perpetuate or end the school to prison pipeline (Kline, 2016), an equity lens must be part of the equation for any real transformation to take place (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Using a social justice and equity lens, educators and schools’ stakeholders reevaluate their policies related to discipline, their internalized biases, and mindsets moving forward. As Gorski (2013) writes, it is important to think about not just the buzzwords we use but how they are applied. For example, he muses as to “whether ‘diversity’ and ‘multiculturalism’ to ‘social justice’ is more a shift in language than a shift in consciousness or shifts in institutional cultures” (para 5). The semantical shifts such as adding cultural awareness and racial diversity language to SEL frameworks, for example, can be observed in recent publications focused on equity in SEL (see Aspen, 2018; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski 2018; Dusenbery, et al., 2019). Revisions with equity in mind call for SEL to be transformative. As Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski (2018) define transformative SEL, they emphasize how collaboration, appreciation of differences, and seeking the root cause of societal problems is imperative. However, fewer than 20% of more than 130

SEL frameworks across 20 areas of study from education to foster care to juvenile justice facilities consider cultural and linguistic diversity of individuals and groups (Berg et al., 2017). Such facts make it clear that Gorski's (2013) warning is still apt especially as culturally responsive and culturally sustaining SEL frameworks are suggested and adopted.

Conclusion

Ultimately, this review traced the ways that SEL trickled into schools from the fields of psychology and human development. In many ways this process parallels with character education programs seeking to instill grit, motivation, and increase student engagement. As an umbrella term that absorbs elements of such programs, and expands into cognitive, emotional, and social processes taught, evaluated, and assessed; SEL became more intertwined with trauma-sensitive schools. Such interactions morphed into explicitly helping students of trauma as well, especially in connection to mindfulness. With teachers also affected, vicariously, through exposure to their students' traumatic situations and feeling powerless to help, mindfulness, can be mutually beneficial (Jennings, 2019). Teasing out mindfulness's role as a philosophical and instrumental aspect of SEL and noting its similarities but also divergence from secularized SEL practice, leads to a focus on self-awareness, empathy-building, and interconnectedness among others (Jennings, 2019). These elements provide the undergirding for restorative justice practices and the ways disciplining practices in schools re-traumatize or traumatize students, especially students of color and students in poverty (Gaffney, 2019). Summarizing the interaction between SEL frameworks and alternative disciplinary practices such as restorative justice also (re) introduces an equity and social justice lens. Undoubtedly the increased symbiotic relationship between schools and prisons undermines equity and social justice efforts. Schools have a role to play in dismantling this relationship and so, while there is not going to be a solution for trauma,

systemic or otherwise, there is a chance for schools to be sites of transformation where students feel safe, feel heard, and are not recipients of exclusionary disciplinary policies. They are doing more than surviving, rather, they are thriving (Love, 2019).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

As discussed in chapter one, my journey to this work begins with doing a pilot study on understanding the SEL program at Marbury elementary in the Fall of 2019. As I went to the school and conducted interviews, gathered artifacts, and fulfilled the requirements of my qualitative research class from which this project was assigned, I found myself enjoying being in that space. I, especially, found my conversations with Emma to be the most enriching as I got to learn more about her own lifelong journey in this work and her own candid challenges and tensions as she went from community organizing with nonprofit organizations into the public school system. Some of these challenges stemmed from one recalcitrant teacher who refused to buy-in to any of trauma-informed changes such as mindfulness practices and restorative disciplinary procedures. Other challenges came from the schedule and feeling like the only person able to diffuse certain situations as well as just the emotional labor that goes into this kind of work (see Jennings, 2019). But amid all these challenges was an excitement and consistent reflexivity that enabled the conditions for this work to flourish. And as with any school wide endeavor, the support of the administration including budgetary extensions and fellow staff and teachers who noted the change in climate once these SEL+ practices were infused into the school, made it less daunting.

As I reflect on this past academic year, I cannot help but think about Paris and Alim (2014) who write of how their pedagogical approach is an evolving one. They write, “while it is

crucial to sustain...language and cultures in our pedagogies, we must be open to stating them in both the traditional *and* the evolving ways they are lived and used by young people” (p. 91). As such while previously I had been focused primarily on the educational staff, this academic year I centered students’ voices as well along with that of their parents and families. Seeing how the language of antibias, antiracism, and abolition are all intentionally added to the curriculum and in some variance at staff professional development, excited me (and Emma) once the school year began. The key term, “evolving”, encompasses the very nature of this project as well as the undergirding of critical ethnographic study. Being a critical ethnographer means that I am constantly reflecting on my own positionality as I shifted from outside volunteer to curriculum developer, and as I balanced this with the role of researcher. Participating in this work through introducing literature (e.g., Ginwright, 2018), attending staff meetings on equity, and in conversations with Emma and administrators; I kept in mind Madison’s (2012) assertion about the accessibility, vulnerability, and transparency of my positionality (and that of any researcher engaged in critical ethnographic work). As this is the key methodological approach, the epistemological and theoretical connections delineated below will better illuminate the underpinnings of this ever-evolving study.

My relationship with Emma began when I was introduced through another professor because of the professor’s own training under Emma’s tutelage in SEL+. I found the curriculum a worthwhile one to explore and research given my initial, preliminary interests in the notion of alternative disciplinary measures, and the potential role of mindfulness practices, restorative justice, and SEL-oriented interventions. I began as an outside observer simply seeking to know more about her curriculum, its application and ways that other perceive it (especially teachers and administrators). However, as our conversations and the question of reciprocity emerged, I

extended my help in surveying or providing some outside (research-based) approaches and suggestions. Moreover, I found during our informal conversations between classroom observations that Emma has so many ideas and practices she does as second nature and does not document to add to her curriculum. When I would ask her about a particular practice or approach she used in front of me, she would realize that she had not inserted that into the curriculum and would quickly write it down on a post-it or index card to insert in the SEL+ folder and then add digitally later. With a few articles and book title exchanges, our relationship emerged from one of me observing and sharing my (usually) positive feedback to one of collaboration where we would meet and discuss survey results and in the spring meet with administrators to discuss the school's plans for the upcoming school year. These planning meetings gave me insight into the ways that administrators were viewing her role and the constraints (e.g., district-level, legal, and economic) even supportive administrators face.

Theoretical Framework

In this critical ethnographic study, my theoretical framework draws mainly from critical theory and Foucauldian theories of discipline, biopower, and biopolitics. Following Madison's (2012) summation of Foucauldian critique, I assert that my role in this study includes using the "resources, skills, and privileges available to make accessible...the voices and experiences of subjects whose stories are otherwise restrained" (p.6). Aiming for emancipatory knowledge means that I also am critically searching for alternative life possibilities, in this case for marginalized students and in the realm of carcerality and school discipline. The theoretical framework I use is a combination of theories related to discipline (Foucault, 1984), carcerality/abolition (Love, 2019; Meiners, 2016; Wang, 2018), trauma-informed

practices/socioemotional learning (Jennings, 2019; Pyscher, 2016; Simmons, 2019) and culturally-responsive-sustaining pedagogies (Gay, 2014; Paris & Alim, 2014; Paris, 2012).

On Biopolitics and the Disciplining of “Child” hood

Foucault’s (1984) seminal text is the undercurrent of this work. In an earlier work, he introduces the elements of biopower as counter to historically fatal sovereign power. Foucault argues that biopolitical power operates within a logic of preserving life but within the domain of value and utility. In other words, the emergence of a new form of governance (and control) where power comes grows in the ability to manage populations (leading to the racially motivated Eugenics movement of the 1900s) and continued sterilization efforts today (Ko, 2016). Moreover, in connection to carceral logics, the idea of controlling deviance or negative traits (in connection to one’s own race or that of other races) emerges. For example, Foucault (1976) argues that “Racism justifies the death-function in the economy of biopower by appealing to the principle that the death of others makes one biologically stronger” (p.258). That is that modern racism when combined with biopower and its principles makes for a rather genocidal outlook on human life in which “preserving life” begs the question, whose life is worth preserving?

Introducing the notion that disciplining the body through rules and regulations in schools (and other institutions like prisons and hospitals), implies an inherent power structure that does not help all students. Foucault (1984) later writes on the relationship between discipline and punishment, the illusion of “delinquency” and how power (and its politicization) permeates in all structures. Notably, his articulations around delinquency remind me of how school assert their own micro-form of biopolitics. Through the focus on what is deemed appropriate and inappropriate behavior and how to behave towards people of authority, schools essentially “make

children's bodies the object of highly complex systems of manipulation and conditioning” (Foucault, 1984, p.67). In this way Foucault helps us to analyze the “functions and effects of power” but not its origin (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012, p. 56). Erica Meiners’ (2016) work on the artifice of childhood and innocence adds to his thesis, and with this schools become the ideal space to challenge and problematize their function in society especially in connection to the disciplining of students. Her scholarship along with that of Wolcott (2005) historicize the ways that childhood has been conceptualized within the frames of labor, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and the creation of juvenile courts as well in the United States. For example, “Child-saving” missions (stemming from late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century middle-class and elite groups’ philanthropic efforts) starting from the 1820s sought to both decrease delinquency and fix the “vagrant, wayward” children on the streets (pp. 14-15). These predecessors to the early twentieth century juvenile courts illustrate shifting views on childhood as well. Wolcott (2005) describes how in the early nineteenth century, children between the ages of ten to sixteen were to assume adult responsibilities. This meant the White children of an emerging professional class going to school till mid-teenage years and then apprenticed or hired for entry-level jobs, whereas children of immigrant families (in urban cities) worked in factories, shops, streets or learned a trade. But by the end of nineteenth century, a “sheltered childhood” (coined by historian David Macleod) for White middle class and elite families dominated the discourse on childhood and thus galvanized efforts to remove “adult responsibilities such as wage earning” as well as protect children from the vices of the urban-industrial landscape (i.e., burgeoning criminality) (p. 13). And so, the legacies of biopolitics in conjunction with the historical underpinnings of the juvenile courts and the conceptualization of delinquency still exist

in modern juvenile systems as well as disciplining of children and childhood, but across racialized, classed, and gendered lines and disparities.

Meiners (2016) argues,

[The] child—along with all institutions involved in shaping this figure, including schools, families, and juvenile justice systems—is a key technology of a shifting carceral regime. New forms of surveillance are invented to safeguard children... [which] serve to reproduce and expand core carceral logics (p. 6).

This discourse on “the child” functions as an essential thread for conversations about reform and transformative justice methods to dismantle the carceral state of schools. For, by examining the “imagined” state of childhood which is not extended to all races, genders, and classes of people, we rethink why schools exist in the first place. If we utilize Meiners’ historicization, that is that the school is a space to “enclose black (and brown) bodies” through introducing school police officers and “rationalizing law and order governance,” we come to also realize focusing on unjust school policies such as discipline “obscures always contested, heteronormative racialized project of public education” (p.10). I pay close attention to how Meiners reflects and concludes that when we try to do reforms, sometimes they can end up becoming part of the system and thus do little to actually *dismantle* the carceral state. That, in fact, “the very strategies we produce—with our goal of liberation—shape expansion” of the carceral state (Meiners, 2016, p. 99). The “schools not prisons” campaigns are another example of expanding rather than minimizing the carceral state. And as Meiners writes, it is these campaigns, though beneficial, that do not

necessarily help in engaging in *transformative* reform, the kind that seeks to dismantle the very artifices (i.e., childhood, innocence, delinquent), which enable prisons and schools to exist in the state that they are in. Keeping in mind how programs are adopted and for whom as they are implemented and adopted in the school district I studied, makes Meiners' work on carcerality necessary.

Discipline leads this study's connection to carceral logics and the broader school-to-prison nexus or for broader implications, the cradle to prison pipeline (Milner et al., 2019). The rise of such penal language connects to Foucauldian logics that schools are not necessarily created to provide an equitable learning environment but instead are spaces where a "docile body may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1984, p. 17). When modern society discusses the delinquent, there is an expectation that this being is someone who fails to follow the laws, who is a menace to society's just social order, and humanity (p. 5). In contrast, Foucault posits that the delinquent's only offense is that he has chosen to embody this identity of delinquent (p. 219). This individual is not an offender, but instead, his life has been made to be that of a delinquent.

As Wang (2018) cites and theorizes Foucault in her chapter on the relationship between biopolitics and juvenile delinquency, she writes of his articulation of biopower as the mode by which the State can justify "the power to kill [such as through civil and political forms i.e., imprisonment] or destroy life as necessary for the health and functioning" of society as a whole (p. 205). Wang's (2018) theorizing with Foucault in mind as he discusses the undercurrents of power and biopower logics inherent in our criminal justice system aided me as I made those macro-connections between discipline in school and the disciplining of bodies.

The Pathologization of Youth and Trauma

Like Wang, Pyscher (2018; 2016), builds on Foucauldian notions of biopolitics as students' (mis)behaviors and the ways that teachers interpret them can either further marginalize and pathologize survivors or sufferers of trauma. Trauma when interpreted from a biomedical perspective in which students are needing treatment or methods to “fix” or “heal” their damaged selves only leads to further rationalizing of throwing away youth (i.e., removal from the classroom) (Pyscher & Crampton, 2020; Pyscher & Lozenski, 2017; 2014). These labels such as “troubled,” “bad kid,” “disordered,” or “broken” only serve to further a panopticon-like existence where schools and prisons simply reiterate these labels, returning to Foucault (1984)'s logic around the very existence of a delinquent (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2017, p. 55).

And so, as I moved forward in this project, I noted the ways that staff, teachers, and students described themselves and each other in connection to trauma. As Pyscher and Lozenski (2017) delineate the various detrimental costs of the “throwaway youth” and deficit-laden narrative surrounding trauma, I also thought of the ways that these youth “penetrated” the oppressive structures in place at school. That is, when I observed a classroom or engaged in an interview, how did students resist and more importantly, how was SEL used to either further control and quell these embodied acts of resistance or support them? How and when did these acts of resistance manifest in the classroom? Such questions arose as I read through the works of critical scholars who warn of trauma, especially, as another characteristic for tracking students and removing them from the main classroom or primary educative space (i.e., “emotionally disturbed” classroom, Special Education, alternative schools, and suspension room), where adults think they should be without considering that these decisions have a likely racialized, gendered undercurrent (Bornstein, 2015; Starck et al., 2020).

As schools strive to make schools more equitable, conversations regarding the “achievement gap” and the proliferation of culturally relevant, culturally responsive, and currently culturally sustaining pedagogies (CSP) emerge. As many scholars take the helm to make SEL connect to these larger bodies of literature and application (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018; Mahfouz & Anthony-Stevens, 2020; Simmons, 2019), dissecting the ways that culturally-responsive-sustaining education (CRSE) appears in schools provides context for what I looked for and observed. The linear progression of these pedagogies all center on the notion that students’ voice and experiences should be the foci of classroom practice, curriculum, and interactions. As they are “rooted theoretically in principles of equity and justice” (Gorski, 2016, para 6), these pedagogies can serve to stop injustices or perpetuate them, when it comes to supporting students’ voices by sustaining their histories, languages and literacies not just acknowledging them.

By focusing on culture alone, Gorski (2016) observes that teachers end up celebrating cultural diversity but then are ill equipped to actually address injustice or oppression in relation to their diverse populations. Ladson-Billings (2006) adds to the conversation the ubiquitous nature of “culture” which at once seems exclusionary and at other times just a code for race or overdetermined to explain everything. She writes how when a teacher cannot connect or identify with a student, that they are quick to cite “culture as the culprit” (p. 105). And that when teachers overuse “culture” they tend to ignore the fact that they are cultural beings who should look closely at their cultural systems to note the ways that they have “learned behavior that has been normalized and regularized” (p. 109). The overuse of culture to stand-in for race is counterintuitive and ultimately harmful for any equity efforts as well. Culture is used, in effect, as a stand-in for race, class, language, and other issues that are not as comfortably discussed as

broad, vague “cultures” (Gorski & Swalwell, 2015). Such nuances were considered and observed especially as the SEL curriculum I observed sought to do the work of culturally sustaining practices. In interviews, race and culture were used interchangeably but also as separate entities, indicating that there are shifting understandings and distinctions when it comes to these terms.

Culturally Sustaining Practices to Center Students’ Voices

According to Paris (2012), a culturally sustaining pedagogy embodies the best of the past and the present in resource pedagogies. That means that teachers (and educators) are “supporting young people in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence” (p.95). *Fostering and sustaining* are the key words of this pedagogical shift. While the shift is not a stark epistemological one with the focus is still on students, however, in praxis some changes are worth highlighting. For example, Paris and Alim (2014) write and ponder of the ways that educators can instead of focusing on how youth of color perform close to white middle class norms, they can instead look to “explore, honor, and at times problematize their heritage and community practices” (p. 86). That is that the ways that teachers interact with their students is not only to acknowledge their culture but also the nuances of it. Seeing how teachers identify (if at all), discuss, and dissect the notion of Blackness, for example, as not a monolithic, static item that enfolds all their Black students. Perhaps, instead, with Paris and Alim’s (2014) theoretical guidance teachers (and students) come to “explore, honor and at times problematize” the performative nature of Blackness, that is as “a social phenomenon that is both invented and constantly imposed on (Black) people” (Ibrahim, 2020, p.xvi).

Ultimately, the theories around discipline and abolition provide context for how I theorize systems that schools interact with and are part of. Schools are central to any work to dismantle carceral logics because as Mac and Kayla's stories indicate, the school was just as culpable as the juvenile justice system to control and manage their behaviors leading to embodied resistance in each of their cases. Despite over a century of policed and paternalistic relationships with children (under the age of eighteen), children's agency develops. Such knowledge addresses the system/individual dichotomy that underlies my framing of discipline in schools (i.e., the system of schooling as part of carceral logic and the individuals comprising these systems). In addition, the theorizing around culturally sustaining pedagogies abetted my analysis of the transformative and oppressive elements of this curriculum. It guided my approach as an inherently evolving and organic, student-centered way of teaching, learning, and collaborating.

Methodology

This methodology section includes research questions that guided my ethnographic work followed by data collection, analysis methods, and the strengths and limitations to my study. These questions emerged from a pilot study I conducted in Fall 2019. After meeting with Emma throughout the semester, the spring brought upon conversations about student sense of belonging, safety, and school pride, which were surveyed as low at the school by students and parents. The results stem from a schoolwide survey given twice a year and reflects data as of the end of Fall 2019. The school vision was changed to reflect the desire to focus on these elements along with a "lens of equity" that guides a "collaborative school climate" but the final version has not been revealed (notes, 3.4.20). These changes all demonstrated the ways that school administrators with the support of teachers and staff, for the most part, responded (as opposed to

ignored), the thoughts of the students and families they serve. Seeking to shift and transform its school climate enabled my own paradigm shift as I observed and analyzed the nuances of these transformations, that is, the possibility and implementation of a transformative SEL program. In this way, my research questions are reflective of the voices (i.e., students, parents, and teachers) I aim to uplift and analyze *and* the areas of focus (i.e., alternative discipline strategies, shifting paradigms of SEL as culturally sustaining and equity-centered).

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does the implementation of SEL+ help students, their caregivers, teachers, and administrators understand injustice to better transform school culture into one that centers healing, families' voices, and uplifts teachers' embodied experiences?
 - a. How are students' community circles reflective of redressing harms/building community through celebrating one another?
 - b. How does SEL+ account for transformative language and dialogue around oppression, discrimination, and both personal and social conflict.
2. How are students' cultural identities addressed in and impacted by the curriculum? How are teachers' understandings of their students' cultural identities affected by the curriculum?
3. What are caregivers' and parents' feedback and reflections on this antiracist, healing-centered, equity-driven curriculum's transformative implications, if at all.

I employed a critical epistemological approach because I sought to include “an understanding of the relationship between power and thought and power and truth claims” (Carspecken, 1996, p. 10). In Carspecken's (1996) seminal text, he outlines the theoretical and methodological foundations to using critical ethnography in research. Carspecken (1996) argues that any

communication or activity (including conversation) will likely be “characterized by holistic, undifferentiated, modes of experience” (p. 19). Moreover, ontologically, the critical ethnographer views reality as less about “reality” and more about categories of diverse “truth” claims (i.e., subjective, normative-evaluative, objective). All this to say that with this in mind, I sought to understand the ways that my own cultural understandings impacted my study as I sought to better understand the evolving culture of the school. How much of what I observed and analyzed are coming from my own groundings in certain theories? I also had to consider that getting too entrenched in this theory could influence the results to just be another study of how oppressive schools are while not demonstrating viable solutions for change.

By using observations (participatory and non-participatory), interviews with administrators, teachers, students, and their parents, I was able to provide a comprehensive view of the experiences related to SEL (with students’ experiences illustrated through observation as well). I used ethnographic methods to critically expose some of the failures of the punitive disciplinary system yet also capture the diverse ways school personnel perceive the SEL+ curriculum and its influence within their school. The triangulation of the data will be possible through the “checking of consistency of different data sources within the same method (consistency across interviewees)” (Patton, 2015, p. 661). Notably, that is not to say I expect the same result or the same experiences to be noted, rather I acknowledge Patton’s (2015) point that “understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative and important” (p.661). Moreover, using a combination of data sources such as individual and focus group interviews and observations enabled me to make note of discrepancies and similarities among participants as they appear in these different settings. My memos and notes evolved as I learned more about the teachers, administrators/coordinators, and the challenges and successes the

school experienced throughout the pandemic and as I engaged in more self-reflexivity connected to these interactions and observations (Madison, 2012).

One of the shortcomings of an ethnography is that by definition an ethnographer is an outsider, creating tension as the lines blur between insider/outsider. As a critical ethnographer and as I immersed myself more in the school, I reflected on this oscillating role. While it was clear that I collaborated with Emma, I also maintained a confidentiality with participants and only shared general feedback about the curriculum or school if they were repeated by multiple participants or were emblematic of salient ones (e.g., balancing between self-regulation and equity centered SEL). In staff meetings, I was introduced as the researcher from Oklahoma State University (OSU) who is “working with Emma and the school” to improve the SEL+ program. This gave me access to both online and in-person classrooms. With parents and students, my connection with Emma primarily granted me access to recruit and schedule their participation. While I was a resident of the city and made sure to make those connections clear as well, I was still an outsider to the local community, especially since the online classroom made it more difficult to have those informal hallway conversations or be there for drop-off/pick-up; two primary ways that parents interacted with (new) staff at the school. Nevertheless, my relationship with Emma granted me access to the participants while I also maintained confidentiality by not sharing who all ended up being in the study for IRB purposes.

Recruitment Process: Hallmark of Pandemic Challenges + Real-time Changes

In my conversations with administrators and coordinators, I tried to brainstorm ways to reach parents in affirming and ethically sound ways. This also meant reaching *all* parents and not just English speakers or a certain race or gender. I reached out to Poppy, the ELL specialist to get insight into how to reach Latinx families including translation services for future student and

family surveys (using Qualtrics software). And so, the professional translator service the district requires for any conversation with parents enabled me to talk with both Spanish-speaking parents and English-speaking parents. This not only helped widen the scope of my participant pool and connected to my aim to be as representative of the school's diverse student and family population, but also it led to conversations and a verbal initiative to involve Latinx families in more than just sending emails and letters in Spanish and English. In fact, the pandemic and online learning platform uncovered the need for more communication and programming with Latinx families in mind. Poppy felt overwhelmed with how much she had to do to support Latinx families and also how despite district and schoolwide Spanish-English letters and emails, families were still not able to get access to the troubleshooting and were falling behind in attendance and Zoom learning in general. My conversations with parents and also with their children also informed our Equity-curriculum to be more explicit about immigration, Dreamers, and integrating bilingualism (Spanish-English) into the lessons.

Since I was not allowed to talk to parents through school lines of communication, like the principal or teachers emailing them on my behalf, I had to improvise. I waited at least three weeks into school for the roster to stabilize since some students may still decide to move to the virtual school and therefore no longer be attending classes with the rest of their classmates. After asking teachers for recommendations of those who might be interested in the project, I contacted those families first and then the rest of the class. While several (at least 8 parents and 18 students) who had voiced interest on the phone and some signed the consent form I either emailed or sent via text, the number of participants ended up being three parents for the interview and a total of 11 third-fifth grade students. I would attest that the online format while helpful for scheduling also proved challenging because people could simply not show up to the

Zoom or stop returning phone calls or texts and there was no real investment other than time on their side. I also was not a classroom teacher or knew them from before in which they might feel more obligated or more interested. Nevertheless, the participants who were able to make it were nonetheless helpful and insightful, and taught me also about how to conduct interviews as conversation, especially with younger people. I felt that I was constantly having to push my timeline but finally managed by first official interview with students in November.

I gained permission from third-fifth grade teachers to observe their Zoom class and the ways they implement the SEL curriculum in the context of an online classroom. Permissions were always read and given via verbal consent and a document consent form sent prior to the meeting through email. Initially, this study was scheduled to be a one semester study with August spent recruiting and September beginning the survey output and observations to then conclude in December. However, due to some of the challenges highlighted above that led to recruitment delays along with regular school delays (cancelled classes, holiday breaks including an unprecedented weeklong minimum school break approximately every month but April), the whole study ended up being about 8 months (September-April). This ultimately helped me juxtapose the virtual schooling of the fall with the in-person schooling of the spring (late February) when stress levels rose across the board (i.e., parents, students, staff, and administrators).

Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Emma has been my greatest ally and partner in this work. Through her points of contact and reputation at the school as a well-liked and necessary part of the Marbury team, she has helped me gain access to classrooms, administrative and staff meetings, and even a community equity meeting about trauma. Through our ongoing conversations whether in person, over the

phone, Zoom, or via text; we find common ground and common understandings regarding the potential (and critiques) of SEL. Her community-oriented framework and upbringing when forced desegregation was happening in her hometown, reflective and reflexive way of life, makes for a robust partnership in this work. In the 2020-2021 school year, her role shifted from one of emergency support along with teaching support, to one of an established and essential teacher whose pedagogical expertise (i.e., SEL) is just as important if not more so than tested academic subjects at the schools. In this way, her time in the classrooms and support increased as she was no longer responsible for the everyday emergencies that in the previous year took up much of her time, sometimes causing her to miss instructional time in the classroom. Though, again, in some classrooms, because of their schedules, such as being the last class before “dismissal” on Fridays or being right before lunch with another, those were inconsistent and had the fewest hours of SEL+ instruction time until students returned to in-person.

All of my recruitment efforts were online either via Zoom or email, with only one in-person visit to help Emma with organizing material to be sent home for the first week of school. Attending initial staff meetings and being introduced to staff that way was helpful. I then asked to meet with third to fifth grade teachers and then the Wellness team members separately as well as another staff member who had to transfer to another school in the district and thus did not end up in the study but who was helpful in thinking through recruitment of parents and connecting with other support staff (like Poppy, the ELL coordinator and Audre, the family coordinator). This initial meeting was to explain the parameters of the project which was two interviews as well as explain that my observations in the classroom would be non-evaluative and purely for my project, focusing on SEL, discipline, and just getting a sense of how community and learning is happening. I asked permission and received it via email to observe not just SEL+ classes, but

also community circles, and content classes. All but one teacher gave me explicit consent to attend classes outside of SEL+ and community circle. I also usually had my camera on at the beginning so students could get used to my face, but eventually, in some classes had it off while in others kept it on per the teacher's discretion.

Ultimately, I interviewed all third-fifth grade teachers, but one was unable to complete the second one-on-one interview due to time constraints. Looking back, I ended fulfilling my goal of at least three parent participants and surpassed my goal with 11 student participants. The students interviewed were: 4 African American females, 2 African American males, 1 White male, 2 Hispanic males, 1 Hispanic female, and 1 Native American female. These identities were voiced by participants (see Appendix G for summary of participants featured in this dissertation).

Emma began with her own Zoom class but that proved too difficult to have students leave their main classroom and log into hers, so she ended up joining teachers Zoom classes as a "guest" at the scheduled time (this took at least two weeks to figure out), though teachers did not always adhere to it and at times Emma would use her discretion and insider knowledge of teacher stress/school challenges to have class or not that week. IRB permissions were to field note the observations like I would in a regular classroom, but I did do screenshots of key curricula as well and never of any students or teachers.

Interviews

This study ultimately was comprised of 13 interviews, 5 of which were individual (3 with teachers, one with a student, and one with Emma). My first focus group interview was in October with teachers, and I analyzed the answers and observations to then tailor the questions for the one-on-one interview to go into more depth while also having questions that I asked each teacher for comparison (See Appendix C). I gained perspective on the group's interactions with

one another and in their evaluation and thoughts on the SEL+ curriculum since there is a “safety in numbers” and can “complement individual interviews, each yielding different information” (Patton, 2015, p.479). My second major focus group (with adults) was in December and with the Wellness Team members comprised of the school social worker, a counselor, the parent facilitator (liaison between school and families), the ELL Specialist and Emma as SEL coordinator. Notably, Emma was not part of this interview. While some members had to leave earlier than the allotted 90 minutes, I was able to gain substantial insight and even had the opportunity to further discuss with the principal some key schoolwide initiatives to better contextualize equity initiatives and ways that SEL+ can support them (i.e., facilitating more parent involvement, helping families without being paternalistic/ “white savior” model) (See Appendix D for questions).

The last adult group, parents, was the most challenging to connect with at first and thus delayed the most was not until March. Their input was invaluable and even introduced community partnership as well as mirrored building community as the participants exchanged numbers and made future plans after realizing their geographical proximity and similarity in age groups of their children. While I anticipated this group to be the most ethically complicated due to the issue of sharing information about their children with other adults present (and the added privacy concern of being at home), the conversations and questions allowed for more general conversations about schooling (including their own experiences as students from marginalized backgrounds). The group setting ended up being a positive one as parents built off each other’s experiences and shared further insight not necessarily related to their children specifically, but their experiences with the classroom and staff (See Appendix E for questions). And all parents

shared their excitement and joy of having their voices heard in this way and having a space to share these thoughts and opinions in such a format.

Students were central to the conversation as well and required the most recruitment efforts to ensure that all IRB consents were given, explained, and also that students understood why they were asked to talk to me. I always obtained verbal consent to move forward with recording our conversation for my own research before conducted each interview. I opened the space for any clarifying questions which helped develop a dialogue and conversational tone to the interview. I also had to find ways to accommodate multiple students' schedules and ultimately had the focus groups at grade level. My first focus group with third grade gave me insight about how to navigate with parents around because in that one, parents ended up dominating the conversation or helping their child when they were too shy to answer. However, after clarifying that it was up to the students and with more independence and rapport built as I attended their classrooms and participated in conversations with them, the second interview went more smoothly with students' input. While these tended to last 45 minutes, I also conducted shorter, 30-minute interviews, that allowed me to have more participants and focus on themes around community building and belonging, specifically (See Appendix F for example).

The interviews for both focus groups and individualized were transcribed using Otter.ai. After each interview, I wrote down memos or musings including major takeaways such as quotes or ideas that I felt were important in a Word document. The next day, I would go over the interviews' audio, make changes, and add emotions and mannerisms when needed to enhance the experience so as to remain true to the participants' feelings and experiences (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p.13). As I did, I would also conduct In vivo coding, open coding, and memos (Emerson et al., 2011).

For observations, I developed a schedule where I would attend community circle, SEL+, and content lessons that occurred after the community circle. My mornings tended to include Mr. Style's community circle, followed by Ms. Warren's community circle and math class. In the afternoons, I would attend Ms. John's community circle and ELA/Reading and the SEL+ lesson if there was one that day (they were on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Fridays). My observations in Mrs. Eagle's class were limited to SEL+ class time. I kept track of my minutes in each classroom on an Excel document which I then calculated into hours at the end of the study. Every Sunday I check my time to determine which classrooms I have spent too little/too much and so adjust my observations for the next week to balance them. However, perhaps due to the subject matter (e.g., ELA having more opportunities for culturally responsive pedagogical practices than math), timing, and SEL+ lesson cancellations, there were clear distinction in hours spent in each classroom. In order of most to least amount spent: Ms. John (40 hours), Mr. Styles (25 hours), Ms. Warren (13 hours), Mrs. Eagle (5 hours). I included notes related to cancelled classes, holidays, and study-related material like when surveys, consent forms, and interviews were conducted.

Observations

Observing both the students and the SEL coordinator/teacher provided a holistic view of the program's embeddedness (or lack thereof). Relationships are central to any SEL-oriented framework and keeping in mind CASEL's frameworks, I made sure to take note of the ways students exhibit self-awareness (i.e., identifying their emotions), relationship skills (i.e., conflict resolution), and social awareness (i.e., empathy, awareness of diversity), in particular. As I gathered my fieldnotes and transcribe interviews, I engaged in an In vivo coding and open coding process. And in doing so, I was "creating and discovering the meaning of and in the notes all

along” (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 190). I then categorized my codes before extrapolating key themes from the data which will focus my study. Notably, this open coding process allowed me to “elaborate, deepen, and refine or discard themes developed at earlier points in time...[as well as] view the entire corpus of [my] notes with fresh eyes” (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 188). Doing so aids me to continue to look for and be guided by the data which can also reduce biases and subjectivity considerations (Peshkin, 1988). Relying heavily on my own observations and triangulating that with transcribed interviews, still left the authorial privilege on me (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 245). And so, at the end of field notes and interviews I included a self-reflexivity piece in which to engage in topics that were troubling me or areas I want to explore further, some of which informed my future inquiries in later interviews or observations (Madison, 2012).

Analysis

During my time observing via Zoom, I did so as a nonparticipant observer or observer-as-participant role depending on the situation and the cues from Emma and classroom teacher (Adler & Adler, 1987, p.84). These field notes observations were written first as “jottings” but then within 24 hours into “extended narrative segments” (Emerson et al., 2011, pp.34, 109). At first, I noted students and gave physical and personality descriptors to differentiate and keep note for possible interview candidates, but then I was able to use names without them. I also noted the lesson aims, number of students, time, and subject. My objective with these field notes was to note the atmosphere, any emergencies and responses to those, the interactions between Emma and teacher and between Emma/teacher and their students. In the non-SEL+ classrooms, I noted what SEL strategies were utilized, how are teachers attending to students’ socioemotional needs as they interact with them and the disciplining of students. I used the color red to note

warnings/punitive interactions, purple for important dialogue around equity such as discussing access to clean water during a social studies lesson, racial equity/inequities, and other culturally-responsive-sustaining topics. Purple was also used to mark early codes for topics such as “(dis)connection” “dialogical relationships” and “being seen/heard” all of which also connected to CASEL’s framework and ATN’s tenets. Green fonts marked positive behavioral interventions/SEL-oriented feedback when students were disciplined. The color-coding field notes helped me visualize which classrooms and lessons were oriented towards red (punitive) or green (positive) and also took notes in a larger and growing word document of possible codes and themes as I continued to gather data and moved towards writing findings chapters in the summer. These codes were analyzed using constant comparative analysis. This form of analysis permits continual revising and revisiting of initial codes (e.g., connection/disconnection) until no new themes were identified. In doing so, I was not only aiming to get to credible and sound interpretations of the data (Hewitt-Taylor, 2001), I was also able to “refine or discard themes developed at earlier points in time...to view the entire corpus of [my] notes with fresh eyes” (Emerson, et al., 2011, p. 188). I embed a critical ethnographic approach as the data analysis directly affected the curriculum and pedagogical approach in real time.

Ethics/Reflexivity

As stated, earlier, IRB approval-consent was verbally stated and signed electronically using both DocuSign and Google Forms. I did some form of member check such as asking for teacher feedback on their biographical profile, acknowledging that I did not want to add any more stress to their already stressful year. I was highly cognizant of this and did my utmost to use preferred communication as well as ask Emma about the school climate as she observed it to gauge scheduling of interviews and asking teachers about extra help with recruitment or

observations. In this way participants could make changes, omit data they do not want used in the study or completely withdraw, giving the participant full control over their right to privacy and intellectual property (Patton, 2015, p. 343). I also provide a space and opportunity for the participant to be an informed one where they are the “insider” voice who have a “degree of collaboration” through their feedback given (Patton, 2015, p. 339). Pseudonyms protected the identity of my participants and the school itself. These pseudonyms, the key and all data are on a password protected computer and password protected file folder. As per IRB stipulations, I will destroy the key and data a year after the study is concluded.

As I developed a great working friendship with Emma, I have been navigating and adjusting my categorizations and ways of thinking accordingly. That is that rather than seeking to erase this relationship, I have taken note of our conversations and how they may be affecting my observations and ways I am thinking. When I see the institutional issues such as district policy or the way that administrators use language that implies deficit in speaking of families, the tension arises as to how to discuss it. Emma has been vocal about her wanting to help me do what I need to do for this project and in return, I am happy to help her with thinking through curriculum, creating surveys, and getting feedback on the implementation as she seeks to improve her curriculum. I did provide curricular feedback throughout and even introduced several ideas that were implemented in some degree in the curriculum as well as added permanently to it. I also contributed to staff meetings with ongoing survey data as found in Appendix B and longform questions such as “why are you feeling [this way] about your classes?” This question came after one that uses emojis to help students indicate their emotional response to how they feel about their classes. Such contributions to the staff meetings helped with providing the rationale for the continued emphasis on “belonging” and community building

and also how SEL+ will help with these initiatives. I also had the opportunity to substitute for Emma and so was able to be on the other side as a Zoom instructor as we discussed Gratitude and Indigenous resilience that week.

As I moved to the conclusion of my study, I thought of ways to provide tangible and helpful product that the school could use as I moved towards writing my findings. This culminated in a word document called “Recommendations and Thoughts for Teachers, Administrators and SEL Coordinator” and in it I put together sections related to praxis and key takeaways from the interviews and observations. Some were mentioned repeatedly across the board and others were not but were deemed important to include anyway. It was divided into “Recommendations” and “Thoughts on SEL+” and then “Recommendations for the School” and “Thoughts on the school” in general. For SEL+, for example, participants (primarily teachers and parents) suggested adding a body-positivity and inclusion piece around that which also builds into broader anti-bullying initiatives. For the school, parents advocated the development of a PTA (parent-teacher association) and the desire to discuss race issues more explicitly while at the same time noting that the school does not discriminate based on race. After I created this bullet-point list, I shared it with Emma and then met with the principal to discuss. We went point-by-point adding notes and at the end of the meeting a priority was given to curricular changes related to having an equity-centered theme each month such as “Kindness” and in that month, the activities, initiatives, and words of the week (including SEL+, PE, and content areas) would incorporate kindness traits and ways that kindness looks like in class, school, at home, and larger community. The emphasis would be that the equity lessons being spread out over the course of a school year with monthly themes can build on one another and also cultivate belonging and safety with internalization of the equity-oriented vision through asking and working on what

does the school vision mean to you (staff, student, teacher). Outside of school, there was also an articulation to have a parent facilitator and develop a PTA with the hopes that parents will want to join. In my most recent communication (September 2021) with one of the parents, I learned that this was coming to fruition, which is exciting!

Significance

The explosion of SEL curricula or SEL-related professional development illustrates the high demand for this burgeoning area. As socioemotional learning integrates to the areas that the school needs the most, school leaders, teachers and others need to constantly reevaluate and question their motives and the impact of these programs on their school community. Recognizing that schools can (re)traumatize students rather than support them, critical scholarship emerges relating to trauma-sensitive schooling (Jennings, 2019), ethics of alternative discipline practices (Gregory & Fergus, 2017; Kamenetz & Bakeman, 2018; Gaffney, 2019) and the implications of such methods like restorative justice on the gendered and racialized disparities present in current punitive disciplinary systems (Gregory, Bell, & Pollock, 2014; Gregory, Clawson, Davis, & Gerewitz, 2014). As more schools adopt “whole child” approaches to learning that include trauma-sensitive training for teachers and staff, socioemotional programs focusing on particular emotional or character traits, and alternative discipline practices such as restorative circles, yoga or peace rooms are added with zero tolerance policies, this study will add to the scholarship regarding socioemotional learning as it relates to the experiences of its practitioners. While there has been scholarship focusing on teachers and their experiences (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Jennings et al., 2017) and providing evidence-based practice for school leaders (Jones et al., 2017; S. Barnes & S.M. Jones, 2019), there is a paucity of work that seeks to ground itself into

the intersection of carceral logics, equity-lens, and socioemotional context, especially at the elementary school level.

Teachers, administrators, teacher educators, and scholars can all benefit from this study. Teachers and administrators can note the ways that their school is implementing their own SEL programs and think through the ways that the program is supporting their students (or not). Asking key questions related to equity, that all students have access to the same resources, and also that students are not being harmed with the approach even unintentionally. Teacher educators introducing their student-teachers to socioemotional learning or who teach courses related to classroom management and discipline would also benefit conversing about the tensions that arise as a classroom teacher. Teachers also can learn more about how their own attitudes and biases affect their teaching practice as well as ways to cultivate compassionate and mindful relationship with their students and families. Theorizing the ways teachers can support their students before they enter the classroom and afterwards will positively impact the teacher and the student. Finally, scholarship in this area is growing and building on the works of those who have been researching, theorizing, and writing about this for years is both a monumental and exciting task. Adding to this scholarship key questions about the ways “success”-oriented curricula (such as SEL) function in schools, Vidyah Shah asks Paul Gorski in a 2019 webinar, “Are we solving the wrong problem?” “What problem have we identified and if these are in the families, students and communities then we are solving problems that don’t even exist?” How do we solve these problems in connection to systems? (2019, 15:07). As critical educators ask these questions, they are working to improve and help the dismantling of the school to prison pipeline and the carceral logics underlying its perpetuation. Finally, through continuously problematizing, challenging,

and reimagining the intersection between SEL and carcerality we can reimagine schools as spaces for transformation.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: SCHOOLWIDE EFFORTS TO INTEGRATE TRANSFORMATIVE (SEL)

“Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person” (Chimamanda Adichie, 2012, para 25).

“Let us continue this experiment together, with every precaution possible, borne of commitment, curiosity and love. Let us be open to transformation.” (Julie Gard, An Invocation for Learning and Safety, 2020, para 12).

Introduction: Crisis in Urban School Intensifies (and Strengthens) Community Bonds

Power, storytelling, and transformation are central tenets of this critical ethnography set during an intensification of multiple crises. The dual crisis of a global pandemic (and all its negative economic and sociological effects) and racial injustice (in the form of police brutality under the guise of public safety) permeated in classrooms, SEL+ lessons, staff meetings, and interviews. The stories, statistics, and conversations, reveal the competing frameworks that arose as SEL+ pushed towards a more transformative school setting that empowers and validates the lived experiences of its community members. And with Black, Brown, Indigenous communities of color (BBIPOC) disproportionately bearing the brunt of these dual crises, the possibilities of transformation were both inspiring and necessary (Dunn et al., 2021; Gould & Wilson, 2020; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021; Way, 2021). While I weave together these stories and chronologize about 8 months of data, I acknowledge and evoke Adichie’s words from the epigraph above that these stories are not the definitive stories of the families, teachers, and students at Marbury

Elementary. Rather, my participant-researcher privilege to tell these stories offers a salient interpretive collage of what transpired.

In the summer of 2020, alongside schoolwide and districtwide efforts to incorporate implicit bias training and conversations about restorative practices, Emma and I had multiple conversations with each other on the critiques of social-emotional learning (SEL) work as it has been integrated in schools (Love, 2019; Simmons, 2019; Warren et al., 2020) and what a transformative, equity-centered SEL program might entail (Aspen, 2018; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Borowski, 2018; Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019). After the publication of the Abolition Teaching Network's (ATN) August 2020 guide, we ultimately extrapolated and focused on: elevating student and families' voices, critical and healing-centered approaches, dialogical and reciprocal approaches, and resisting punitive or disciplinary approaches (including no SROs or police). After I explained these elements and what they entail during a meeting with the principal, Ramona, she approved incorporating the language in the SEL Vision and SEL+ lessons. These elements shaped the methodological choices such as who was interviewed and what they were interviewed about as well as the direction of our "Equity curriculum". Notably, Ramona started her fifth year at Marbury in 2020 and during that time she had been integrating trauma-informed training to teachers and staff. She also co-facilitated with Beverley, the vice principal, implicit bias and reflexivity training that was a hallmark of the summer 2020 professional development series.

During an interview with Ramona and Wellness Team members, she cited the opportunity myth (TNTP, 2018) and how students facing hardships such as food insecurity, homelessness, traumatic home lives can also be disadvantaged further at school by (well-meaning) teachers who lower expectations due to those hardships. This poverty bias and

stereotyping (Gorski, 2018) ultimately harms students (and their families) and disproportionality affects students of color (Smith et al., 2015). Dunn et al. (2021) address this by stating how building “radical trust” between families and schools is one of several ways to transform/rebuild schools and shift from reform to abolition and liberation. Such “radical trust” entails “collective action to acknowledge and address systemic racial inequities the education system” and developing “critical consciousness through self-reflective processes” (p. 217). While Ramona and Beverley’s professional development summer sessions was a starting point, the fact that the adults interviewed (including teachers) cited the opportunity myth, addressed the poverty (and racial) bias they held and pedagogical choices they made to address it indicated movement towards that radical trust and relationship-building Dunn and his colleagues envision. Ramona’s adoption of ATN’s SEL Abolitionist tenets demonstrated the gradual shift towards more direct conversation and collective action around antibias, antiracism, and reflexivity to improve school-family relationships and students’ experiences at school. While not explicitly naming PIC (prison-industrial complex) abolition (Critical Resistance, 2020), the rhetoric around trust, safety, and the desire to transform schools into such spaces essential for liberatory school climate comprised of “radical trust, radical joy, radical imagination, and radical disruption” (Dunn et al., 2021, p. 221).

What was *supposed* to happen and then what *actually* happened, proved emblematic of many experiences for schools during this past 2020-2021 academic year. According to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI) (2020), several challenges that schools faced prior to the pandemic intensified and led to conversations seeking new ways to address them. Interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents all bolstered EPI’s 2020 report and others (e.g., Goldstein et al., 2020; Gould & Wilson, 2020; Lee, 2020). For example, school personnel named

chronic absenteeism/attendance, accessing, and understanding the online platform and programs, being able to utilize the technology effectively and balancing between academic rigor or external (i.e., district and state mandates) accountability and supporting families' needs. Parents also noted technological difficulties such as access to the internet, keeping up with the multiple Zoom sessions and online learning programs outside of Canvas (e.g., Zearn Math, Accelerated Reader, Class Dojo).

Economic and health-related stresses were also ongoing challenges that parents named. Notably, all staff interviewed and observed described the school community (including families and staff) as more close-knit and communicative than ever before. And moreover, that the pandemic's intensification forced them to move positively towards being more supportive, innovative, and inclusive of many ideas. However, as the remainder of this chapter will illustrate contested spaces emerged wherein the school had the option to move past pre-pandemic norms (e.g., safety as order and compliance) and transform into a more abolitionist or at least supportive and culturally responsive one (Hammond, 2015; Simmons, 2019). In some instances, this happened, while in others it did not. As the examples will show, abstract and discretionary (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003) expectations lead to a lack of consistent schoolwide horizontal and hierarchal accountability. At the same time, as Chapter 5 exemplifies, individualized interpretations of SEL (as opposed to institutional ones) also paved the way for pockets of transformative, innovative, and equity-centered work that in many ways were more positively impactful than institutional interpretations due to the inconsistent hierarchal accountability and expectations for SEL.

MTSS: Contextualizing the SEL Program and Schoolwide Approach

Marbury Elementary's SEL organization strategy aimed to develop a comprehensive SEL curriculum that is modeled after trauma-informed Multi-Tier Systems of Support (MTSS) (e.g., Rich & Stein, 2019). Such a model aimed to support students and their families with their social, emotional, and academic needs. Thus, the school year began with the expectation that students and staff regardless of whether school was in-person or online, would be engaged in multi-tier SEL support and reinforcement outside of the scheduled SEL+ classes. Moreover, with the implicit bias and equity training completed at the school and district levels, conversations around race, poverty and trauma this school year were aimed to be more nuanced and shift away from previously more, often-times, deficit-laden descriptive and prescriptive discourses (Gorski, 2018; Love, 2019; Bornstein, 2015; 2017). Bornstein's (2015; 2017; 2020) educational leadership scholarship advocates for a second wave of the previously damaging MTSS models that in many ways pushed towards compliance to white norms and ways of being. Johnson and Bornstein's (2020) MTSS second wave theory moves past personal implicit bias initiatives alone and into evaluating schoolwide policies and procedures for their coded racialized language. This language, in turn, ultimately "enshrines White norms of acceptable behavior" and, I add, Foucauldian notions of delinquency and compliance. In this chapter's emphasis on schoolwide implications, I utilize Johnson and Bornstein's (2020) scholarship as they shift inquiries at the schoolwide level from how students are failing school into how schools are failing students. Doing so opens the conversation past one of figuring out new policies and tools to push students into compliant behavior, which I observed sometimes coded as self-regulation in SEL, and to more transformative and justice-oriented ways that Simmons (2019), Ginwright (2018), and Love (2019), to name a few, advocate.

When we began more intentionally working on curriculum, we did so with certain administrative and schoolwide language in place including “self-regulation” and “relationship building” about SEL. For example, the school’s mission: “Marbury students are actively engaged in learning within a collaborative school climate and culture built on a sense of belonging through relationships, informed by a lens of equity, and rich with academic and social emotional learning opportunities” (PD Power point, 4.15.21). This somewhat vague phrasing allows for multiple interpretations. For example, Emma and I interpreted “informed by a lens of equity” to mean as a ATN’s elevation of student and families’ voices through identity-specific lessons with inquiry that centered families’ cultures and beliefs⁷. Emma and I discussed the SEL Vision which the administration also approved as, “Marbury students and staff will gain social and emotional intelligence through consistent learning, and the application of effective, healing centered classroom management skills in and out of school.” Reinforcing Ginwright’s (2018) healing-centered language in all social-emotional learning professional development sessions centered trauma as only part of a child’s identity and challenged “fix-them”-oriented behavioral interventions (Jimerson et al., 2004). Nevertheless, deficit-language pervaded indicating an ongoing struggle towards strength-based and thus agency-building school climates.

Briefly, Figure 1 illustrates the primary components of SEL and SEL+ as planned for the 2020-2021 academic year. A combination of Rise and Shine⁸, the SEL+ classes leading to

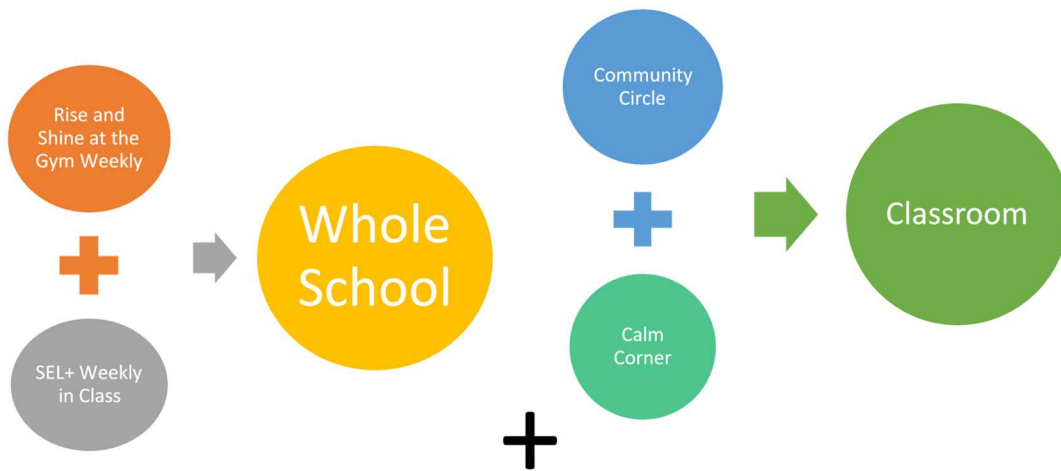
⁷ Emma prefaced lessons (Oct-Jan) with conversations around where families are from, how we all come from different traditions, but all learn from each other, and explicitly asked about what community we feel safe and like we belong in, SEL+ classes and then I asked again during in-depth interviews with students and their families.

⁸ Rise and Shine (2004) is part of Dr. Jean Feldman’s children’s song collection and is played in elementary schools primarily as part of morning community building activities in gyms and classrooms. Lyrics are sung with an upbeat staccato tempo that can be accompanied with gestures: “Rise and Shine. Welcome to school today. Rise and Shine (repeated twice). We’re so glad you’re here” (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyAD2OoFuoY>). In the school, *Rise and Shine* initiates a teacher-led 10–20-minute video that included reading of the school creed, mission, Pledge of Allegiance, a joke of the week, a song and dance (for movement) related to the theme of the week, or

common language around SEL skills (e.g., “candle breath”), SEL self-regulation language (e.g., “I notice...I feel” “self-awareness”), and “Words of the Week” related to character building or empathy work (e.g., “Kindness” “Inclusion” “Leadership”) comprised the plan. Emma would introduce students to the Word of the Week, for example, “Courage” on Monday in the Rise and Shine video. Then, in the community circle conducted within the classroom, the teacher and students discussed implications and perhaps the example(s) Emma provided in the video such as different examples of courage and how it looked like in different spaces (e.g., at school, home, on TV, and in books). Then, when Emma stopped by for the weekly SEL+ lesson, students would be enriched with activities such as learning about Ruby Bridges and connecting her actions to the word, “Courage,” while also using her example to discuss racial segregation. Lessons also included self-regulation tools, mindfulness exercises such as guided visualizations, and movement on yoga mats when students returned to in-person learning as well as explicit instruction on community and conflict-resolution.

upcoming holidays, celebration of school’s top readers, and celebration of student birthdays for that month. When students returned in late February, it became student-led including Emma’s portion with students sharing breath techniques and role playing to explain the SEL concept and/or Word of the Week.

Figure 1. Marbury Elementary SEL Program Components



Ultimately, the competing frameworks around maintaining the status quo (e.g., the school as a state agent) and moving towards transformative/abolitionist educational practices (e.g., the school as supportive) emerged in multiple ways. For the purposes of this chapter, I highlight, the theme of safety as operationalized in response to various societal and school-related crises. Carceral logics name safety as justification for the continuation of policing efforts, punitive disciplinary approaches, and removal of students from classrooms. Accordingly, interpreting SEL-oriented approaches as disruptors of these logics lead to discursive practices and tensions around reimagining safety and its ramifications on the future. Stearns (2020) notes how safety’s denotation in the trauma-informed context while not explicit, does imply “safety [as] an affective sensibility that emerges from ongoing compliance” (p.29) and is also one of the foundational principles of trauma-informed care in schools (SAMHSA, 2014). And so, SEL-oriented approaches while not punitive directly, do rely on consistency, routine, and discipline to respond emotionally to students’ needs (e.g., Responsive Classroom, 2011).

Exploring safety leads to broader conversations about who wields the power to determine the parameters of (school) safety and how it connects to broader carceral/abolitionist discourses. In this analysis, competing (and, sometimes, simultaneously employed) frameworks of safety illuminate the ways that Marbury Elementary was the site of transformative policies as well as when it relegated to its more punitive operations. Those moments of intersection and parallels with ATN's SEL Teaching Guide also bear significance for future application. Constantly oscillating between district expectations and families' needs, SEL+ provided the tools and space to explore and address these competing expectations due, in part, to its nonacademic nature. Accordingly, I weave SEL+ lessons, including from staff meetings, to provide a glimpse of the ways that the curriculum attempted to move towards transformation and liberation highlighting the possibilities and challenges of a transformative SEL curriculum.

School Safety: Competing lens on who is protected and when that protection occurs

Safety defined and operationalized

While a rudimentary internet school on safety inevitably leads to conversations around school shootings, bullying, and criminal activity on school sites, there has been a rise in more nuanced conversations integrating equity language and, in some instances, using SEL practices to foster a positive school climate that, in turn, reduces (student) violence (Nickerson, 2018; Varghese, 2021). School safety definitions have shifted from rather vague language, like, “the absence of negative incidents (such as bullying or bomb threats) or [a focus] on emergency preparedness” to more explicit language, like, an “environment that is free from fear, intimidation, violence and isolation...[and] fosters inclusion and acceptance for every child” (Eith & Trump, 2019, p. 45). The addition of a SEL and/or trauma-informed lens that the latter

definition entails, meant that school leaders should then not see the child or student as the threat, but instead work toward making a school climate that is not threatening or harmful *to the child*. Such a paradigm shift is echoed in SEL+ as well as in interviews with Marbury administrators, parents, and teachers, however not consistently.

The creation of a safe school climate means that every aspect of schooling should be deemed safe. So, then, how should adults respond when bullying, or a perceived harm is committed, and students are the harm creators? And how and when does the school perpetuate state-sanctioned violence in the form of mandatory reporting to DHS or local police? Additionally, how does the implementation of SEL+ help students, their caregivers, teachers, and administrators understand injustice to better transform school culture into one that centers healing, families' voices, and uplifts teachers' embodied experiences. In the following chapter, I articulate three general competing and sometimes simultaneously employed states/tales of "safety" to illuminate SEL+'s limitations and possibilities in fostering nuanced and trauma-informed ways of forming a "safe" school. Firstly, the embodiment of care and support through a social worker's and parent's testimony countered with a tense decision. Secondly, safety as prevention (and compliance) through a SEL+ lesson and disciplinary issue. And finally, I explore safety as both transformative and punitive by examining what transpired at Marbury during a gun threat incident and the school's subsequent response.

Safety as supporting families: The tale of the not-so-threatening state agent

The Wellness team comprised the school social worker, a counselor, the parent facilitator (liaison between school and families), the ELL specialist and Emma as SEL coordinator. All worked diligently to meet the needs of families. Their role and interaction from home visits, weekly check-ins, and finding resources and helping families fill out forms to get enrolled in

school and access social services such as rent assistance, food stamps, and other needs helped build safety and trust between the school and families. Due to the demographics of the school, these services were part of the schooling experience prior to the pandemic. And, in fact, the very composition of the school's populations may have contributed to a more positive relationship with families when the pandemic began, and those same challenges intensified (Favela & Torres, 2014). Nevertheless, as the statement below indicates, despite these seemingly supportive and trusting relationships that should have emerged between families and the school, due to policies like mandatory reporting and the repercussions of that (Schenwar & Law, 2020), such relationships were marred with the possibility that members of the Wellness team would have to report families to the Department of Human Services (DHS) or Child Protective Services (CPS). Michelle, the social worker, cited a positive change in comparison to her previous experience. She has been at the school for five years and so her testimony below exemplifies this shift from fear to trust:

But as far as social worker goes, I feel like the overall idea of my position has changed from being like, sometimes I was identified with DHS and Child Protective Services. And I feel like now more than in the past, I'm identified as someone that is going to help you. Whether it's with Sooner Care⁹, or with getting clothing or school supplies, or computers, technology, whatever it is, I feel like I'm starting to be seen as a positive role in our school and helpful instead of kind of a, someone to be afraid of, because I'm titled as a social worker.

⁹ The name of Oklahoma's Medicaid program offering free healthcare for Oklahomans who fit certain guidelines related to age, income, and circumstances (e.g., pregnant, deaf, permanently injured). As of May 2021; 1,043,152 Oklahomans are enrolled (https://oklahoma.gov/content/dam/ok/en/okhca/docs/research/data-and-reports/fast-facts/2021/april/TotalEnrollment04_21.pdf)

The intensification of families' needs such as food insecurity, eviction threats, and unemployment led to Michelle and other members of the Wellness team visiting more families' homes and doing the advocacy work to ensure that families received federal and state aid. However, Michelle's observation that as a social worker she has been deemed "someone to be afraid of" is not unfounded. Historically social workers have been perceived, and rightfully so, as "kinder, gentler" cops (Kaba as cited in Schenwar & Law, 2020) or more recently enactors of carceral social work. Noting the historical and philosophical underpinnings of social work, transformative justice and anti-carceral social work advocates highlight how the "logics of social control and White supremacy" that lead to "managing" BBIPOC and poor communities underpin carceral social work as well (Jacobs et al., 2021, p. 37). While social workers advocate for families' basic needs (e.g., shelter, food, clothing), they also are known to separate families, increase surveillance through mandatory reporting and due to vague legal frameworks around "negligence" which can range from food insecurity to more recently, risk of exposure to COVID-19 (Wilson et al., 2020). The advent of mandatory reporting leads to growing critiques of social workers weaponizing care and doing very little to support underserved families (Jacobs et al., 2021; Kaba, 2021; Schenwar & Law, 2020). While Michelle does not necessarily say this, by her noting this positive shift in the ways families perceived her role, she was aware of these ongoing tensions that she navigated as social worker.

Reading Jacobs et al.'s (2021) work in conversation with key theorists of this study such as Love (2019) and Meiners (2016), I note SEL+'s limitations when it comes to state mandatory reporting laws and generally in terms of "child safety". For example, another member of the Wellness team¹⁰ (who is white) was approached by a Black grandmother who has been

¹⁰ The Wellness team is comprised of all white members with only one who identifies as African American.

struggling with getting her grandchild to show up to school for supervised Zoom time¹¹ sometime in February/March. The trust that this grandmother had in sharing and seeking help was also interpreted as desperation by the team member, because the grandmother knew from her own experience of gaining parental custody over the child in the first place, the extent of state's surveillance and control. She had admitted to using corporeal punishment because she could not get them to attend Zoom sessions, and, because of this, the team member was torn on how to respond: to either report her and ask for a wellness check or connect her to services from SEL+ and therapeutic counseling. They ultimately did both. They called DHS to schedule a visit and worked with the district's therapy/counseling department and Emma to set up an appointment for the family. While I did not learn what ultimately happened with the grandma and her grandchild, I learned from the Wellness Team member that they were distraught at having to report but were compelled by legal ramifications if they did not.

In reading this scenario in conjunction with Michelle's testimony through an abolitionist lens, I think about how better served the grandmother would have been if she could access mutual aid services or some kind of immediate intervention that was outside the purview of the state. This intervention could have included SEL-oriented tools and ways of inquiry that get to the root cause of her grandchild's reticence to go to school. Interrogating implicit bias (Schenwar & Law, 2020) and stereotypes of families in economic distress (Gorski, 2018) both may have helped in the decision-making process. In fact, due to the overwhelming evidence of racialized, sexist, and economic bias in mandatory reporting in general (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2011 in Schenwar & Law, 2020), the transformative or at the very least abolitionist

¹¹ This program began in January to help students who could not get to Zoom from home due to parent schedules or any number of challenges. For two hours a day students could be in the library, access their class's live Zoom, complete assignments, receive one on one SEL support from Emma if requested, and a free school meal.

response would have been to have a conversation with her and her grandchild and create an immediate action plan including accountability measures to prevent further physical punishment of the child.

Returning to Jacobs et al.'s (2021) piece, the authors cite a restorative project at a school site that follows in the tradition of mutual aid where collective work is done to build interdependent, and sustainable social relationships as a means of changing punitive disciplinary measures in place (Spade, 2020). They conclude that social workers and any support staff doing this work in schools and elsewhere must paradigmatically shift from “paternalistic patterns of managing, controlling, and correcting BIPOC, economically poor, ...and other individuals and communities who do not fit the White supremacist norm” and instead move towards a more community-centered, life affirming model (p.61). I add that the alternatives the authors propose overlap with key tenets of transformative SEL in schools (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019) and so both the example with Michelle and the Wellness member indicate that as long as there is a connection to state agencies and a legal premise to report situations of child abuse or neglect, moving towards the mutual aid, community-driven and -centered interdependent alternative seems impossible.

However, as the next scenario will show, SEL can become a tool for change through introducing parents to alternatives as part of SEL+'s curriculum and, in doing so, perhaps proactively help stressed parents in a non-punitive fashion. They can also render the school as a truly safe space in which grandparents, like the one mentioned above, could seek help without fear of state agencies removing the child in question or even incarcerating her. Additionally, the next section also reveals answers to another main research question: What are caregivers' and

parents' feedback and reflections on this antiracist, healing-centered, equity-driven curriculum's transformative implications, if at all?

Safety as cultivating relationships: The tale of parental support and SEL+'s role

In a March interview with several parents, one parent stood out from the rest in her experiences at the school. Ronda, a self-identified Black, single mother of two, came from a unique standpoint because whereas she had a child with a "learning curve" as she called it, which may have contributed to them getting suspended three times when they were in kindergarten the previous year, she had nothing but good things to say about the school and its response. In connection to SEL+, specifically, she cited Emma and the curriculum with helping her as a parent. Notably, the other parents echoed many of her sentiments.

"But what I have to say about Marbury is how supportive they were. They didn't look at my [child]. Like [they're] just a bad kid. You know, they didn't treat [them] like, "Oh, [they're] a bad kid....[They] were turning over tables. [They] were kicking over chairs. [They] were putting his hands on students. I mean, if I saw a child like that, I would think that's a bad kid. That's what I would say. But they refuse to just allow [them] to just kind of, just be the way [they] are. **It was what can we do to help? What can we do? What does your child need?** Emma would go get him. They would do the candle breath. They will do the tree pose. They would do you know. And then when I would come get [my child] at the end of the day, she would come and tell me that [my child] did so well. And then some days [my child], didn't do quite so well, you know, but I have to say that Marbury gave me that outlet. They were able to allow me to talk they were able to also allow my [child] to even express the things [they] might have needed to express."

Later she went further to discuss how SEL+ helped her as a parent with both her children and at home. She particularly found SEL+'s de-escalation tools helpful as a parent for herself and her children.

So, you know, you want to be able to make sure that you do something effectively for your children, you don't want them to suffer behind anything that you do. So, I'm glad that SEL+ has kind of even given...different avenues that are even brought up through the school, and I would have never thought that the school would have been able to give me an avenue to help me raise my children. You know, that's something that could go along with them. 'I remember when my mom did candle breath, they might do with their kids.'

Ronda cites the school as a source of support through helping her as a parent. At the end of her statement, she imagines SEL+ activities with her children will be something that they can take with them into adulthood, with their own children and part of memory-making with each new generation. With ATN's 2020 guide, an abolitionist lens entails a true partnership between the school and families in a mutually beneficial, non-punitive, and safe way. The dialogical and reciprocal nature that Ronda articulates between the school and her family, elevation of family voices through her input and healing-centered engagement and most notably the resistance to punitive and deficit-laden responses all were observed in the above testimony. Questions such as "It was what can we do to help? What can we do? What does your child need?" (I bolded above) are indicative of trauma-informed and restorative practices aimed to help get to the root of the issue and support rather than solve through removal of the problem (i.e., the child) (Ginwright, 2018; Jennings, 2019; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017). She also notes how helpful it is as a parent to have positive alternatives because as she states later, she uses candle breath or other tools when inevitably conflict arises between her children or amongst them and she finds it helpful to diffuse

the situation. It may not always work as she admits, but her testimony is indicative of ways that SEL+ has offered practical tools that can also help in increasing positive interactions with the school.

Starla's mom, Leena echoes Rhonda's words focusing on how her daughter's teacher reinforces the SEL+ lessons and connects to his students well. She sat in on Wednesday's morning community building and noted how "they (the staff, classroom teacher, administrators) do help the kids...find their strengths, even their weaknesses and work with them on that line. And that's what Mr. Styles has been doing with not just mine, but all the kids in class ...he like tries to be their friend and tries to like, come to their levels where they can relate. And that's what I like...if I had that kind of stuff when I was growing up, you know, I could be maybe a lot further." While I analyze Mr. Styles classroom more in-depth in chapter 5, here Leena is adding to Rhonda's testimony about support and connection. Noting how the staff supported and built on both the strengths and weaknesses of the student body, Leena trusts the school's motivations and especially her daughter's teacher who has developed a positive relationship with his students. Being a new parent to the school, she immediately noticed the difference in how the adults in the school helped her with paperwork and in helping her child feel welcome. She also noted the stark differences between the staff at Marbury Elementary and at the rural school she grew up in as one of the few Native American students in that predominantly white school. Further on in the interview, Leena also mentioned how her teacher invited, her daughter, Starla who is known to write and perform songs and poetry to enter creative writing contests. For Leena, Mr. Styles' encouragement to enter such contests coupled with the support she received from other staff with paperwork, enrollment and acclimation to Marbury all lead to an overall positive view of the school and its staff.

Trust and safety interlock because, by the school (and Emma) establishing trusting and positive relationships with Ronda the previous year, despite her child's disciplinary challenges, Ronda felt safe sending her children again the following year and, even, sat in during Zoom classes when her schedule allowed and built her SEL+ language and capabilities. The school's compassionate approach of refusing to see her child as a "bad kid" and cultivation of trust through Emma working with her child and providing daily feedback helped her child continue to attend school and be equipped to navigate their learning curve challenges. For example, their speech delays increased her child's communication frustrations and so as she says at the end of her first statement, SEL+ enabled her child to "express the things [they] might have needed to express". Emotional expression is central to SEL+ and most SEL programs. Moreover, providing a space to navigate and express oneself in non-destructive ways (i.e., turning over tables, hitting others) reduces compliance measures in which students are told to breath and calm down without addressing deeper issues and even more so systemic ones (Simmons et al., 2018; Simmons, 2019; Duane et al., 2021). Ronda's feedback and ways she describes the school's response to her child's behavioral challenges indicate movement towards that supportive, healing-centered, trauma-informed response that rejects deficit-laden (i.e., "bad kid") language and cultivates care (Jennings, 2019).

Kundu (2020) defines support as "any factor, whether it be a relationship, a tool, or a system that implicitly or explicitly acknowledges a person's position of need and then subsequently eases that burden through specific pinpointed help." And that further, "having a support means that a person does not simply have to rely on their own internal fortitude to reach their goals" (p. 4). While his argument is centered as a grit framework critique, in which students' internal fortitude is not the reason for their success alone, his definition of support

connects to this project's as well. Using Kundu's (2020) definition of support and combining it with how Jacobs et al. (2021), Love (2020), and Meiners (2016) discuss safety and supporting families and children in the school context, among others, further adds to ways of thinking about SEL+ as a means of providing that safe and supportive space based on the individual needs of the students and their families. A healing-centered, trauma-informed, and (moving towards) transformative SEL program like SEL+ can be the space where students and their families alike work with the school to build a safe and trusting space. While punitive legal parameters continue to limit the impact and extent of restorative and supportive school climates as the juxtaposition of the grandmother and Michelle's testimony demonstrates, in some ways, SEL can be the means by which schools can enact these more proactive, non-punitive, and trauma-informed directions, as Ronda and Leena describe.

Pre- and Post-Distance Learning: When “Their Behaviors Were Just Too Big”

In December, I interviewed members of the Wellness team and the principal. During this interview and in future conversation with Emma, it became clear that discipline while students were distance learning shifted from being less punitive in part due to the absence of any “big” behaviors testing the school's commitment to restorative practices as students returned in late February. In the previous section I juxtaposed various ways the school promoted a safe and supportive learning environment for families. In this next part, I analyze a SEL+ (including a restorative process) response in conjunction with an SEL+ lesson on “Resilience” to illustrate how safety through discipline shifts when students are back in person. Doing so also demonstrates how SEL+ has compliance measures that can also be transformative given the right tools and procedures.

In December and again in January, students were still distance learning but were introduced to the concept of resilience. I highlight the resilience lesson because it speaks to the ways that SEL can be both compliance-oriented and liberatory. It also was used later on when a fifth-grade student was removed for being “defiant.” In this lesson with fifth graders, Emma begins by defining resilience as “bouncing back after things get hard” and then shows the physical effects of problems by placing holes in a playdoh heart for every problem she encounters. They then heard parts of the bilingual book, *Dreamers*, by Yuyi Morales. In this lyrical book, the author/protagonist travels to San Francisco from Mexico, shares some (sometimes funny) anecdotes of acclimating to life as a new immigrant and gains solace at a public library where she discovers the welcoming multilingual, multicultural environment that a library cultivates. Emma went on to share an SEL+ strategy illustrated below:



Figure 2. SEL+ Strategy Graphic

Fast forward to March, and Jessa, a Black female student who was also new, was being removed from her class because she was being “defiant”. Emma was brought in to talk to this new student and they strategized about what made her angry with this teacher. The teacher refused to allow the student back into the classroom without a strategy in place, and one of the strategies that was used is the Stop-Breathe-Choose along with an Emotion Map that helps students reflect on the emotion, what triggers them, and prompts them to create strategies to

prevent that emotion from becoming “big”. Emma worked with the student for at least a couple of days figuring out different strategies and communicating with the teachers. One of the things that Emma said was, “You are going to have to find a way to deal with this teacher because you cannot keep missing class”.

In the above lesson and scenario with Jessa, I found out that Jessa was a newly transferred student and unfamiliar with SEL+ and the school in general. Notably, when the issues of refusing to cooperate with the teacher and not doing what she was being asked first arose, her classroom teacher called in a Wellness team member, Nate, the counselor. As Emma emphasized, “I think that our Wellness Team is so capable. You know, there's just not any punitive language that ever comes out of their mouth, and our mouths. And I think that's the saving grace for us is that even when kids are in trouble, you know, “trouble”, or they've done something that they can't be in classroom anymore, there's just a great support system there for them” (Interview, April 21, 2021). In this quote, Emma noted how the language of the Wellness team was conducive to a positive and safe school climate. With Jessa, while the teacher removed her from the classroom for her behaviors (and did not take the time to look at why she was behaving this way), the fact that people at the school including Emma were willing to do so is important. At the same time, Jessa was tasked to figure out a strategy so that she would be able to stay in class after going through SEL+ practices including the resilience lesson. Placing the onus on the individual student alone based on this scenario contradicts a holistic trauma-informed approach or even a culturally responsive restorative one, too (Gay, 2014; Lustick, 2020).

The resilience lesson could be a compliance measure (Simmons, 2019); however, this interpretation is also debatable. Take 5! (n.d.) a social justice oriented transformative justice

organization defines self-regulation as the “ability to monitor and to modify one’s experiences in life” or to be aware before we act (para 3). For Emma, SEL+’s main goal for the school year was self-awareness and moreover that students are made aware of their emotions, what triggers them, and that they are not alone and are empowered to do something about these emotions.

Transformative SEL centralizes agency and in this case, Jessa’s process with the combination Stop-Choose-Breath and Emotional Map provides her with awareness and practical tools. In this way, depending on how it is applied, SEL+ can either be read as compliance-oriented or agency-building. According to Take 5! and other trauma-informed research (Cole et al., 2013; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016) self-regulation is foundational for resilience efforts. With self-regulatory tools that build awareness capacity, Jessa and others then respond to adversity in their classroom in ways that do not harm themselves or others (i.e., lash out), they also learn more about what triggers them. Ideally, the teacher does as well to prevent disciplinary issues and enable a more positive learning environment. Moreover, as restorative practice, Jessa’s conversations with Emma (and the teacher when I am not there), are “both a reaction to harm that seeks to repair rather than punish and a proactive relational strategy to create a culture of connectivity” (Davis, 2019, p. 19). However, again, if these tools are used to just help Jessa cope with the teacher and the teacher’s own self-awareness (i.e., implicit bias, external prejudices) was not interrogated, then this whole process is not as transformative.

While I see Emma asking Jessa about what triggers her anger and her willingness to write it down but not say it aloud, it also takes time to build that trust and make Jessa feel safe enough to tell another adult why she prefers being removed from the classroom rather than staying. Her act of defiance can be read as resistance (Pyscher & Lozenski, 2017). Based on my limited interactions with this teacher, there is likely a plausible reason for Jessa’s behavior. In

transformative SEL that looks to the root of the issue, adults are part of this equation (Jagers et al., 2018; Simmons, 2017, 2019). In fact, teachers and adults are just as culpable in these situations and antiracist, antibias training is a first step in combatting these disciplinary issues before they start (Johnson & Bornstein, 2020). While there is growing literature around (transformative) SEL work with teachers (Barnes & McCallups, 2019; Domitrovich et al., 2015; Warren et al., 2020) and those few professional development programs that target teachers (and administrators) (Jennings, 2017, 2019; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016), a deeper analysis on educators' self-reflexivity and its effects on transformative SEL is a step for further research. Recent studies also analyze transformative, or equity-centered SEL and secondary school teachers (Lund et al., 2021; Walls, 2021; Warren et al., 2020), but there is still little research at the elementary school level.

Gun Threat: When Safety Protocols are Ineffective and Transformation is Possible

In the final example, I examine an incident at the end of the school year, in April. Emma recounted that staff called the police to the school twice. She was present during one of these incidents. A student had reported that a third grader, Derrick, had bragged about bringing a gun to school. Emma prefaced the story by describing him as, “a kid who, often, he was really a sweet kid. But he often talks big. So, it scares people. He is the biggest 10-year-old I've ever seen in my life.” Because of this, Emma recalled that part of the protocol for such a threat was sending the child to office while the staff member waited for the police to show up: “you wait an hour for the cops to get there. That cop doesn't ever search him. So, the poor kid sitting in Ramona's office with Nate (the counselor). Derrick doesn't know why he's in there sleeping and, most of the time, doesn't understand anything.” Four hours later, another cop comes in and replaces the one who had been standing there. This police officer talked with Derrick and asked

him to remove his coat. Derrick removed it (still confused as to why he is even there), and they found no weapon on his person. Emma criticized the protocol and system as a whole:

“But that system....And, you know, the hard part was...that we have a kid who might have a gun on him for four hours in our school. Why don't we just know, yes, he does or doesn't have a gun. Then you're not worried about 250 people in a school with a kid who's just not in jail, he's just in Ramona's office.”

As Emma recounts her conversation with Ramona a day or so later, she said that the mom was really wanting help for her son. After Ramona “begged” the alternative school to take him because he “cannot be sent back in the classroom. They're too afraid of him” they received approval very quickly.

Emma was clearly exasperated as she was telling the story and also empathetic in her mannerisms and tone as she talked about Derrick. She said that he was “nothing to be afraid of” though he is the largest “10-year-old [she's] ever seen in her life.” It is evident that she along with the rest of the staff believed he would be better served by an alternative school. There were two details that repeated throughout the story. The first was the question: “why was he hanging out with 16-18 year-olds?” and secondly, that his size was larger than the average 10-year-old. Such details add to Derrick's life trajectory if he was not careful (i.e., jail) for he is already being pushed out of the school for being too threatening by virtue of his body as large and his language as older. His friendships with much older teens troubled the adults (and classmates). He was already perceived as much older, perhaps already on the path of delinquency based on the coded messages of fear and “big talk.” All these details lead to such possibilities especially after reading Rios (2011) and Meiners' (2016) books on how delinquency is racialized and gendered.

While boasting about the presence of a gun at school is a very real and dangerous threat and the exact thing that led to police officers being instated in public schools like Marbury to begin with (Emdin, 2016; Vitale, 2018) the ineffective process (waiting four hours) and the staff's response demonstrates that there is still a carceral mindset when it comes to life threatening situations. Police officers are still perceived as protectors.

I thought Emma was going to then go on to state how pointless the police officer was during the gun incident and, perhaps, how a new protocol should be in place that would prevent the police officer from showing up in the first place. Instead, she emphasized that these officers were not properly trained. As I asked more, Emma said that there needed to be more properly trained officers who, like one model officer, Officer Smith, actually “play with the children” in the apartments and were part of the community. He was never called for incidents like the gun threat or de-escalation, she lamented. Reading this incident with the gun boast/threat as safety from the transformative lens, means that perhaps, Derrick did not feel safe at school. Perhaps Derrick thought he would fit in better if the kids took him seriously or he did not think that he would be taken seriously. As Emma noted, ‘he doesn’t know what he is saying.’ She highly doubted some nefarious intention and saw him for the 10-year-old-boy that he was.

In this incident, I note competing views of delinquency and safety. On the one hand Derrick's size and language as well as bragging about a gun deemed him a threat to the student body and staff. At the same time, the school sought out help for him in the form of alternative schooling which can also be interpreted as a form of pushing out as well. The police's role was determining whether there was a weapon. With the police involvement, was that even necessary? An abolitionist stance would suggest absolutely not! I wonder if Emma was allowed to talk with him, would they have called the police? It is very likely that they would have been in trouble by

the district and even parents if word had gotten out. Again, protocols of “safety”, like with mandatory reporting, supersede any alternative procedures. At the end of the day, Derrick was not put in handcuffs as many students who look like him have been, even when there is no evidence (Djato et al., 2021; D. Jones & Hagopian, 2020).

When I think of an SEL+ lesson that would address this, the only thing I can think of is what conversations occurred after the fact. Did students have a conversation about gun safety, feeling afraid, or even made aware of the incident? To my knowledge, none of these conversations took place and the student who was also new to the school, perhaps, had not been there long enough for his presence/absence to be noted. However, what does transpire as a result of this was conversation and movement towards “New Student orientation”. Emma articulated that they need to do more proactive programming for new students. Her suggestion came after Jessa and then Derrick as well as other new students became more frequent visitors to her classroom, where restorative practices and strategies occur. These conversations usually involved the students’ classroom teacher and another member of the Wellness Team. Welcoming new students by meeting with peers and a staff member was one suggestion. Another was having peers lead a tour of the school and also doing more activities that emphasize inclusion throughout the year, rather than just when it was the word of the week. Ultimately, the gun threat was a volatile space in which Derrick could have had life-altering events occur if carcerality was the first step. It also was indicative of how as long as schools perceive police officers as supporters of safety and protection, they will not be able to move towards true abolition and liberation. SEL+ was prevented from making any inroads in this particular incident, but because of it will become a proactive space to prevent, perhaps, in the future, from students feeling the need to brag about weapons and other violent tools.

Concluding Remarks

Marbury Elementary's mission and goals as part of their community-building efforts include creating a safe and compassionate learning environment. Equity efforts around implicit bias training and culturally responsive-sustaining education (CRSE) both emphasize the importance of students feeling safe at school and their families trusting the school to not harm their children (Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative or EJ-ROC, n.d.). This can translate to many policy-driven changes related to anti-oppressive/restorative disciplinary practices, elevating students' and families' culture and identity in the academic curriculum and shifting the deficit/white savior attitude prevalent in urban settings to a more empowering one (Milner, 2015; Ukpokodu, 2016). It also means that when schools implement second wave MTSS, they are seeking to support families in non-punitive, compliance-oriented ways, and reflexively addressing their own positionality and identity in ensuring that they are not perpetuating white hegemonic norms (Johnson and Bornstein, 2020).

As this chapter demonstrated, the school's efforts to create a safe, equitable relationship with its families led to competing frameworks of safety. In the first section, I began with Michelle's testimony illustrating the ongoing tensions social workers face as they navigate the at times contradictory identities of "agents of change or agents of oppression" (Edmonds-Cady & Wingfield, 2017; Jacobs et al., 2021). Part of this tension stems from State protocols like mandatory reporting while necessary to protect vulnerable children from abusive and violent situations, are weaponized against Black and Brown families as data demonstrates (Jacobs et al., 2021; Schenwar & Law, 2020). The school's response to a grandmother's plea exemplifies the range of abolitionist and carceral choices available. While the school becomes part of this (carceral) welfare/foster care apparatus, it can also be a source of non-punitive support for

families like in Ronda and Leena's case. In the second section, I use SEL+ and a disciplinary incident to illustrate how restorative practices when done well can lead to positive change while also the tension of seeking a less disruptive (perhaps more compliant) school climate. And finally, in the last example, a gun threat/boast exemplifies how ineffective current "safety" protocols are while also envisioning what an abolitionist and/or transformative response would look like.

Safety shifts based on the paradigmatic parameters of who is granted a safe space and who is not. When physical, emotional, or bodily harm is imminent or has occurred, the school's choices reflect these shifting paradigms. As the school moved from being online only to in-person, the proximity to students, and relearning of procedures and rules in a "post" pandemic world, the school was poised to enact and continue towards a transformative and abolitionist-oriented way of responding to crisis or disruptions. While ATN's tenets were articulated in various ways such as understating healing-centered engagement, elevating family voice through input and culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogical choices (e.g., the resilience lesson), the overlapping with carcerality such as through police protocols and mandatory reporting laws limited the extent of transformation. This chapter's focus on safety also is purposeful as it sets up the climate and theoretical underpinnings central to cultivating community building efforts. While safety is just one of the many characteristics of a culturally responsive and antiracist and antibias school disciplinary and pedagogical model (Hammond, 2015; Johnson & Bornstein, 2020) it is one that is highly contested and directly connects to conversations around discipline, power relations (i.e., between the school and police), the carceral state and implications for liberation and abolition. SEL (and SEL+ as well) as a tool and paradigm has both spearheaded

that transformative process while also relegated to its compliance and control roots (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; Simmons, 2017; 2019).

Critical urban education scholarship emphasizes how dangerous schools are for Black and Brown bodies regardless of their ages (e.g., Love, 2019; Milner, 2015; Morris, 2015; Rios, 2011) and advocate for liberatory practices that shift that narrative deeply rooted in White supremacy and colonization. Ultimately, when students feel safe to express themselves about the things that matter to them and especially when their emotions get too big, the school is poised to be a space for validation and transformation.

In the next chapter, I deep dive into third, fourth, and fifth grade classrooms and juxtapose my observations with SEL+ classes to illuminate community-building efforts through interrogating “belonging” and all that it entails. In many ways, safety and belonging intertwine and are mutually inclusive, because without having the basics of a safe space for all students and their families, especially historically marginalized populations, developing a widespread sense of belonging is impossible. Moreover, the teachers embody the very nuances and challenges of developing virtual and in-person community spaces while still seeking an equitable learning environment.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: CULTIVATION OF BELONGING AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE CLASSROOM

WITH SEL+

“Our students already are social change agents, so we might as well keep up with them and provide...support” (Emma in an interview, Social Emotional Learning Coordinator)

“What a teacher is, is more important than what he teaches” (Karl Menninger in Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 148).

Introduction: Contextualizing Belonging and Community Building Efforts (in Classrooms)

While in the previous chapter I delineated nationwide trends of the pandemic’s effects, in this one, I focus on teachers and the challenges they faced as they navigated district, state, and local standards and expectations. The fact that state testing still had to occur in the 2020-2021 school year is a testament to the types of pressures these teachers faced. Online learning was a double-edged sword in which transparency both gave teachers and parents an avenue to be in the classroom with their child, while also forcing teachers to be more stringent about curriculum maps and what was taught. As one teacher interviewed mentioned, she was unable to extend lessons like before because of the district’s mandate and because she would “get in trouble” if she did not show that the homework aligned with the district-wide curriculum map (Interview, February 17, 2021). Rhetoric around “learning loss” “the Covid slide” and other gap language (Dickler, 2021; Mader, 2021; Pier et al., 2021) exemplifies this teacher’s anecdote. Notably, parallel conversations about discipline gaps (i.e., reversion to old punitive models) and critiques of how marginalized populations were even more disadvantaged not just financially but also with

increased online policing/surveillance meant limitations to community building efforts under the dome of surveillance (Belsha, 2020; Homer, 2020; Preston & Butreymowicz, 2021). This teacher also noted how the pandemic exposed heightened socioeconomic disparities (echoed in the Economic Policy Institute 2020 report) and that in crisis, private companies were able to be more accommodating than in the past (e.g., providing affordable WiFi to families). Thus, bringing to question how long after the crisis will such accommodations and aid continue and why was this not offered before (Goldstein et al., 2020; Way, 2021). Similarly, the academic achievement, discipline, and SEL+/SEL goals and objectives during the pandemic demonstrated implications for transformative praxis and policy.

Building a sense of belonging undergirds any, and all efforts for a positive learning environment as much of the literature on trauma-informed or sensitive pedagogy (Jennings 2015, 2019; Souers & Hall, 2016; Sporleder & Forbes, 2016), culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy (Gay, 2014; Hammond, 2015; Paris, 2017; Paris & Alim, 2014), and abolitionist and liberatory pedagogy/practices (Love, 2019; Milner et al., 2019; Stovall, 2018; Ukpokodu, 2016) attest. At a basic level, belonging means the opposite of alienation and marginalization. As Milner et al., (2019) assert, cultivating belonging means that teachers “commit to doing anything necessary to keep students in the classrooms” because removal from the classroom community hurts all students’ sense of psychological safety. In other words, removal creates an “I can be next” mentality (p. 118). While distance learning has impeded the interpersonal relationship-building that normally happens, teachers can work on building that trust and safety (Mahmood, 2020; McKenzie, 2020).

Audre, the parent facilitator and only African-American Wellness Team member thinks that “our families see us as a safe place. I’m almost positive, our students see us as a safe place”

and that the common goal of “Marbury [is to be] a welcoming place. And a place that they can feel care...whether they're doing the wrong thing, the right thing...whether they're succeeding in school or not, we still care about them, and every adult at the school wants them to succeed” (Interview, December 14, 2020). Teachers and administrators interviewed echoed her description of the school’s goal and caring attitude. This equity-centered care framework entails connecting to families’ cultures in affirming not superficial ways and expanding culturally-responsive-sustaining education (CRSE) into explicit schoolwide policy and across classrooms. Audre’s comments emphasize a cornerstone of relationship building especially when students enter a system whose colonial and assimilationist roots stifle rather than foster (BBIPOC) joy and cultivate belonging and inclusion (Dunn et al., 2021; Emdin, 2016; Love, 2019). Evoking Karl Menninger, noted psychiatrist and social justice advocate’s words above, the embodied teacher determines the direction of the classroom and extent of community building. For example, the teacher can move towards a restorative justice and culturally responsive or revert to more punitive, surveillance-oriented approaches. As such, questions arise such as: what would this look like in a virtual community? How can community be built in an elementary school classroom reflective of redressing harms/building community through celebrating one another? How does that change when students return to the classroom? And how can teachers promote community building and belonging in ways that fosters individual identity and affirms these identities and backgrounds?

One teacher interviewed added that teachers have become better appreciated by society but as caregivers and not necessarily the value they bring to education (Interview, January 28, 2021), an observation echoed in recent reports as well about teacher stress (Ellis, 2020; Loewenberg, 2020, Will, 2021). Teachers are the bedrock of the school and I want to clarify that

these observations and analysis are not to “blame the teacher” or hold them accountable, but rather to analyze the ways that a teacher’s approach and pedagogical stance as well as familiarity and confidence with SEL+/SEL practices manifested in their individual classroom management plan and topics discussed both on Zoom and in-person. As Domitrovich et al. (2015) conclude in their own study about teachers and a particular SEL gamified intervention, teachers “who felt that the intervention fit their teaching style implemented the intervention more often than those who did not feel like it was a fit” (p.1072). I add that with SEL+, Emma’s dialogical and reciprocal approach which meant including teachers’ feedback allowed more teacher buy-in. She also included teachers in the lessons verbally and ensured teachers had the tools at their disposal. For example, while the fifth grade proved to be the hardest due to scheduling and the tendency not to prioritize SEL+ sessions, by the end of the year (and as students returned to classrooms), fifth grade teachers were excited for SEL+ classes and saw a need especially given an uptick in disciplinary issues. Additionally, Mr. Styles, the fourth-grade teacher would return and get more resource materials after a particular lesson he found engaging such as “Guided Visualizations” in which students are guided through a meditation with an animal friend and safe garden/forest imagery to evoke a sense of comfort, practice attentive listening, and unwind (see Appendix A). Examples like these indicate that teachers saw SEL+ as a resource felt comfortable trying the concepts on their own time, too.

SEL+’s core objective is to support students as social change agents as Emma’s epigraph indicates. Our first year integrating an equity centered SEL curriculum taught us this. Moreover, as we worked towards a more transformative school space which SEL+ supported, we found that building in that activism or at the very least student ownership of their learning shifted the lesson’s impact. Whether it was students leading the class with breathing techniques, sharing

their ideas about anti-bullying initiatives or when they feel included/excluded, some of these students cited these activities and lessons in group interviews. Nelsen and Gfroerer (2017) contend that a sense of belonging is fundamental for student motivation and engagement. Their positive discipline approach, an adaptation of Alfred Adler and Rudolf Dreikurs' philosophy, entails that encouragement coupled with contributing to one's social setting enables deep belonging and connection because "belonging without contribution equals a feeling of entitlement" (p. 3). Using a kind and firm classroom management paradigm, positive discipline intertwines with transformative SEL in that both focus on looking to the root of the issue and putting the child's humanity at the forefront of any disciplinary endeavors. Accordingly, SEL+ enabled and sometimes was unable to promote a positive discipline approach in some classrooms.

Community circle as a scheduled part of the day was set for the last 15 minutes of the day, sometimes called "closing circle". The premise of this was where restorative practices would be implemented as students cooperatively learn how to problem solve and if needed address tensions in the day. From my observations, it also became a space for a teacher read aloud the class Dojo points (an online classroom management software rooted in individual and collective reward or point accumulation), encourage "shout outs" to celebrate and thank one another for their contributions to class or to others that day. This form of celebration and appreciation is also a hallmark of "belonging" if it does not become rote or only connected to academic accomplishments such as "working hard". Most teachers facilitated community circles as "morning meetings" and either began the day with it or set aside the first 15-30 minutes of their period to this effort (Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017). Regardless of whether we were on Zoom or in person, the timing (i.e., beginning of the class period) did not change. Most of my

observations were done in these usually 30-minute slot and depending on the class I would stay afterwards (on Zoom primarily) and observe things like discipline, how teachers and students interacted, and if there were any SEL+ concepts or techniques used and how. While a formal community circle professional development with all staff did not occur until an April, all (third to fifth grade) teachers I observed did some form of this concentrated non-academic effort to build community in their classrooms and not just teach the content and exit Zoom.

However, those who were already inclined to be more transformative or equity-centered and had a firmer grasp of SEL+ or just SEL in general were able to have rich conversations that moved past “if you could eat one thing for the rest of your life, what would it be?”. Such teachers exhibited a comfort in discussing “controversial” topics like Black Lives Matter and provided students space to voice their emotions after volatile political events such as the insurrection in January. These teachers also affirmed students’ identities through recognizing their family backgrounds and integrating it into the conversation. Some felt more comfortable using such silly starters and wanted to bring more fun-filled interaction with games like a Zoom scavenger hunt before heading into the lesson. Such activities are necessary for entertainment but when done exclusively do not push students to think critically and have those deeper, empathy-building possibilities. Moreover, while community building differed by teacher, staff meetings and interviews indicated that all community building should incorporate a Mood Meter, the Word of the Week/SEL topic, and activities that build interpersonal relationships. Relationship building and community building are used interchangeably in the literature or in tandem and so it comes as no surprise that rules and expectations in community circle exemplified many of the elements found in the ATN’s handbook as well as culturally-responsive-sustaining education (CRSE). These rules and expectations spoke of respectful dialogue, attentive listening, and

honoring or respecting each other's stories among others. Figure 3 (on p. 106) under Mr. Styles' profile illustrates both a Mood Meter and the basic expectations.

I will delineate community building efforts through interrogating belonging. Community building, specifically, speaks to not only the overarching theme of SEL+ and the school at large, but also the ways in which Marbury Elementary interpreted community building both online and in-person. Teachers' positionalities and educational philosophies emanated in the ways that they managed their classrooms. Analyzing classroom management styles inform the ways that students and teachers navigated the pandemic and found ways to connect virtually and in-person. As Forbes attests, "creating a trauma-informed school isn't about teachers becoming therapists. It's about creating an environment that focuses on relationship, trust, and emotional safety" (in Sporleder & Forbes, 2016, p. 36). Forbes, who is a licensed counselor, makes this distinction because too many times trauma-informed learning or professional development becomes conflated to mean therapy, too. When instead, the focus should be on relationship building as central to any kind of community building efforts. Moreover, when teachers and staff members focused on the "fix-them" approach to trauma or to students' challenges in the classroom or on the Zoom screen, they are liable to focus less on relationship building for agency (see Take 5!) and more for compliance (Pyscher & Crampton, 2020; Simmons, 2019; Stearns, 2020).

In this chapter, I will introduce the four teachers I observed and interviewed. The classrooms I chose highlight the relationship between hierarchal and horizontal accountability frames (in the form of classroom management and discipline) and culturally responsive or transformative SEL (in the form of curricular choices, teacher-student interactions, and student-student interactions). These classrooms represented the range of such a relationship as well as comfort with SEL+. Mr. Styles' class reflected a strong sense of horizontal and vertical

accountability while also regularly holding space for culturally- responsive topics and transformative, agency-building SEL practice. Ms. John’s class on the other hand had a more fluid accountability structure yet incorporated both compliance-oriented and agency-building SEL and culturally responsive pedagogical choices. Ms. Warren’s classroom reflected a similar style to Mr. Styles and Ms. John while also highlighting the instrumental outlook of a novice SEL practitioner. And, finally, Mrs. Eagle’s classroom, where I was present the least but also gleaned rich insight, was a mix of Mr. Styles’ and Ms. John’s accountability and pedagogical relationship. In each of these classrooms I chose scenes that not only exemplify the ongoing tensions between juxtaposing accountability frames as well as how a SEL lens either pushed teachers towards transformative disciplinary mechanisms or not.

My observations highlighted pockets of transformative and culturally responsive pedagogy in action. In each classroom, belonging was not static or uniform. As such, I will delve deeper into the classroom spaces illuminating how belonging encompasses trust, safety, being seen and heard, and how and when the opposite of those characteristics occurred. Interweaving SEL+ lessons and ways that teachers and students were change agents adds to my analysis because while some moments occurred during SEL+ others occurred outside of it, too. Despite schoolwide support, cultivating a sense of belonging was discussed until the end of the school year and it was evident that this was where the most need was but also where the most strides had been taken to address it. As Simmons (2019), Love (2019), Duncan-Andrade & Morrell (2008) and other critical urban scholars note, belonging is essential for school success and reduction of key challenges exasperated during the pandemic (Milner et al., 2019). SEL+ even dedicated two lessons on “belonging” specifically but arguably other lessons bled into that such as those on inclusion, attentive listening, and when students did the surveys how their voice

matters. Co-constructed frameworks around community building through “belonging” thus indicate another lens for both praxis and theory on transformative SEL in urban schools.

Mr. Styles’ Fourth Grade Class: Firm and Consistent Discipline

‘Politically neutral’ approach that teachers are expected to take is B.S. There’s a major difference between political neutrality (like not explicitly saying who I’m voting for) and addressing blatant injustice and violations of human rights. And unfortunately, many teachers don’t take the approach of validating our kid’s identities and realities by talking about things that will inevitably affect them.

Percentage belonging: 90% of fourth graders surveyed feel like they belong at Marbury. 70% feel accepted in their class, (n=10).

Mr. Styles is a fourth-grade teacher and is completing his third year at Marbury Elementary. He grew up in a predominantly white town just north of New York City. While in college for a business degree, he became involved in multiple nonprofits that engaged in youth civic participation and college mentorship programs that exposed the intersectional nature of social inequalities. Mr. Styles observed that education is the space that can both deepen these inequalities and alleviate them. He also believes that the purpose of education is to give students the ability to have an enjoyable life and have equal access to educational opportunities (regardless of their zip code). Joining *Teach for America*¹², Mr. Styles knew he needed

¹² Teach for America (TFA) has a contentious and complicated relationship in Oklahoma. While many urban school districts use TFA fellows, there has been increased critiques of TFA’s neoliberal white saviorism and saturation of TFA fellows in schools that would benefit from more experienced teachers (Kavanagh & Fisher-Ari, 2017). Some “protections” that TFA members receive including exemptions from district evaluations, its reliance on standardized test scores, de-professionalization of teaching, and links to harmful deficit-laden narratives of communities of color all add to these contentions (Brewer & deMarrais, 2015).

classroom experience regardless of his future educational career plans. Outside of teaching, Mr. Styles has coached basketball and even conducted socially distant basketball camps with his students during the pandemic. Currently, he plans to go to graduate school in a couple of years and eventually become a principal. He describes himself as a focused, goal-oriented, serious, and family-oriented educator.

As Mr. Styles demonstrates in his quote, he decries that teacher are weaponizing neutrality in a way that undermines students' identities and expressions. This quote exemplifies his curricular choices whether they are in his social studies or reading selections and in his community circle space as well. Au (2021) writes of a pedagogy of insurgency in which teachers see "schools as powerful sites of resistance and rebellion, spaces, for building critical consciousness and fostering collective action for justice" (p. 119). Au (2021) thus believes teachers can remove the "cop in their head" (Boal & Epstein, 1990), and act in ways that undermine the current punitive system. Mr. Styles' curricular choices and classroom management style exemplifies this contradictory space where insurgent subject material pushes against a firm discipline style. I observed Mr. Styles in multiple Zoom classrooms and what stood out was that he was one of the few teachers who consistently issued warnings, had a behavioral chart and in-person schooling resumed, his students were attuned to following directions and transitioning with "call backs" and responses. An example would be when Mr. Styles issues directions and says, "when I say go", the rest of the class replies, "Not yet!". Observing in his physical classroom, a mere 10 minutes into the community circle, Mr. Styles issued two warnings: one for not facing the front and the other for talking. Then after a short restroom break, students returned for their math lesson. It was then that he issued at least five warnings, all related to facing the front, not following the directions to cap the Expo markers for

their mini whiteboards, and talking, finally resulting in one student, Calvin, being moved (the first of the consequences after three warnings per the class consequence ladder) (field notes, April 5, 2021).

And yet, what occurs next exemplifies how teachers can either deescalate or escalate behaviors. As students are working on their math classwork, Mr. Styles discreetly chatted with Calvin at his new desk and before I left the classroom, Calvin was contributing to the math lesson and his demeanor had changed from open hostility (hunched shoulders, head down, stomping to the new seat) to smiling and laughing and engaging in class activities (field notes April 5, 2021). In this way, Mr. Styles classroom space is both firm and fair. While I was astonished at the number of warnings, and the almost clockwork style of call-backs and timing of activities, it seems that his rapport with students established via Zoom and in-person, led to a trusting and positive relationship in which students do not remain hostile or disconnected from the classroom after being disciplined, countering a common occurrence cited in the literature (Hammond, 2015; Milner et al., 2019; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017).



Figure 3. Mr. Styles' Community Circle Opening

Figure 3 is a screenshot from one such community circle meeting and while the format of the Mood Meter changed from a blank one without emojis to one with emojis, nothing else changed

indicating that for Mr. Styles consistency is key, which was echoed in his interview as well. Every morning, Figure 3 would appear on the screen and then he acknowledged the students' moods and would share his own as well. As the school year progressed, Mr. Styles found creative ways to expand students' emotional vocabulary including the words on the Mood Meter. After prompting students to send him their student commitments in the chat (which were a collaborative effort prior to my first observation), and which also indicated their participation in the "Do Now" activity, he would move on to the next step.

A teacher commitment would come next and chosen from a list that included "assess students to show what you know, don't give up on students, always explain the instructions, help students after they've done their best, give challenging work, and give rewards for great work" (field notes, December 1, 2020). A teacher commitment exemplifies a horizontal accountability paradigm in which students and teachers agree to set goals for themselves and their class. While indicative of equitable classroom management and relationship building, I have not observed any accountability in which students respond or give feedback to the teacher regarding how well or to what extent the commitment was managed. If these commitments are more like goals, the verbalization is as far as the accountability goes. Notably all his instructions were in written in Spanish as well, though the activities themselves (i.e., meditation) would remain in English. A Headspace™ meditation or a short yoga video preceded the "Do Now" and preceded the final part of community circle, a discussion at the end. On Fridays, Mr. Styles had students watch CNN10, a news segments tailored to grade school students. In it stories ranged from actual current events (e.g., Halloween during Covid-19) to how Amazon returns can lead to more waste and its effects on climate change and the economy (field notes, October 2, 2020). And on those days, meditations were shorter or removed altogether allowing more time for conversation.

Community circle was also a time to incorporate current events or topics especially when certain emotionally charged or just important events occurred. In the following scene, from January 8, 2021, Mr. Styles opens the space to discuss the insurrection in the capitol. He puts two images side by side (Figure 4). For clarity, Image A was of Black Lives Matter protests at the Capitol steps in June 2020 (after George Floyd’s murder) and Image B was of the insurrection (January 6, 2021).

Image A

Image B

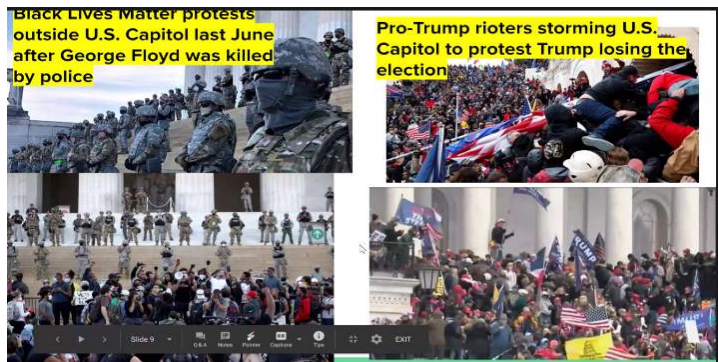


Figure 4. Juxtaposition of Protest Images

He prefaces by stating: “This is a safe space, and we are going to start by showing you two images neither of which are violent. You are not in any danger. The point of this discussion is to help us understand why some people in this country are treated differently than other people” (field notes, January 8, 2021). By assuring students that they are not “in danger” eases tension for both his white and BBIPOC students who attended that day. Also, setting up the conversation as more off a historical one and inquiry-based one, enables students to freely speak, which it does. After asking students of their initial thoughts on what they notice distinguishes the two images, Ray, an energetic Black male student, recounts a show he had watched the night before,

Chicago P.D. In the episode, “a white police officer shot a black man because he would not go on his knees!” Ray exclaims.

Mr. Styles: “What did you think about that, Ray?”

Ray: “That was mean! Just--he could have tased him or something or went over there and put him down.”

Styles: “Why do you think the police officer did that?”

Ray: “Because he wouldn’t listen maybe.”

Styles: “But you think that the police officer should have tased him?”

Ray: “Yeah, because the taser wouldn’t kill him.... And they had a big protest on there too! And they were shouting ‘Black! Lives! Matter!’” (Chants in a rhythm with hands pumping at each exclamation point)

Styles: “Yeah, I mean, that represents what is going on in the country, too! That is cool that you watched that. Other reflections?”

Farrah (a white female student): “There is a lot more people on the Trump side than the BLM side. Which I don’t think is right because a president losing an election isn’t as bad as someone’s whole culture being spoiled?” (She was asked to repeat the last word, but she had frozen and so Mr. Styles paraphrases her comment by noting how on one side the people were advocating for basic human rights while on the other people were upset that the president lost (his election) which is “something to think about”).

The above exchange is an exemplar of moments of connection in Mr. Styles class. Relationship building efforts center making connection with students to help a child feel safe and comfortable in the classroom (Milner et al., 2019; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017; Souers & Hall, 2016). This was one of the most animated classes I witnessed and not once were students reprimanded or given warnings, indicative of the engagement of this topic and of spending 18 weeks on procedures and expectations. Moreover, in the above exchange, active and attentive listening in the form of affirmations (Hammond, 2015) occurs as students are discussing and making connections with their own lives such as Ray's comment on the TV show. In that exchange, Mr. Styles prompted Ray to think about the justification for the police officer's actions and, for Ray, the issue was the extent of the violence rather than the actual act of policing. Mr. Styles reinforcing that the show reflects the current dialogue around police brutality as well as his closing comments lead students to think more critically about the justifications behind protesting in general.

A hallmark of both a pedagogy of insurgency (Au, 2020) and of culturally responsive and equity-oriented classroom management (Hammond, 2015; Milner et al., 2019) is not only the subject matter (i.e., analyzing protests) but also the interactions themselves. Validating students' responses by asking students to repeat themselves and thanking them for their contributions all model ATN's (2020) framework of a dialogical and reciprocal process as well as elevation of students' experiences. For Mr. Styles, student voice is central to community building efforts (Interview, January 22, 2021). While the teacher is the one initiating the community circle discussion with prompts and framing of the conversation, a conversation rather than an interview transpired, and students felt safe contributing and sharing their opinions about the ethics of the protests like Ray and Farrah.

Mr. Styles rationale for what to include in his community circle talks reflects that of a culturally responsive and student-centered approach. For him, the topics (like the insurrection) must be “pertinent to the lives of [his] students” and because “like in terms of identity, something that they relate to, but also like giving them an understanding of like, what protests look like why people protest” (Interview, January 22, 2021). Referring to this day, he mentions how he plans to do a unit on protesting by teaching about the civil rights movement and the Chicano movement later in the semester. He also added Native Americans and water rights after a student who is a tribal citizen mentioned that as an example of protests. His classroom was full of activism-oriented posters and connections such as posters in English and Spanish of the Chicano Movement, Civil Rights Movement and “Future is Female” very much in the tradition that Au (2021) describes (field notes, April 5, 2021). The posters and Mr. Styles’ Bitmoji™ (virtual avatar) donning a BLM T-shirt on his Canvas classroom the whole school year illustrated that Mr. Styles’ wants his students to know of his activist stance and allyship with BLM and other social justice groups. While I do not know if he shared this with his class, but through personal communication I know he was also present at the local BLM protests during the summer of 2020 and thus does not just have the merchandise but also attends protests. When we note the recent passage of Anti-CRT legislation (Schumaker, 2021), his stance is deemed even more radical and insurgent.

Ultimately, for Mr. Styles, a successful year of community circle means that his students are more self-aware, can self-regulate more, are more civically engaged, and build on each other’s ideas without his prompting (Interview, January 22, 2021). He envisions students as critical and inquisitive as well as able to develop regulatory practices conducive for complex conversations. From the examples above, Mr. Styles’ classroom is emblematic of the struggles in

incorporating transformative SEL and classroom management both virtually and in-person. Mr. Styles integrates social justice topics and leans towards a pedagogy of insurgency (Au, 2021) while also building relationships with his students and creating a safe, culturally responsive-sustaining (CRSE) and equitable learning environment. However, there is still space for more transformative classroom dialogue that enables students to be less concerned about compliance (SEL as instrumental) and more about interpersonal growth. Student interviews indicated that students saw SEL+ as a breathing and movement intervention and while connected to the identity-based lessons, did not retain it as anything more than just a topic to discuss.

SEL+ provides a space potentially for transformative elements related to a positive discipline space outside of external rewards and punishments (Homer, 2020; Nelsen & Gfroerer, 2017). However, that is contingent on the teacher's interpretation of SEL+. For Mr. Styles, self-regulation is paramount in helping students be more focused since

mindfulness practices allow students to push negative thoughts away or replace them with more positive thoughts...[which] can help improve a child's educational outcomes...I think it also ideally can instill like a sense of independence in students because it's like, 'oh, like I like I can do these things myself. I have these tactics that I that I can use in order to like restore.....You know, conflicts with other people'...But also, you know, if I'm feeling something inside, I have ways to respond to it (Interview, January 22, 2021).

When asked about the equity-centered/culturally responsive SEL+ lessons (prior to our last few lessons on "belonging"), Mr. Styles was worried that self-regulation was being pushed aside. Echoing scholarship on how regulation and mindfulness improves educational outcomes and

overall wellbeing (Durlack et al., 2011), he emphasizes those techniques in his community circle with daily meditation (from Headspace™) or yoga. Also, while compliance is a common critique, Mr. Styles' interpretation translates to self-regulation that leads to independence and agency (i.e., Take 5!) as students have the tools to respond responsibly and proactively in emotionally charged situations. His classroom management, however, leaves little room for pockets of play from which deeper reflexivity can occur (Doll, 1993) contrasting with Ms. John in the next section.

Ms. John's Third Grade Reading/Social Studies Class: Clinical Disciplinarian

My philosophy, I just think that we all we all should be equal. And everyone deserves to have an equal education. And that everyone needs to be treated as individuals. Because none of these kids are the same...Of course we teach culture we teach about people's backgrounds, but there's also gonna be some fun, you know?

Percentage belonging: 66.7% of third graders surveyed feel like they belong at Marbury. 66.7% feel accepted in their class, (n=24).

Ms. John has been teaching for twenty-five years but this is her first-year teaching at Marbury Elementary and teaching third grade exclusively. She has taught primarily fourth and fifth grade within the district. Her interest in teaching came after she spent eleven years in counseling working with elementary-aged children and early adolescents at a psychiatric facility in the city. Due to burnout, she felt that she could better serve young people as a teacher and returned to school to receive her degree in elementary education with an endorsement in social studies. Her previous career in mental health informs her approach to teaching and relationship building with her students. She puts the mental health of her students first and intentionally chose to work with students who are coming from less privileged backgrounds. Growing up in a Mexicali border town as white and Choctaw, she strives to introduce her students to diverse cultures and backgrounds including outside of the scope of race and culture such as teaching sign language. Ms. John describes herself as an educator who likes to learn new things and wants to build her students' confidence to be lifelong learners.

Entering Ms. John's classroom, your eyes are immediately drawn to the colorful posters of Native American art and different cultures represented on her walls. In her classroom students are in color-coded pods (with different colored tape on the desk indicating the "territories") but also move around much more than in Mr. Styles' class. They were more active, some sitting on their stomachs in their chairs and stretching, others moving freely to sharpen pencils, borrow supplies from a nearby classmate and chat. Yet, they quickly quiet down when she begins to talk. When I came to her classroom right after Mr. Styles, I was immediately struck by how much less rigid the structure was as well as the lack of dividers that separated students' desks from one another due to Covid precautions. On this day, Ms. John was explaining to the students about the new emojis which were essentially magnetic buttons that they were going to decorate as their own and place on the magnetic Mood Meter located next to the front door. Previously, on Zoom, Ms. John would ask students and remind them about the Mood Meter and would always be sure to describe how and why she is feeling the way she is. Desks were arranged in rows and one desk right in the middle was designated as the space for all the art supplies including Elmer's glue, sequins, feathers, pipe cleaners and popsicle sticks to help decorate the unique emojis. Ms. John made it clear that these emojis would be anonymous as students would file in and place their emoji on the board. Then the class would discuss their overall mood.

In the following incident, I focus on the ubuntu principle and culturally responsive one of being seen and heard.

*A young boy named Simon who was at the back and watched everyone making their emojis and then never gets up or engages. I try to coax him or at least ask him if he wanted to go to the teacher, but he shakes his head no. Finally, Miss John turns around and sees she has been ignoring him unintentionally and so she quickly exclaims, “Simon, you were so quiet and polite back there I did not see you!” And he lights up and walks to her and she gives him a hug and says, to please let her know if she doesn’t see him. She says, “next time, please say, Ms. John and **I will always listen to you, okay?**” He nods and gets to work on the emojis. His whole demeanor changes and the rest of class he is animated and talking with classmates and seeing what they are up to whereas before he was not at all.*

Ubuntu pedagogy is premised on the humanistic principle that “students have the innate desire to be curious and to learn naturally when their humanity and dignity are valued and affirmed, and when they have the freedom and space to engage their curiosity, imagination, and intelligence” (Ukpokundu, 2016, p. 155). Simon was essentially ignored though not purposefully and because of that he was not part of or felt like he belonged in the activity, refusing to engage until his teacher acknowledged him. While Ms. John could have apologized or even reprimanded him for not speaking up, she instead validated his hurt feelings and reiterated that she “would always listen to him”. Moreover, Ms. John’s quote indicated that for her treating students as individuals and also equally are two essential aspects of her pedagogical and interactive approach to her students. That phrase is so powerful as Hammond (2015) writes because when you make a promise to a child (and keep it), that trust builds. “Trust begins with listening” and this

scene illustrates Ms. John's aiming was to do so (Hammond, 2015, p. 77). Ms. John also hugged Simon who is rather small and made him feel like an important member of the class, that his absence during most of the activity was very much a mistake on her part. Both these pieces help more shy students like Simon feel like they belong despite not being as loud as their classmates. While I did not see a similar incident occur the next time I was in her class, I did note that Simon was more willing to raise his hand and even walk up to make sure he was heard indicating that her promise from before gave him permission to have more of a presence in the classroom.

In complete opposite, Rhianna, another third grader, remembered in an interview how she felt ignored in her music classroom (3.31.21). When I asked her about times she felt unfairly treated, she recalled how:

Rhianna: "When I'm in music class, sometimes I don't get picked for the stuff that I want to do. when she sees me raising my hand and then I'm the only one raising my hand and then somebody else raised her hand, their hand and then she picks them."

Me: "So even though your hand is first, and you were the only one raising your hand, you weren't picked on?"

Rhianna (nods): "If I'm the only one or if I'm the only one raising my hand and sheeeee.... she just randomly picked somebody."

Me: "okay yeah and how does that make you feel?"

Rhianna: "I feel shut down and left out."

In the above exchange, Rhianna frustratingly recalls her music class. When I clarify about whether she felt like that in other classes, she said no. In this case, her music class is the opposite of her experience in Ms. John's or her other teachers. Feeling "shut down" and "left out" are both the consequence of not being seen or heard, in this case literally. Rhianna and Simon had opposite experiences in their respective classrooms, and it showed in the ways that they behaved and in Rhianna's case. Another important incident that speaks to Ms. John's approach to teaching as well as a complicated moment is when Daryl, a Black male student, responds to Ms. John's question about the Rise and Shine video and whether or not they recall watching it last week, by saying, "Yeah, it was a white girl dancing" and then he moves from side to side in his desk modeling the dance moves. Ms. John takes off her glasses looks him in the eye as he is sitting right across from her desk and says, "how would you like it if someone said, 'it was that Black kid over there?'" That is kind of rude, Daryl". He mutters a little and then she asks him, if being Black and White makes us different, and he pauses and then nods. She seems taken aback, pauses like she is thinking about what he said and within seconds, says "you're right, but we still love each other, right". She repeats this a second time but as a statement and not a question. And he nods.

Two major interpretations arise from this scene. The first stems from Ms. John's defensive stance of "how would you like it if...". The situation was made more serious by Ms. John choosing to problematize the mention of White skin. Yet, if that was the identity marker that Daryl remembered, was it really so objectionable and insulting? If I was a teacher in that classroom, I would not have even made it a teaching moment or did more than just ask further questions about what they remembered the girl was dancing

about (she was making physical movements that connect to the emotions they wanted to focus on for that video). The other interpretation while positive, nonetheless, it is important to note that despite Ms. John's message of love and acceptance at the end, her initial reaction problematizes such a stance as it demonstrates her escalation of a minor comment/observation. While Ms. John had been repeatedly reprimanding Daryl which could have contributed to this "final" disciplinary turned teachable moment, that does not negate the escalation, nor the ways colorblind narratives emerge.

Ms. John had the option to assert to Daryl that "we don't see color" or some formation of a colorblind narrative. Such a damaging narrative would have reinforced that skin color does not matter, when in reality it affects every aspect of BBIPOC students' lives. At the time, I was frozen not sure where she was headed when she initially reprimanded Daryl with her tone in asking him how he would feel if people were referring to him as the "Black boy over there". However, as the conversation continued and the class had quieted down to hear what going on, it seemed that Ms. John was more interested in making sure that her message of love and acceptance was articulated and nothing less. She also could have insultingly asked Daryl to, "breathe through racism" as Dena Simmons argues most SEL programs do (cited in Jacobson, 2021). However, instead, Ms. John's inquiries led to Daryl noting that at the end of the day, caring for one another regardless of skin color is more important and validating his observation that skin color matters and is noticeable (Hammond, 2015). Moreover, Lucas (2008) advocates for colorblind classrooms that look at students as individuals and for teachers to make their classrooms open to discussing cultures and lived experiences, both of which are key aspects of Ms. John's pedagogical stance and philosophy. In this interpretation, a

colorblind narrative would have been the opposite of harmful and instead would have led to powerful teaching moments as students and teachers both learned about why it is important to not see each other and describe one another just by the color of our skin and all the socially constructed and systemic power dynamics that come with it. Nevertheless, the escalation of “White skin” as a problematic identity marker equal to pointing non-white skin indicates more antiracist self-work is in needed.

While Ms. John’s interactions with her students are grandmotherly and similar to Emma’s in terms of proactively explaining to students and utilizing SEL+ language related to community building efforts (inclusion, belonging) and validating students’ feelings first, in interviews, Ms. John utilizes biases and deficit-laden language when describing her students and their families. When I asked her about any support that SEL+ or the school can provide to be better prepared as a trauma-informed educator, she laughingly replied:

I just need you to fix them...I need you to make their parents better...You know this. I really do think that it's a community issue. And we really as a society need to offer more in the school...Or in these housing projects, where people live Section 8. We do offer parenting classes for GED classes. Some of these people don't even have cars. But if we had classes here at the school, they could come and study for their GED. How helpful would that be? I think that it would also show the kids that if their parents are willing to go to a class or get their GED, they would be more motivated to work on their own education. But you know, that goes back to that cycle of poverty.

As Gorski (2018) writes, stereotypes about cycles of poverty in which education will pull students and their families out of this cycle are prevalent. While Ms. John's intention is to motivate students through having their parents as role models who show them the value of education, that is also a common stereotype as well, that families in poverty do not value education or school. While she argues that society has a role, she then puts it on the school to provide that support which is certainly part of a mutual aid model that sees the school as a site of aid rather than of punitive or State-sanctioned accountability. Nevertheless, the most poignant and jarring phrasing though said in jest was to "fix them". This phrasing connects to Bornstein's (2015) work and Pyscher & Lozenski's (2017) on pathologizing behavioral issues and in this case socioeconomic issues that are less an individual problem and more of a societal problem. Rather than fixing them, an abolitionist or transformative approach would be to see what supports are needed to help families get their GED (if that is what they want) such as childcare, groceries, mutual aid for tutoring and anything else. Assuming families want and will get out of the "cycle of poverty" through education is both damaging and unhelpful. It is also emblematic of White values connected to the myth of meritocracy and other such fables used to help white hegemonic notions of success flourish in schools and elsewhere.

Ultimately, Ms. John and Mr. Styles are foils to one another in terms of classroom management styles and experiences that inform their pedagogical and curricular choices. While both discuss social justice issues related to race, power, and instill the importance of voice and agency in their students, they also have different ways of enforcing classroom rules and of interpreting the challenges that their families face. Ms. John's clinical background perhaps makes her more ready to diagnose and "treat" her students

while Mr. Styles' firmer discipline style mixed with sarcastic humor allows his students to connect with him while also knowing their boundaries. In each case, students felt like they belong in their classroom due to different characteristics. Mr. Styles instills trust and safety while talking about controversial issues and validates and affirms his students' opinions. Ms. John also validates and makes a point to see and hear her students even the shy ones making her classroom a welcome space where they are not ignored.

Ms. Warren's Third Grade Math Class: Novice Teacher Experience

Notably, Ms. Warren while similar to Mr. Styles in her discipline style maintained a novice status with SEL+ (which she vocalizes in her interview) and therefore did not feel comfortable moving past the instrumental aspects (i.e., breathing exercises, yoga poses, mood meter). She also used affirming language like "happy to see your faces" and "great job, buddy" or positive disciplinary notes like "I know it is hard to pay attention on the screen with your puppy close by, but can you try?". During moments of extreme stress (e.g., repeated redirections, little videos on, students not following along based on the screens that she sees on her own screen), she gives a stern talk about expectations, how education is important, and that the third graders are individually responsible for their learning and success.

In many ways, as a private school student from the upper East Coast, Ms. Warren notes the ways that school does not always fit what the individual student needs and aims to change that as a teacher. As a white teacher, she recognizes that she comes from a different life experience, than that of her students, and seeks to honor her students' diverse backgrounds and identities. She also believes in the transformative power of a

well-rounded education. After receiving a degree in law and policy, she planned to attend law school but decided to join *Teach for America* first while she finalized that plan. Now, five years later (at the time of this study), she has found her passion lies in teaching and has entered graduate studies to one day be an administrator. She describes herself as a high energy and consistent educator who maintains high expectations for all her students.

And so, while I will not provide any in-depth examples as I did in the other classes, I will note that due to her novice status coupled with first year at Marbury Elementary, Ms. Warren's math class was one in which I observed SEL+ at its most basic and foundational level. Not an indictment or judgement but observation that despite this foundational instrumental application of SEL and understanding of SEL+, Ms. Warren maintained a positive classroom environment that included the Peace corner (as noted in my in-person field notes), and clear and consistent expectations (like Mr. Styles). Her reliance on Ms. John for the more counseling-type of interventions (voiced in an interview) also meant that Ms. Warren knew where she needed support and sought it. Ms. Warren's class was a midway point between Mr. Style's strict disciplinary approach and Ms. John's more laid-back, clinical one. She had not been properly trained in SEL or how to attend to trauma/misbehaviors in a therapeutic way and so oscillated between these two styles during my observations. Notably, in late January, Emma had a last-minute conflict and could not teach the SEL+ that Friday afternoon. Ms. Warren decided to lead this SEL+ lesson in which students did student-led yoga/breathing exercises ("Move"), played a game about recounting a positive memory of the week ("Play"), and discussed their emotions using the mood meter ("Regulate"). In this way, Ms. Warren checked her understanding of the curriculum and even asked the students if they thought she had

covered all the SEL+ basics, ending with a positive message their faces and smiles bring her joy (field notes, January 29, 2021). When I shared with Emma how the third graders still held SEL+, she was excited to hear how Ms. Warren, the newest teacher exposed to SEL+ interpreted SEL+'s simple motto. In this scenario, the motto's basics indicate its instrumental basics and also the embedded relationship building and professional development potential as lessons continue to be conducted while teachers are in the classroom (and paying attention to the lesson). Next, I look to Mrs. Eagle whose classroom had some intensely emotional moments.

Mrs. Eagle's Fifth Grade Class: Stern and Loving

They need someone who shows up every single day, and does the same thing, has same rules. And even if the kids throw stuff in your face, "I hate you," "Whatever, that's fine. I love you. I'll see you tomorrow." And that's kind of the way I was raised was like, "Okay, this is, you know, gonna love you no matter what." And I've always tried to be that with my students, no matter what. No matter who you are....

Percentage belonging: 75% of fifth graders surveyed feel like they belong at Marbury. 87.5% feel accepted in their class, (n=8).

In the final vignette, I look at fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Eagle. In this example, I note how moments of tension after an equity centered SEL+ lesson illuminates how important the adult facilitating such conversations are and how SEL+ enables such conversations from the onset. While I spent the least amount of time in her classroom, the moments I did were complex and rich. It is in her classroom where strong conversations about race, relationships, bullying, and inclusion took place. What I was told and

witnessed through the minimal time I was there, was that Mrs. Eagle was a hardworking consciousness veteran teacher who was attune to her kids' needs and Emma always made sure that the lessons correlated with those needs, especially when kids were back in session. In this lesson from January 13, 2021, Emma is introducing fifth graders to Ruby Bridges, and integration to set up inclusion and the next week's lesson, specifically on belonging. Emma introduces Ruby Bridges story with Norman Rockwell's painting, *The Problem we all live with* (1964), which shows Ruby dressed in white as she is escorted to school by U.S. marshals. As students are asked to think about their own schooling experience, Emma asks students if they feel like at the school **“our students of color and our white students get along?”** Students reply in the Zoom chat (which is how the majority of fifth grade preferred to communicate), with yes, no, sometimes. And one Mexican American student, Maya writes, “well yes, but, I also feel like there will always be some people that really don't respect it but try to find some way to ignore that.” Emma's verbal response is that it looks like this is an area to work on and some of the students nod. However, it is in the next section where things get more tense or perhaps appear so.

Emma asks students, **“How might we be able to make a change in that so that everyone feel like they belong, and everyone feels like they are included?”** Some type “IDK” in the chat and so Emma prods by sharing that research shows it is important to read books about people who look different than us and talk about those differences to build empathy, she reminds students of the previous week's lesson on Dreamers (i.e., the Latinx population and immigration in general), as an example of where we can think about inclusion. Mrs. Eagle interjects and asks students how they would feel if they

would have to be six years old and escorted by Marshals every day to school for a year. In the silence that ensues, Maya types in the chat, “how come we only ever talk about black people? i mean i love learning about black empowerment but i just wanna know” (sic). The adults look a little taken aback and I for one wrote in my notes, “feeling a bit heated, brain going miles a minute of how to respond to this question. Is she upset we are only talking about the Black community right now? Why?” Emma, without really skipping a beat, takes a deep breath and in her normal tone just says, “that’s a great question, Maya, thank you for asking that. Well, we started with Native Americans in Thanksgiving time, and then Ruby Bridges, and then Dreamers. So, you all were a little behind. But that is because these are the biggest groups, to be broad and touch on these big groups. And we can’t talk about everyone, who would like to talk about Native Americans next week?” Some students reply, “yes” in the chat and then Maya texts, “no i dont wanna learn about the native americans i wanna continue learning about the black people (sic)” Emma nods. And then she prompts students to fold hands together, turn to someone on the screen and tell each other “I am glad you are here” before the Zoom call ends.

After this class, Emma calls me, and we unpack what Maya said. Emma recounts that she was feeling very nervous but held it in because while she knows she could have given a more substantive answer connected to why the BLM movement even exists, for example, she was glad that Maya felt “safe” enough to ask that question. For Emma, she did not see Maya’s question as racist, or challenging her authority as the teacher in the (Zoom) room, but rather as an honest inquiry or curiosity that warranted an equally honest and open response. Chang and Conrad (2008) note how students initiating

conversations about race are conducive to true antiracist dialogue. This dialogue means that the adult does not override the child's language and experience by presenting themselves as an authority figure, but rather let the child lead the inquiry. When Maya texts that she would like to continue learning about "black people" it indicates that perhaps Emma's response satiated Maya's curiosity enough to want to continue learning about these struggles instead of moving on to another group. Also, that would have been a good space to acknowledge Maya's response and to gauge how Black students felt about Maya's question. But it was also two minutes before the class was supposed to end and so that timing may have been a factor for not responding to that latter remark. Ultimately, in Mrs. Eagle's class, race is a contentious topic but when addressed in a more relationship-based way rather than a reactionary one, and emotions are kept in check (such as Emma's nervousness and her self-awareness of that physical discomfort) not affecting her response, a SEL practitioner can shift a tense, possibly irreversibly contentious moment to a more transformative and agency-building one.

SEL+: Looking ahead and Conclusion

Balancing between identity-centered lessons using literature, multimedia, and/or games and the "usual" self-regulation strategies such as breathing techniques and guided visualizations proved challenging. All four teachers interviewed noted this tension as they saw SEL+ as a toolbox curriculum for helping themselves and their students during those "big emotion" moments. In each of the classrooms described in this chapter, community building efforts centered around relationship building and incorporation of SEL+ as well as SEL (i.e., RULER, see Brackett et al., 2019) tools. The extent to which SEL+ enabled

a shift in classroom management styles or responses to disciplinary infractions shifted as students went from online to in-person classes. In some ways due to the increased disciplinary issues, SEL+ regained its momentum as a restorative practice outside just being an instrumental curriculum with breathing techniques and yoga moves. As I move towards concluding remarks in the next chapter, I emphasize that these teachers and their students epitomized the inevitable tension and added challenges of attending to transformative and culturally-responsive-sustaining education choices while also trying to survive a pandemic. While “crisis” becomes an exaggerated term in many urban settings and an excuse to opt-out of more rigorous, uncomfortable, transformative curricular and disciplinary policy choices, they can also be spaces for innovation and change.

Each classroom illuminated the various ways that teachers and students’ lived experiences impact SEL in ways that can either move it towards transformation or not. In Mr. Styles’ class, community building efforts revolved around creating a firm, consistent and safe climate. Students felt safe sharing their opinions on important topics and both culturally responsive pedagogy (Hammond, 2015) and insurgent pedagogies were observed (Au, 2021). Mr. Styles’ activism outside of class embedded into his curricular choices and yet the SEL+ concepts he practiced, modeled, and added into his classroom, were related to self-regulation and punitive if not careful. His interpretation of SEL+ meant self-regulation for agency-building, but then how much can be built if the classroom is so stringently managed, and each minute is planned. On the other hand, perhaps, the consistency and firmness allowed for safety in sharing political and emotionally driven materials and was developmentally appropriate. In this way, tensions between accountability paradigms and the push for further liberatory social justice

practices means going to abolition and co-conspiratorship, for example (Dunn et al., 2021), is the next step.

In Ms. John's class, as a mental health practitioner, she exuded many of the key characteristics of a successful SEL+/trauma-informed/sensitive educator class including seeing and hearing students and affirming their identities/opinions, but this was in tension with deficit-laden descriptors and pathologization of families. In this way, while she was also intentionally teaching culturally responsive curricula and habits, some reflexivity (observed in her pedagogical practice of sharing emotions and techniques to move through them and in interviews), could have led to more of an explicit emancipatory outlook without deficit-laden language. Similarly, Ms. Warren's self-proclaimed novice status precluded her sense of agency moving forward. Her classroom management style as a medium between Mr. Styles and Ms. John demonstrated how a novice status (with SEL integration) looks like while also struggling to fulfill district and schoolwide academic mandates.

Finally, Mrs. Eagle's class was one in which a watershed moment occurred and through Emma's facilitation, students felt safe and validated in sharing their inquiries around race and the topics that were discussed around that. SEL+ provided the tools and its fluidity is both its strength and its weakness. Again, tensions emerged not just because of the subject matter, but also in the ways that the adults responded to the outburst. The situation could have easily escalated and as chapter 4 highlighted with Jessa's case, there is escalated interpersonal conflict between teachers and students in fifth grade. Jessa's case is also one that demonstrates the interconnectedness of belonging and safety. As a

new student to the school, she has not developed the relationships that Maya did, but then, what frameworks are in place for teachers (and students) to ensure that future students like Jessa do not feel the same way and consequently pushed out of the classroom due to the lack of connection or teacher's stress. Ultimately, as Ronda said in the parent interview, "that plus I feel goes a long way. That plus means A LOT of different things. I think that the plus part really sits in Emma's lap. And I think she's very aware. I have to say, I feel like that woman is extremely aware of what is going on around her and possibly what these children need." That plus does go a long way and moving forward, learning from this past year will enable that plus to move closer towards full transformative SEL that helps students *and* teachers build a school where everyone feels like they belong and are safe and who's individual identities are validated and affirmed.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: LOOKING TOWARDS A TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE

“Abolition is not aspirational, but it is an adventure. When you’re on a quest, anything is possible. It’s up to all of us to create new possibilities, new routes, new pathways, new visions, together” (Schenwar & Law, 2020, p. 238).

Summary of the Study

Reflecting on this past year and sifting through the 83 hours of observations, 13 interviews, and informal conversations with students and staff, hope emerges for schools to become liberatory, identity-affirming, abolitionist spaces. While Marbury was not alone in facing the crises of this past year, it was one of the few schools in the district looking to enact restorative practices, articulating equity centered SEL language, and intentionally working through implicit bias (including naming White supremacy) training at the elementary school level. The overall school climate was supportive and collaborative as staff, families, and students interviewed all had positive responses about their feelings towards the school. From Rise and Shine videos to daily contact with families, communication was the norm, and this led to feelings of connection and care as the school became a stronger source of support. The 2020-2021 school year was the second full year of implementing SEL+ and the first year integrating an equity-centered curriculum into the program. Much like how first-year teachers experiment, analyze, and reflect on their practice, this concluding chapter will analyze “lessons learned” at the curricular and schoolwide level. Research questions are revisited for further analysis. I then

synthesize the ways that “safety” and “community” were in tension and in tandem with transformative SEL efforts. Whether a classroom teacher, SEL practitioner, administrator, counselor or preservice teacher educator, the challenges associated with implementing antiracist (SEL) curriculum and practice in radical ways that lead to substantive change, requires reflexivity and time. This study thus adds to the research on transformative SEL, in the elementary school level, specifically.

To summarize the study first, this critical ethnography was conducted at a public elementary school whose students and families are economically marginalized, racially, and culturally diverse. The school has been called a community school because of its student population primarily living in walking distance to the school and the number of community-oriented services that it provides such as social work, meal programs, and counseling. In my first year at the school, I conducted a pilot study in which I learned more about the school, its staff, and how SEL+ functions in the classrooms and the school as it was initially implemented. The following year, we added an equity component. With the equity-orientation and restorative justice initiatives in mind, I intentionally introduced theorists and works (Ginwright, 2018; Jennings, 2015; Love, 2019) to influence and inspire SEL+'s equity curriculum planning. Notably, there were already lessons and language in place that alluded to Abolition Teaching Network's (ATN) tenets including ones around belonging such as an activity using potatoes to discuss differences with the conclusion that all the potatoes are potatoes. In this way students are taught that despite our differences, we are all human. What I added to the curriculum extended this version of belonging into more explicit language around inclusion through elevating student and family voice in the curriculum choices, healing-centered approaches, dialogical activities and resisting punitive/deficit-laden language. In this way, we were specifically looking to attend

to the growing critiques of SEL work as lacking attention to systemic challenges, including racism (Simmons, 2019). If we were to summarize the additions, it would be intentionality around identity, resilience, and Black, Brown, Indigenous, people of color (BBIPOC) joy. As an example, I list the elements of the “belonging” lessons with how it began as level 1 and what we added this year as level 2 and 3.

Level 1 (original): Belonging as **celebrating differences**. Embracing our diversity with each of us having value.

Level two- (Students are asked): What are some ways that we can be more **inclusive** in our families, schools, and classrooms. Our job is to help others feel included as well as make sure we are as well. (Voice to others when we feel left out, too)?

Level three (The final objective and the one we were working towards for the end of the year): Developing an **activist** disposition, what can we do as 3, 4, 5th graders when we see injustices being done in society, in class, in school? What can we control and what can we do since there are historically oppressive systems in place (e.g., housing segregation; Rothstein 2017)?

Ultimately, this critical ethnography employed both a critical pedagogical relationship between Emma and I leading to real-time changes as we implemented the equity component for the first time this year. It also led to broader conversations related to critical consciousness at the individual (myself, Emma, and teachers) and systemic level as we looked to the ways that our interactions with parents/caregivers, and the school’s relationship developed throughout the school year.

Research Questions Revisited

The research questions that directed this study and grounded my thinking were both ambitious and attentive to the various voices I wanted to center in this work. It also helped me when I started deviating towards topics such as distance learning, technology's effect on classroom management, and the limitations of Zoom community building are listed below. Under each question I will reflect and share the ways in which my study answered these questions and ways in which these questions were not quite answered.

1. How does the implementation of SEL+ help students, their caregivers, teachers, and administrators understand injustice to better transform school culture into one that centers healing, families' voices, and uplifts teachers' embodied experiences?
 - a. How are students' community circles reflective of redressing harms/building community through celebrating one another?
 - b. How does SEL+ account for transformative language and dialogue around oppression, discrimination, and both personal and social conflict.

This question has multiple parts and so not all parts were ultimately answered. It, however, was one of the central questions that I continuously referenced in my interviews and observations. SEL+'s implementation was inconsistent because of the distance learning. Accordingly, while the language we used in our description of the equity component and ways to think about SEL+ in the classroom (as proactive, healing-centered, uplifting teachers' experiences), was connected to these questions, I struggled to completely answer the transformative piece as much as I had hoped. As Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrated, the limitations of transformative language in many ways stemmed from various reasons including teachers'

processing of what that would entail. The ways in which “culture” was defined and analogous to race made it difficult to move past racial bias, especially since that was also one of the major areas covered in professional development as well. The school’s staff, teachers, and administrators all valued parents’ input, centering families in their decision-making. My role turned to more intentional shifts that moved past the logistical conversations (i.e., getting hotspots, food deliveries to students) to deeper conversation about school culture. Some examples of this deeper shift include: brainstorming and implementing ways to discuss from deficit-language (which still existed) and attitudes towards transformation included initiatives such as providing leadership roles for students, recentering lessons to not just talk about race but communities of color (e.g., Dreamers and the students’ home lives, too), and making sure the classroom space once students were in-person did not revert to pre-Covid disciplinary practices.

Chapter 5’s dedication to teachers’ experiences coupled with my own observations in the SEL+ classroom/class time led to the conclusion that teachers were certainly the agents necessary for transformative change to occur. Again, not to add to the burden that teachers already bear and especially during the pandemic when stress, anger, frustration was at an all-time high (stemming primarily from district mandates, technological learning curves, and general fatigue), but in many ways SEL+ bolstered equity-centered learning in the classrooms that were already oriented to that while re-emphasizing in those that were not seeming to. All in all, when it came to the core first question, SEL+’s inclusion of conversation about the challenges facing communities of color and ones around what changes to make in the world and our role as citizens in this society opened up dialogues within caregiver, student, administrator and teacher interviews that seeped into the classrooms as well.

Asking students to family traditions and memories while also processing the shared struggles of distant learning, personal issues at home, and the pandemic intensification of these issues, helped make community circles healing ones. The community circles when they connected to SEL+ Words of the Week served to cement the concept and activities more smoothly than when Emma introduces it to students for the first time. While community circles were not used to redress harm since students were not in physical vicinity to one another to harm/have conflict with one another for most of the school year, they were used to build positive relationships. Mr. Styles' class used shout outs. These are positive, encouraging comments that are framed as "Shout out to Amy for trying her hardest even though it was hard today" or "shout out to Bill for being a good partner during reading and helping me understand the assignment". Ms. John and Ms. Warren's classes used "say something positive" or positive question stems to encourage an optimistic feeling before dismissal. Mrs. Eagle encouraged students to share their feelings (especially through chat when they were online) and made community circles ones that included games and fun activities so students would build positive memories with one another. Finally, for the last sub-question, through the "Equity unit" we were able to account for transformative language especially around social conflicts and the dialogical aspect was certainly addressed. What we learned was that these dialogues take time and build on one another. The intentionality that we had was present but would need improvement the following school year. Such improvements include planning to space certain lessons out more and integrating a more systemic way of addressing oppression, discrimination, and personal and social conflict through hypothetical scenarios and those that naturally arise when students are in the same physical spaces. Also, expansion of the "Equity unit" to more of an integrated equity throughout the

school year in different ways would help develop that transformative school culture that we were aiming for.

2. How are students' cultural identities addressed in and impacted by the curriculum? How are teachers' understandings of their students' cultural identities affected by the curriculum?

My second major research question was the most challenging because of the cultural piece. While we used culturally responsive sustaining pedagogical resources, there was not a widespread definition of what culture entails. As Ladson-Billings (2009) has noted, race and culture are conflated and many times when teachers mean race, they use the more generalized term of "culture". I asked teachers both individually and in the focus group interview what their definition and view of culture was and their articulation included race, food, language, and family traditions. Teachers cited the desire to be inclusive and affirming of students' individualized identities and creating a positive learning environment for all. Notably, online learning led some teachers to shy away from "controversial" topics around race and current events out of fear of what parents who are listening might say while other teachers did not feel that same wariness. All teachers noted that they appreciated the integration of the identity affirming aspects of SEL+ and the equity lessons that utilized various important historical and current figures, but also observed that there was a lot packed into one 30-minute lesson. Prioritizing the mindfulness aspect along with emotional regulation to reduce outbursts and foster positive self-control was cited repeatedly. And so, the oscillation between these priorities while also aiming to explicitly discuss cultural differences as a positive (not-colorblind approach), was an ongoing challenge and is further discussed below. This question helped me to pay closer attention to the "cultural" aspect of our whole enterprise.

3. What are caregivers' and parents' feedback and reflections on this antiracist, healing-centered, equity-driven curriculum's transformative implications, if at all.

My final question proved to be the most clearly answered, due to the parent interview. While I would have liked to have interviewed more than three parents and more than once such as at the beginning and end of the school year, I was able to gain insight into the ways that parents understood SEL+ and observed its merits through the interview that was conducted. Each parent provided an important perspective that stemmed from both their time at the school, and, also from how much exposure they had to the curriculum. Since all classes were conducted on Zoom until the end of February 2021, parents had the opportunity to sit into the classes and witness it firsthand. Parents' exposure ranged from a few months to more than a year. Leena was new to the school and had been there for a few of the classes, but already noticed the emphasis on emotional identification and ways to access those emotions. She lauded the notion of helping students feel comfortable talking to adults that are not necessarily blood relatives and to have a space in school to discuss life skills outside of academic ones. Ronda cited the Ruby Bridges lesson as one that taught her new things about her and the joy she witnessed in her children as they learned about this iconic and important figure in civil rights. Finally, Nikki, the quietest of the three, has been at the school for several years and noted the differences in her own children as they were exposed to SEL+, echoing the positive appraisal that Leena and Ronda articulated. The "plus" in SEL+ was deemed a fluid and flexible piece which parents appreciated and optimistically anticipated for future years.

Interpretation of Findings

I now move to the actual themes that were identified in this dissertation and their broader implications. In the first, I look at how the themes of safety and community-building and how their interpretations bode positively towards a radical, abolitionist future such as what Dunn and his colleagues (2021) and Mariame Kaba (2021) envision. In the second section, I look at the limitations that we faced and move from there to lessons learned as a researcher, too. And finally, to future research considerations as well as plans for the school.

How “safety” and “community-building” move schools toward an abolitionist future

Safety at the surface level meant protection from the coronavirus and supporting students and their families with online learning. However, as chapters 4 and 5 illustrated, it is due to the intensification of the pandemic that teachers, staff, and parents felt more connected to the school than ever before. The school was central to providing services outside of just academic support. While this was not new for the economically marginalized families that attended, Emma and other adults articulated how the school stepped up even more with connecting to charities and local churches to help fundraise rent to prevent evictions, advocate for free internet access for families, wash clothes, and do several tasks that would not traditionally be connected to schooling and the school site. Moreover, in many ways, what the pandemic showed and illuminated was that for years, schools have not just been places where learning is supposed to occur, but also sites of social service and in fact social services that the State failed to uphold or did so punitively. For example, many times, Emma mentioned how the cafeteria staff and others would have a lunch and food pantry line with no questions asked since the Spring of 2020.

Social services aside, then turning to the notion of safety, this theme had broader implications for the ways it can disrupt the school to prison pipeline. Since safety has been historically used to justify the introduction of police and punitive discipline to prevent delinquency and protect staff and fellow students, the ways in which it was enacted, especially in ways that disrupted the status quo and by whom bears recognition (Milner et al., 2019; Wang, 2018). In chapter 4 as I noted the various ways that school officials at the schoolwide level negotiated safety, I also can extrapolate that these instances are not singular to just Marbury. There are subtle and overt ways to disrupt the school-to-prison nexus and moreover to challenge White supremacy in all its facets including enactment of culturally-responsive-sustaining educational practices (CRSE) and addressing challenges in a more humanizing way (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; EJ-ROC, n.d.). Subtle ways could be simply providing social services like Michelle, the social worker did, including washing families' laundry and building connections with local nonprofits or connect with families with other community members to help build partnerships that extend past a one-time aid. It is the framework of building capacities instead of just giving away food to feed a family once. Overtly, it could be in the ways that Emma or other Wellness Team members interpret mandatory reporting policies and build "radical trust" and "radical joy" and support. Abolition is not a social justice trend but a commitment towards the indispensability of all people (Dunn et al., 2021) and so in that case no child, family member, or community member should be removed. While there are real cases of child abuse and neglect, there are also plenty more in which racialized/gendered/economic bias was the real culprit. And moreover, putting offenders in prison does little if anything to dismantle systems of poverty or the conditions that led to the abuse or neglect in the first place (Levine & Meiners, 2020).

In chapter 5, I shifted from schoolwide conversations about safety and the tensions that emerged from key instances such as a gun threat/boast, when a grandparent asked the school for help while admitting to spanking their grandchild, and students were pushed out of classrooms until they could figure out ways to regulate and essentially “conform” to standards to be allowed back in. Instead, I delved deeper into classrooms which I observed throughout the year as they each had not only nuanced incidents of moments of safety embedded in a larger conversation about belonging and community building, but also, they highlighted distinct classroom management styles and teacher personalities. As this section focuses on the pockets of transformation and where disruption occurred, I look at the incident in which Mr. Styles had a conversation with Ray about police brutality witnessed in a TV show. While Ray did not necessarily move towards an explicit stance about police presence even being necessary, he did note that the use of the gun was excessive. Moreover, in this exchange, Mr. Styles modeled CRSE practices of dialogical and reciprocal engagement. For Mr. Styles, his goal of building his students’ individual agency and ownership of their opinions, means exposing them to topics that are relevant to their lived experiences while also teaching them the skills and techniques that he thinks will help them navigate when these topics become emotionally driven. In many ways, Mr. Styles sees SEL+’s purpose as instrumental and programmatic, but it is also a way of living, too.

In comparison, Ms. John uses SEL+ concepts and interactions (as well as ATN’s tenets) as she makes sure that her students are “seen and heard” and her colorblind interpretation is a message of love and not erasure. While not necessarily intentional about stating the concept, she models emotional regulation as something we all have control over. As she shares with students her emotions and aspects of her life related to the topics, her vulnerability gives students permission to also share their own emotional struggles and personal ones as well if they choose.

In this way, belonging and safety go hand in hand in Ms. John's class as students feel comfort that they will not be ridiculed or discriminated against because of their stories and experiences. And, yet the clinical background is also one which insidiously leads to deficit-laden language and a "fix-them" mentality antithetical to an abolitionist approach (Love, 2019) or healing-centered engagement (Ginwright, 2018), both of which call for humanization and systemic reckoning rather than an individual one.

Ms. Warren's classroom as a melding together of Mr. Styles firm style and Ms. Jones' therapeutic style embodies the ways that a novice teacher interprets SEL+'s tenets. While she acknowledged her feelings of inexperience and fear of "messing up," she also noted that she felt more comfortable as the year progressed and even after a semester, she felt confident enough to lead an SEL+ lesson at the last minute. In this way, Ms. Warren's class also shows that the instrumental aspects of SEL+ are the first to be internalized followed by the more nuanced lessons on identity, social change, and attending to systemic challenges to the status quo. Healing-centered (Ginwright, 2018) as opposed to trauma-informed in the pathological sense is also something that Ms. Warren articulated as necessary for positive shifts in student- teacher relationships and for her own students who are coming from very challenging home lives.

And, finally, with Mrs. Eagle, the classroom is also deemed a safe space, at least in Emma's SEL+ class when a student asks a tense question about why she is only learning about "black people". The Latina student types the question which also adds to the tonal miscommunication possibilities since if she had spoken it, the question could have been read differently. Nevertheless, Emma's SEL+ orientation and way of life leads her to give Maya, the student, the benefit of a doubt and she answers her question with no judgement or reprimand. And later, when she mentions it, she sees the incident as one emblematic of the safe space she had

cultivated in this short time with the students (online) and was proud of this. In another classroom, this may not have been the case and in fact could have led to some escalation and further racial tensions.

In many ways just like students are change agents as Emma stated in chapter 5, teachers can be as well. In fact, one of the ways in which Emma seeks to implement a more activist disposition like the Level 3 of the belonging lesson above, is by uniting under an umbrella of social change. After a separate conversation that was more reflective about SEL+ and the equity curriculum, this was a key point to build upon, that is to move towards a broader theme of “being social change agents” and what characteristics and ways you can be one or already are one. In this way, we are shifting from always assuming that students need us to tell them that they are “being the change they want to see in the world” and instead that they are in fact already doing it, even if they are not fully aware how. In fact, as Dunn et al., (2021) note as many students who are Black, Brown, Indigenous, and people of color navigate their white heteropatriarchal world they live in, they need to find those spaces of “radical joy” and “radical imagination” in which they are not relegated to second-class status through the hidden curricula of tracking, low expectations and now recent legislations that prohibits the discussion of critical race theory in K-12 schools, despite it never being taught.

The limitations of safety and pitfalls of belonging

While I did allude to some of the less transformative aspects of safety and community building as articulated in chapters 4 and 5, in this section I will go further to discuss ways in which safety was limited and in which belonging could also be harmful. At the schoolwide level, if there is an overall climate that renders itself “unsafe” for some and not all, then there is a risk

of inequity all around. If students do not feel like they can trust the school to keep them safe from discrimination and prejudice, then they are less likely to feel like they belong there, too (Dunn et al., 2021; Love, 2019). Also, students can note the discrepancies and hypocrisies when the school motto might be “all are welcome” but then they or their friends are constantly feeling the opposite. While I did not witness such clear discrimination or feeling of “not belonging,” Emma’s informal survey with fifth graders prior to Maya’s inquiry did uncover Black/White student tension. Teachers also articulated that there was a racial divide leading to group work that was purposefully (racially) mixed. The teachers’ description of such self-segregation in a pre-pandemic world, makes me wonder about the extent of continued self-segregation after a year of distance learning. Nevertheless, it is important to note that such a divisive climate exist(ed) at the school.

Moreover, one of the major limitations is that despite the clear push towards support, care, and agency-building, care that does not lead to tracking or other harmful practices in school like in the case of Ronda’s child, school officials, generally were not quite ready for abolition in the way that Love (2019) and Dunn and his colleagues (2021) articulate. They were at the cusp of this as they noted how there was little need for police officers and in fact the ineffectiveness when they had a real “safety” threat with a gun. Nevertheless, Emma and other adults involved in the incident simply said that they wish they had the “community cop” Officer Smith to take care of these sort of incidents or at least better trained ones. Yet, again, reform becomes the norm and as I learned from Emma her own trepidations about venturing into “prison-industrial complex abolition” out of fear of being deemed too radical or the more conservative staff and administrators, and thus risking her job. Her own journey towards this moment is occurring as we complete the project. Although abolition was taught, it was more about the end of slavery and

the concept of “abolishing old systems” to make way for new, better ones. All true, but not quite reaching that PIC element. As she does the inner work of excavating her White privilege and ego which she names in conversations as we moved into this topic near the end of the school year, she found that the language of “social change agent” is one that is tangible and from a curricular perspective, one that she can build our equity-curriculum around. The notion of coconspirator as a verb and not a noun comes to mind here and in the previous section with teachers like Mr. Styles and Ms. John. For ally to shift to coconspirator, these individuals and others in the school as well would need to “leverage their power, privilege, and resources in solidarity with justice movements to dismantle White supremacy” and the systems in place that keep BBIPOC students and their families marginalized (Dunn et al., 2021, p. 220). I think that Marbury was an excellent site to observe allyship and the elements of self-reflexivity and the foundations for coconspirators in the future.

Further limitations include the extent to which the school was able to shift from an individual understanding of belonging to a systemic one. This means that when students feel like they belong, it is through the affirmation of their individual identities and that of their familial or collective culture and not because of conforming to White hegemonic rules or protocols. This balance and constantly checking the Whiteness of those enacting SEL approaches and curricula is necessary. Many times, Emma would bring up the desire to ask families since they are right there on the Zoom screen, what they thought of the lesson (such as on Ruby Bridges) or others and what their insights are. She was then excited to learn that parents did have positive feedback (without my prompting) during an interview. Taking advantage of the direct access to families and parents through Zoom (when they are available) was a lost opportunity.

The greatest area for improvement at the school and one which I was only able to give a bit of help with was creating parent-school partnerships that went beyond the school communicating with parents what is going on. Even though the principal articulated in the focus group interview and at staff meetings, this desire, she also noted that it is an area of improvement. While all staff interviewed agreed that parent communication has been unprecedented, there is still need for parents to become part of the decision-making process whether it be about pick up/drop off to field trips and upcoming events, and that parents' voice is important and should be honored. Moreover, the explicit conversations and professional development around implicit bias especially around stereotypes surrounding economically marginalized families (who also have added racialized and gendered biases against them as well), indicate that one major area that has been articulated in the literature around lowering expectations for BBIPOC students is being addressed (Gorski, 2018; Love, 2019).

Lessons learned

This project reaches outside the scope of just lessons learned in terms of praxis and content. In many ways, I learned a lot of how to conduct a critical ethnography and how navigating the various roles of researcher, volunteer, consultant, and teacher. The following lessons will help future ethnographers doing this work and learn from the mistakes we made along the way.

1. Curricular lessons: slow down and spread out

One of the main challenges with enacting an equity component during distance learning and one in which students are expected to somehow get instruction on a regulation, a concept (like inclusion), read or do an activity with it, and then make connections to broader social challenges or make self-to-world connections all in 25-30 minutes is ambitious. Accordingly, we spent time

reorganizing and Emma was resourceful and creative in finding SEL+ tools that already teach that concept or which can be adapted to do that work. Nevertheless, based on conversations with students, the community piece and inclusion one was able to be internalized along with different breathing techniques, visualizations, and making the connection between emotions and our actions. Self-awareness, which was the SEL-specific goal Emma had in mind was achieved, but to take it to a level of activism and as change agents, the social justice component would mean conversations that name the importance of self-awareness to build empathy and be agency-building. The interconnectedness embedded in mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), would then be transferred into practical applications that go beyond the individual into the notion of the individual as part of the larger community (and the importance of doing the work to improve it).

2. Curricular challenge: make connections

Another area that I felt I contributed to and where Emma admitted needed the most support was in finding ways to make it all connect in a clear and articulate way. Perhaps one way I think I should have really done more consistently is apply Wiggins & McTighe's (1998) backwards design model to then develop a final product that was a theoretical social change agent or culturally-responsive-sustaining outcome, but rather a more tangible one. This could mean that at the end of the project, students would have an exit project or goal that they would have been working towards and thus the curriculum would build capacity to reach that goal. For example, the Words of the Week would help students see the larger picture, such as what an inclusive society means in all sense of the word including race, class, gender, and religion. Helping students see the connections between the Words of the Week and other concepts and SEL+ activities allow for more review and more intentionality that could potentially be internalized through repetition. For example, as Ramona, the principal, suggested, the school should have

“Equity” as the overarching goal such as this year’s focus on community building and belonging. The topics could be all about being a “Good Leader” or in Emma’s case, “A just social change maker” leading to words of the week or month around “EMPOWER, REBUILD, COURAGE, BRAVERY, RESILIENCE, JOY” to name a few.

3. Logistics of conducting an online research project

Depending on when this dissertation is online, there could potentially be more distance learning and research conducted solely online. With the advent of more virtual schooling opportunities and options because of the pandemic, perhaps the virtual setting will become a more dominant research site. For me, what I learned from conducting most of my study online is that it is challenging when you do not have the rapport built in from previous in-person relationship-building. However, if possible, especially as an ethnography, being immersed by being in classes throughout the day and having students exposed to you, your face, mannerisms, and ways of interacting such as through the chat prove invaluable when later conducting interviews. Moreover, those interviews especially with younger students should aim to be closer to 30 minutes. I tended to have too many questions and would sift through to make sure to ask the ones that had the most fruitful or ongoing discussions with little need for follow-up.

Adjustment was key. The first couple of interviews were like trials as I learned better how to leverage class experiences, I observed into the conversation to help contextualize questions better and engage students to respond in ways germane to the question. Flexibility in teaching and in any research project is essential, and especially so in a space with new rules and added stressors increasing like this past year. Flexibility is another trait I had to embody. I also found the limited time (of 30 minutes) forced me as a researcher to make that decision of what was central to my study and was just extra (such as questions related to distance learning). I could

have easily written a whole dissertation just on experiencing distance learning and the feelings, interactions, and results of that! And the ways the school addressed (or not) those challenges in affirming and transformative ways both virtually and in-person (Lazzell et al., 2021; Love, 2020).

4. As a researcher: code switching and self-reflexivity

A hallmark of the critical ethnography approach is to engage in self-reflexivity to constantly check one's own privileges, biases, and ways of being as they connect to the subject at hand. Some of the ways to combat the ethical dilemmas that inevitably arose in this study was to consistently ask questions and change opinions and ideas while also maintaining an open, non-judgmental mind. In many ways, I would apply the SEL+ concepts we learned such as those related to non-judgmental, being open and grounded to the common humanity we all share to check my own personal disagreements with the way a teacher reacted to a particular incident or to what I heard at a staff meeting (about a third grader being “manipulative”), and language around deficit to name a few. Madison (2012) writes about code switching as another method critical ethnographers employ as a “delicate balance” where the participant can both feel respected that the ethnographer embraces their culture or field styles or insulted that the outsider ethnography is wanting to be like them (p.123). I connected with this concept as I would go between parents (and be told not to use sophisticated language) while also not wanting to sound like I am anything more than a student doing research. I wanted to connect with parents without feeling like I was talking too simply in a way that would be insulting. I also would have to code switch between classrooms with some classrooms open to my participation and inviting me into the conversations (including via chat) and others preferring that I be a faceless observer. And finally with students, I would have to code switch and perform in a way as a teacher or substitute

as I would have to ask for the removal of distractions or moving away from a space that was too loud to hear. But then I would make sure to be more of a student, not wanting to distract from the lesson at hand or be that evaluative presence.

Future research

As I look to the future of this research, I take note of some key spaces for development. The first is in the realm of family-school relationships. As one of ATN's major tenets is uplifting student/family voice and developing positive relationships, I add Dunn et al.'s (2021) language of radical love, trust, and joy, for such relationships need to be cultivated. The school was going to hire a parent facilitator who would act as the school representative and voice of the families living in the nearby housing projects. However, budget cuts and Covid-19 did not allow this position to be developed further. Audre, the parent/family facilitator had a unique role which was not able to be used to its maximum capacity due to the daily emergencies and support she had to give. And so, with the articulation of a desire for a Parent Teacher Association (PTA), the development of this could be a direction this project takes. Documenting how the PTA develops, its role, and the ways that it affects school-parent partnerships would add to this project's scope about ways to build liberatory and transformative partnerships between families and schools, especially when the families are the ones initiating and fostering this development. Community building occurring outside the school would be rewarding for students to see and to note how this direction would impact conversations related to deficits or negative stereotypes (e.g., poor parents don't get involved in their kids' schooling; Gorski, 2018) towards parent-school relationships such as through the development of a PTA. With the possible implementation of the anti-CRT bill and the fact that many of these parents would be economically marginalized,

racially, and culturally diverse would add important voices to the conversation, given the popularity of the NPR series, *Nice White Parents*, for comparison (Walt, 2020).

Another area would be to see why abolition is not discussed in schools or rather what is stopping the push to full radical abolition (Love, 2019). In many ways, just in Marbury Elementary, the school's shifting role from State actor (i.e., calling the police, following mandatory reporting laws) continue to tether it to the punitive aspect of the system, while its more supportive, mutual aid inspired role (i.e., washing laundry, providing food, and school supplies) also then connect it to these abolitionist principles. If schools have some connection to those more carceral aspects of government and state sanctioned control, conversations about removal of campus police officers and divesting from such options seem untenable. Nevertheless, there are examples all over the country, primarily after George Floyd's murder, where youth activists, community leaders, and educators rallied together and severed contracts with local police departments from Minneapolis to Oakland to recently in Los Angeles (Djato et al., 2021).

And, yet there are still educators and community members who argue that severing such ties remove the possibility of building bridges with law enforcement when students (re)enter their communities outside of school (Camera, 2021). With these ongoing challenges in mind, I wonder: How does one go about promoting abolitionist values while also centering families' lives and leveraging their experiences to better improve the school? What mechanisms are in place to help a school move towards and maintain itself as one of support rather than compliance? How can urban sites like Marbury be spaces of transformation especially when they are in more politically conservative towns or states? As part of this line of inquiry, I see my research taking a duo-ethnographic approach such as with Emma and I excavating and doing the

self-awareness and self-study work that then integrates into the curriculum. The curriculum is still an imperfect product of imperfect people and so this time of self-reflexivity coupled with abolitionist-oriented and driven goals will only move SEL+ further towards liberatory pedagogies. Thinking of Dunn and his colleagues (2021) who argue, in part, that full liberation cannot occur in schools as they are now, means that perhaps the future of SEL+ lies not in schools even, but in the spaces where it began, in community halls and after school programs. Also, if not fully liberating BBIPOC, there is still the possibility of opening space for such conversations to occur, a safe and trusting space to explore these often competing and tenuous notions of “safety” “culturally-responsive-sustaining education,” “abolition,” “belonging,” and “liberation”.

Future for the school

While I am optimistic that we did some significant groundwork in shifting the SEL+ curriculum to be more culturally-responsive-sustaining and transformative, there are some changes that may affect the next year’s equity initiatives we planned. There are also some exciting opportunities that will enable this curriculum to both expand but also makes me wary of how it will be morphed if at all as it spreads (see Meiners, 2016). Emma will be returning to the school, but it is unclear since she will be a classroom teacher, how the SEL component will spread beyond her classroom. As a *Teach for America* (TFA) candidate, which she applied for to help her gain elementary education certification, among other reasons, she received permission to return to Marbury and do SEL work, but they also required her to be a classroom teacher. I also plan to present my findings about SEL+ to the district to adopt its tenets in more than Marbury Elementary. The key strategy is that this curriculum is local and adjustable to local needs rather than stemming from a national curriculum that may not necessarily make the state

or city connections needed to take SEL to a deeper community-oriented level. We also will include the equity piece as a key component that must be included in any SEL curriculum, regardless of if they choose to allow SEL+ to be taught in other schools or at least allow for expansion of the training since that was halted due to Covid-19.

On a positive note, as I concluded my research, I learned of an amazing afterschool program that some of the students I interviewed were part of and the timely initiative they developed. Mr. Styles was the faculty sponsor and as part of Changemakers¹³, fourth and fifth grade students pick a topic and develop a campaign to either spread awareness or fundraise or whatever the objective might be. One of the main objectives of this organization is to build community organizers and leaders through such local projects while also helping address societal needs. In Marbury Elementary's group, they decided to tackle police brutality. They recorded a video where they asked for community volunteers to be on a panel to speak about police brutality. They asked for police officers, community members (like people affected by this), and volunteers in nonprofits or those doing things related to criminal justice changes. This student-led organization is emblematic of the type of transformative and important work students do when given the opportunity. While I did not get to follow up about the panel event, I was excited to see students showing that social awareness and activism that SEL+ hopes to foster.

As I conclude, I maintain that optimism and criticality with which I started this project. Evoking Schenwar & Law's (2020) diction of "adventure," "quest," and "possibilities," I see that my journey with Emma and with the amazing parents, students, teachers, and staff at Marbury is

¹³ Changemakers is an organization whose mission is to build the capacity of young people to be social entrepreneurs in response to challenges in their communities and the world. Their three-step process, frame, convene, and ignite along with connections to national and worldwide sponsors, leads to actionable solutions or changes in participating communities. Educators in this program do receive a stipend to be facilitators (Changemakers, 2021).

just the beginning. In many ways their own adventure with abolition and transformative SEL is also beginning and moving forward towards many avenues that bode well for the economically marginalized and racially and culturally diverse populations they serve.

REFERENCES

Abolitionist Teaching Network. (2020, August). Guide. Abolitionist Teaching Network.

<https://abolitionistteachingnetwork.org/guide>.

ACLU. Cops and No Counselors. (2016, September). Retrieved from <https://www.aclu.org/report/cops-and-no-counselors>.

Adichie, C. (2009, October 7). *Transcript of "The danger of a single story."* Ted.com; TED

Talks.https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en

Adler, P., & Adler, P. (1987). Membership Roles in Field Research. doi:10.4135/9781412984973

Anderson, A. (2018, November 27). *How Personal Trauma Can Lead to Teacher Burnout | Resilient Educator*. ResilientEducator.com. <https://resilienteducator.com/lifestyle/trauma-teacher-burnout/>

Anderson, K., & Jack, D. (1991). Learning to Listen: Interview Techniques and Analyses. *Psychology*. doi:10.4324/9780203435960-18

Aspen Institute. (2018, May). Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: A Call to Action. Retrieved from <https://www.aspeninstitute.org/publications/pursuing-social-and-emotional-development-through-a-racial-equity-lens-a-call-to-action/>

Aspen Institute. (2019, February 14). From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope. Retrieved from <http://nationathope.org/report-from-the-nation/>

- Au, W. (2021). A Pedagogy of Insurgency: Teaching and Organizing for Radical Racial Justice in Our Schools. *Educational Studies*, 57(2), 109–123. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2021.1878181>
- Barnes, T.N. Changing the Landscape of Social Emotional Learning in Urban Schools: what are we currently focusing on and where do we go from here?. *Urban Rev* 51, 599–637 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-019-00534-1>
- Barnes, T. N., & McCallops, K. (2019). Perceptions of culturally responsive pedagogy in teaching SEL. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 13(1), 70–81. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JME-07-2017-0044>.
- Barnes, S., & Jones, S.M. (2019, November 15). An Antidote to the "Fever" of Social and Emotional Learning: Build from Science and Evidence, and Ask the Right Questions. Retrieved from <https://www.educationnext.org/antidote-to-fever-social-and-emotional-learning-build-from-science-evidence-ask-right-questions/>
- Baelen, R., Esposito, M., & Galla, B. (2019). A Selective Review of Mindfulness Training Programs for Children and Adolescents in School Settings. In *The Mindful School: Transforming School Culture through Mindfulness and Compassion* (pp. 14–56). The Guilford Press.
- Baicker, K. (2020, March 12). The impact of secondary trauma on educators. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <http://www.ascd.org/ascd-express/vol15/num13/the-impact-of-secondary-trauma-on-educators.aspx>

- Belsha, K. (2020, August 21). Virtual suspensions. Mask rules. More trauma. Why some worry a student discipline crisis is on the horizon. Chalkbeat.org.
<https://www.chalkbeat.org/2020/8/21/21396481/virtual-suspensions-masks-school-discipline-crisis-coronavirus>
- Berg, J., Osher, D., Same, M., Nolan, E., Benson, D., & Jacobs, N. (2018, November 14). Identifying, Defining, and Measuring Social and Emotional Competencies. Retrieved from <https://www.air.org/resource/identifying-defining-and-measuring-social-and-emotional-competencies>
- Bierria, A., Prasad, A., Stephens, A., Banks, A., Lenz, C., Suh, E., Thuma, E., Kabrona, F., Shim, H., Kaba, M., Schenwar, M., Said, N., Caidor, R., Hussain, S., Suh, S., & Coleman, S. (2018). *Survive Defense as Abolitionist praxis*.
https://survivedandpunished.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/06/survivedandpunished_toolkitbw.pdf
- Blevins, K. (2009, November). Time for SEL+. Retrieved from <http://www.tulsapeople.com/Tulsa-People/November-2009//>.
- Boal, A., & Epstein, S. (1990). The cop in the head: Three hypotheses. *The Drama Review*, 34(3), 35–42. doi:10.2307/1146067
- Bomer, R., Dworin, J., May, L., & Semington, P. (2008). Miseducating Teachers about the Poor: A Critical Analysis of Ruby Payne's Claims about Poverty. *Teacher's College Record*, pp. 2497–2531.

- Bornstein, J. (2015). "If they're on Tier I, there are really no concerns that we can see:" PBIS medicalizes compliant behavior. *Journal of Ethnographic & Qualitative Research*, 9(4), 247–267.
https://www.academia.edu/19539263/If_theyre_on_Tier_I_there_are_really_no_concerns_that_we_can_see_PBIS_medicalizes_compliant_behavior
- Bornstein, J. (2017). Can PBIS build justice rather than merely restore order? In Okilwa, N. S., Khalifa, M. A., & Briscoe, F. (2017). *The school to prison pipeline: the role of culture and discipline in school*. Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Brackett, M. A., Bailey, C. S., Hoffmann, J. D., & Simmons, D. (2019). RULER: A theory-driven, systemic model to social, emotional, and academic learning. *Educational Psychologist*.
- Braithwaite, J. (1989). *Crime, shame, and reintegration*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brewer, J. & deMarrais, K (Eds.). (2015). *Teach for America counter-narratives: alumni speak up and speak out*. Peter Lang.
- Camangian, P., & Cariaga, S. (2021). Social and emotional learning is hegemonic miseducation: students deserve humanization instead. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 24(3), 1–21.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2020.1798374>
- Camera, L. (2021). *Momentum Stalls in Fight to Remove Police From Schools*. US News & World Report; U.S. News & World Report. <https://www.usnews.com/news/education-news/articles/2021-05-25/momentum-stalls-in-fight-to-remove-police-from-schools>
- Carspecken, P. F. (1996). *Critical ethnography in educational research: A theoretical and practical guide*. Routledge.

- CASEL. (2020). Student-Centered Discipline. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://schoolguide.casel.org/focus-area-3/classroom/a-supportive-classroom-environment/student-centered-discipline/>
- CASEL. What is SEL? (2019). Retrieved from <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>
- Character Lab. (2020, March 29). Retrieved from <https://characterlab.org/>
- Chang, K., & Conrad, R. (2008). Following Children's Leads in Conversations about race. In M. Pollock (Ed.), *Everyday Antiracism: Getting real about race in schools*. New Press.
- Changemakers. (2021). *About*. Changemakers. <https://www.changemakers.com/what-we-do>
- Cheek, K., & Bucchio, J. (2017, September 07). School-to-Prison Pipeline Can Be Dismantled Using Alternative Discipline Strategies. Retrieved July, 2020, from <https://jjie.org/2017/09/07/alternative-discipline-strategies-for-dismantling-the-school-to-prison-pipeline/>
- Cipriano, C. Why Social-Emotional Learning is Suddenly in the Spotlight [Interview by E. Tate]. (2019, May 7). *Ed Surge*.
- Cohen, J. (2020, July). A Teenager Didn't Do Her Online Schoolwork, so a judge sent her to juvenile detention. Retrieved from <https://www.propublica.org/article/a-teenager-didnt-do-her-online-schoolwork-so-a-judge-sent-her-to-juvenile-detention>
- Cole, S. F., Eisner, A., Gregory, M., & Ristuccia, J. (2013). *Creating and advocating for trauma-sensitive schools*. Trauma and Learning Policy Initiative, partnership of Massachusetts Advocates for Children and Harvard Law School. Available from www.traumasensitiveschools.org
- Critical Resistance. (2020). What is the PIC? What is Abolition? from <http://criticalresistance.org/about/not-so-common-language/>

- Curran, F. C. (2019). The Law, Policy, and Portrayal of Zero Tolerance School Discipline: Examining Prevalence and Characteristics Across Levels of Governance and School Districts. *Educational Policy*, 33(2), 319–349. doi: 10.1177/0895904817691840
- Danieli, Y., Norris, F. H., & Engdahl, B. (2016). Multigenerational legacies of trauma: Modeling the what and how of transmission. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 86(6), 639–651. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ort0000145>
- Datu, J. A. D. (2021). Beyond Passion and Perseverance: Review and Future Research Initiatives on the Science of Grit. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 11. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.545526>
- Davis, F. E. (2019). *The little book of race and restorative justice: Black lives, healing, and U.S. social transformation*. Simon and Schuster.
- Dickler, J. (2021, March 30). *Virtual school resulted in “significant” academic learning loss, study finds*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/03/30/learning-loss-from-virtual-school-due-to-covid-is-significant-.html>
- Dixon, E (2020). Practical Steps toward Liberatory Transformation. In Dixon, E., & Piepzn-Samarasinha, L. (Eds). *Beyond survival: strategies and stories from the transformative justice movement*. AK Press.
- Djato, S., Anderson, S. L., Assoon, Q., & Williams, K. (2021, April). *USA TODAY*. [Www.usatoday.com. https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/opinion/voices/2021/04/16/defund-police-schools-los-angeles-district-blm-column/7147151002/](https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/opinion/voices/2021/04/16/defund-police-schools-los-angeles-district-blm-column/7147151002/)

- Doll, W.E. Jr. (1993). *Curriculum Possibilities in a “Post”-Future*. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*. Vol 8 (4). ASCD.
http://www.ascd.org/publications/jcs/summer1993/Curriculum_Possibilities_in_a_%E2%80%9CPost%E2%80%9D-Future.aspx
- Domitrovich, C. E., Pas, E. T., Bradshaw, C. P., Becker, K. D., Keperling, J. P., Embry, D. D., & Ialongo, N. (2015). Individual and School Organizational Factors that Influence Implementation of the PAX Good Behavior Game Intervention. *Prevention Science*, *16*(8), 1064–1074.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-015-0557-8>
- Duane, A., Casimir, A. E., Mims, L. C., Kaler-Jones, C., & Simmons, D. (2021). Beyond deep breathing: A new vision for equitable, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed mindfulness practice. *Middle School Journal*, *52*(3), 4–14. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2021.1893593>
- Dunn, D. C., Chisholm, A., Spaulding, E., & Love, B. L. (2021). A Radical Doctrine: Abolitionist Education in Hard Times. *Educational Studies*, *57*(3), 211–223.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2021.1892684>
- Duncan-Andrade, J. M., & Morrell, E. (2008). *The art of critical pedagogy*. Peter Lang.
- Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K. (2011). The impact of enhancing students’ social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions. *Child Development*: *82* (1), 405-432.
- Dusenbury, L., & Weissberg, R. P. (2017). Social emotional learning in elementary school: Preparation for success. *The Education Digest*, *83*(1), 36.

- Dusenbury, L., Yoder, N., Dermody, C., & Weissberg, R. (2019, February). An Examination of Frameworks for Social and Emotional ... Retrieved from <https://measuringse.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Framework-C.3.pdf>
- Dweck, C. S. (1998). *Mindset: the new psychology of success*. Ballantine Books.
- Edmonds-Cady, C., & Wingfield, T. T. (2017). Social workers: agents of change or agents of oppression? *Social Work Education*, 36(4), 430–442.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2017.1291802>
- Education Justice Research and Organizing Collaborative (EJ-ROC) (n.d.). “What is culturally-responsive-sustaining education (CRSE)?” New York University Metro Center.
<https://www.nyccej.org/category/resources>
- Eger, A. (2017, January 4). Oklahoma slips to 47th in nation on annual educational quality ranking. *Tulsa World*. Retrieved from https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/education/oklahoma-slips-to-th-in-nation-on-annual-educational-quality/article_0053bd86-0819-5cab-8eda-2edcfbff0594.html
- Eith, C., & Trump, K. (2019). *Holistic Approach to School Safety Is it possible and practical to balance metal detectors and mental detectors?* School Administrator.
<https://www.schoolsecurity.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/A-Holistic-Approach-to-School-Safety-April-2019.pdf>
- Elliott, M. (2018). Oklahoma No. 2 in the nation in overall incarceration in 2016; No. 1 in female incarceration. Retrieved from <http://doc.ok.gov/oklahoma-no-2-in-the-nation-in-incarceration-in-2016>

Ellis, R. (2020). *Teacher Burnout and COVID-19 Stress*. Human Resource Exchange.

<https://www.tasb.org/services/hr-services/hrx/hr-trends/teacher-burnout-and-covid-19-stress.aspx>

Emdin, C. (2016). *For white folks who teach in the hood and the rest of y'all too: reality pedagogy and urban education*. Beacon Press

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. The University of Chicago Press.

Favela, A., & Torres, D. (2014). Connecting classrooms & communities: Identifying students' needs & assets inside & outside of school. *Multicultural Education*, 21 (2), 51.

Feldman, J. (2002). *Rise and shine!* [CD].

https://songsforteaching.com/drjean/all_day_s/01riseandshine.pdf

Fisher, P. A., Gunnar, M. R., Chamberlain, P., & Reid, J. B. (2000). Preventive intervention for maltreated preschool children: Impact on children's behavior, neuroendocrine activity, and foster parent functioning. *Journal of the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, 39(11), 1356–1364. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00004583-200011000-00009>

Foucault, M. (1984) *Foucault Reader*, MacMillan: New York.

Foucault, M. (1976). *"Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975-1976"*, trans. David Macey, English series ed., Arnold I. Davidson (New York: Picador, 2003).

Fronius, T., Persson, H., Guckenburg, S., Hurley, N., & Petrosino, A. (2016). *Restorative Justice in U.S. Schools: A Research Review*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596786.pdf>

Gaffney, C. (2019, May 20). *When Schools Cause Trauma*. Learning for Justice.

<https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/summer-2019/when-schools-cause-trauma>

Garcia, E., & Weiss, E. (2020, September 10). *COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S.*

education policy: Lessons from pre-pandemic research to inform relief, recovery, and rebuilding. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-relief-recovery-and-rebuilding/>

Gard, J. (2020, September 18). *A professor's poem invokes learning and safety in a time of COVID*

(opinion) | Inside Higher Ed. [Www.insidehighered.com](http://www.insidehighered.com).

<https://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2020/09/18/professors-poem-invokes-learning-and-safety-time-covid-opinion>

Gay, G. (2014). Culturally responsive teaching principles, practices, and effects. In H. R. Milner & K.

Lomotey (Eds.), *Handbook of urban education* (pp. 353-372). Routledge.

Ginwright, S. (2018, May 31). The Future of Healing: Shifting from Trauma Informed Care to Healing

Centered Engagement. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@ginwright/the-future-of-healing-shifting-from-trauma-informed-care-to-healing-centered-engagement-634f557ce69c>

Giroux, A. "Can Democratic Education Survive in a Neoliberal Society?" 16 October 2012. Retrieved

from <http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/12126-can-democratic-education-survive-in-a-neoliberal-society>.

- Golden, N. The Importance of narrative: moving towards sociocultural understandings of trauma-informed praxis. *Bank Street College of Education*, (43), 71-78.
- Goldstein, D., Popescu, A., & Hannah-Jones, N. (2020, April 6). *As School moves online students stay logged out*. New York Times.com; The New York Times. <http://newyorktimes.com/2020/04/06/us/coronavirus-schools-attendance-absent.html>
- Gorski, P. (2018). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing the opportunity gap*. New York, NY, NY: Teachers College Press
- Gorski, P. (2016). Rethinking the Role of “Culture” in Educational Equity: From Cultural Competence to Equity Literacy. *Multicultural Perspectives*. 18:4, pp.221-226.
- Gorski, P. (2013, December 18). Social Justice: Not Just Another Term for "Diversity" Retrieved from <https://acpacsje.wordpress.com/2013/02/19/social-justice-not-just-another-term-for-diversity-by-paul-c-gorski/>
- Gorski, P. (2005). Savage Unrealities: Uncovering Classism in Ruby Payne’s ... Retrieved July 29, 2020, from http://edchange.org/publications/Savage_Unrealities.pdf
- Gorski, P. & Swalwell, K. (2015). Equity literacy for all. *Educational Leadership*, 72(6), 34-40.
- Gottschalk, M. (2015). Raze the Carceral State. *Dissent*, 62(4), 54-56. doi:10.1353/dss.2015.0069
- Gough, D. (2013, September). The Significance of Grit: A Conversation with Angela Lee Duckworth. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/sept13/vol71/num01/The-Significance-of-Grit@-A-Conversation-with-Angela-Lee-Duckworth.aspx>

- Gould, E., & Wilson, V. (2020, June 1). *Black workers face two of the most lethal preexisting conditions for coronavirus—racism and economic inequality*. Economic Policy Institute.
<https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>
- Gregory, A., Bell, J., & Pollock, M. (2014, March). How Educators Can Eradicate Disparities in School. Retrieved from http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Disparity_Interventions_Full_031214.pdf
- Gregory, A., Clawson, K., Davis, A., & Gerewitz, J. (2014). The Promise of Restorative Practices to Transform Teacher-Student Relationships and Achieve Equity in School Discipline. *Journal of Educational and Psychological Consultation*, 26, 1-29. 10.1080/10474412.2014.929950.
- Gregory, A., & Fergus, E. (2017). Social and Emotional Learning and Equity in School Discipline. *The Future of Children*, 27(1), 117–136. doi: 10.1353/foc.2017.0006
- Greenberg, M. T., Brown J. L., Abenavoli, R.M. (2016). “Teacher Stress and Health Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools.” Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University.
- Hammond, Z. (2015). *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain: promoting authentic engagement and rigor among culturally and linguistically diverse students*. Corwin, A Sage Company.
- Hargreaves, A. (1992). Time and Teachers' Work: An Analysis of the Intensification Thesis. *Teaching College Record*, 94, 87-108.

- Hart, S. C., Diperna, J. C., Lei, P.-W., & Cheng, W. (2020). Nothing Lost, Something Gained? Impact of a Universal Social-Emotional Learning Program on Future State Test Performance. *Educational Researcher*, 49(1), 5–19. doi: 10.3102/0013189x19898721
- Hermes, G. (2019, September 11). State Supt. Joy Hofmeister Testifies in front of congress subcommittee. Retrieved from <https://www.news9.com/story/41033148/state-supt-joy-hofmeister-testifies-in-front-of-congress-subcommittee>.
- Hewitt-Taylor, J. (2001). Use of constant comparative analysis in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard*, 15(42), 39–42. <https://doi.org/10.7748/ns2001.07.15.42.39.c3052>
- Homer, V. T. (2020, September 7). *Remote Learning Makes Punishment Easier Than Connection*. Truthout. <https://truthout.org/articles/remote-learning-makes-punishment-easier-than-connection/>
- Hulvershorn, K., & Mulholland, S. (2018). Restorative practices and the integration of social emotional learning as a path to positive school climates. *Journal of Research in Innovative Teaching & Learning*, 11(1), 110–123. doi: 10.1108/jrit-08-2017-0015
- Ibrahim, A. (2020). [Introduction]. In *Black immigrants in North America: Essays on race, immigration, identity, language, hip-hop, pedagogy, and the politics of becoming Black* (pp. Xi–Xx). Gorham, ME: Myers Education Press.
- Interview. (Emma). October 13, 2019.
- Jackson, A., & Mezei, L. (2012). *Thinking with theory in qualitative research: viewing data across multiple perspectives*. Routledge.

Jacobs, L. A., Kim, M. E., Whitfield, D. L., Gartner, R. E., Panichelli, M., Kattari, S. K., Downey, M. M., McQueen, S. S., & Mountz, S. E. (2020). Defund the Police: Moving Towards an Anti-Carceral Social Work. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 32(1), 37–62.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/10428232.2020.1852865>

Jacobson, L. (2021, April 6). *Social-Emotional Learning or “White Supremacy with a Hug”?* Yale Official’s Departure Sparks a Racial Reckoning. The 74 Million.

<https://www.the74million.org/article/social-emotional-learning-racial-reckoning-yale-center-departure/>

Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Borowski, T. (2018, November). Equity & Social and Emotional Learning: A Cultural Analysis. Special Issues Series Retrieved from:

<https://measuringSEL.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Frameworks-Equity.pdf>

Jagers, R. J., Rivas-Drake, D., & Williams, B. (2019). Transformative social and emotional learning (SEL): Toward SEL in service of educational equity and excellence. *Educational Psychologist*, 54, 162–184.

Jennings, P. A., Brown, J. L., Frank, J. L., Doyle, S., Oh, Y., Davis, R., Rasheed, D., DeWeese, A., DeMauro, A. A., Cham, H., & Greenberg, M. T. (2017, February 13). Impacts of the CARE for Teachers Program on Teachers’ Social and Emotional Competence and Classroom Interactions. *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Advance online publication.

https://education.virginia.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/resourceLibrary/Jennings_CARE_2017.pdf. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/edu0000187>

- Jennings, P.A. & Greenberg, M.T. (2009). *The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes*. American Educational Research Association.
- Jennings, P. A. (2015). *Mindfulness for teachers: Simple skills for peace and productivity in the classroom*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Jennings, P. A. (2019). *The trauma-sensitive classroom: building resilience with compassionate teaching*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.
- Jimerson, S. R., Sharkey, J. D., Nyborg, V., & Furlong, M. J. (2004). Strength-based assessment and school psychology: A summary and synthesis. *The California School Psychologist*, 9(1), 9–19. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03340903>.
- Johnson, D. D., & Bornstein, J. (2020). Racial Equity Policy That Moves Implicit Bias Beyond a Metaphor for Individual Prejudice to a Means of Exposing Structural Oppression. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership*, 24(2), 81-95. 155545892097672. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1555458920976721>
- Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social and Emotional Learning in Schools: From Programs to Strategies and commentaries. *Social Policy Report*, 26(4), 1–33. doi: 10.1002/j.2379-3988.2012.tb00073.x
- Jones, S.M., Brush, K., Bailey, R., Brion-Miesels, G., McIntyre, J., Kahn, J., ... Stickle, L. (2017). *Navigating from the inside/out: looking inside & across 25 leading SEL programs: a practical resource for schools and OST providers*.pdf report.

Jones, S. M., & Doolittle, E. J. (2017). Social and emotional learning: Introducing the issue. *The future of children*, 3-11.

Jones, Damon., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). "Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness", *American Journal of Public Health* 105, no. 11 (November 1): pp. 2283-2290.

<https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2015.302630>

Jones, D., & Hagopian, J. (2020). *Black lives matter at school: an uprising for educational justice*. Haymarket Books.

Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this til we free us: abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-Based Interventions in Context: Past, Present, and Future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*. 10. 144 - 156. 10.1093/clipsy.bpg016.

Kaler-Jones, C. (2020, May 12). When SEL is Used as Another Form of Policing. Retrieved June 24, 2020, from <https://medium.com/@justschools/when-sel-is-used-as-another-form-of-policing-fa53cf85dce4>

Kamenetz, A. (2017, August 14). Social and emotional skills: everybody loves them, but still can't define them. *NPR*. from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/08/14/542070550/social-and-emotional-skills-everybody-loves-them-but-still-cant-define-them>

- Kamenetz, A., & Bakeman, J. (2018, June 22). Making Schools Safer: Harsh Consequences, Or Second Chances? Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2018/06/22/622217666/making-schools-safer-harsh-consequences-or-second-chances>
- Kavanagh, K., & Fisher-Ari, T. (2017). Constraints and Negotiations: TFA, Accountability, and Scripted Programs in Urban Schools. *Penn GSE Perspectives on Urban Education*, 14(1).
- Khasnabis, D., & Goldin, S. (2020). Don't be fooled, trauma is a systemic problem: trauma as a case of weaponized educational innovation. *Bank Street College of Education*, (43), 44-57.
- Kim, M. E. (2018). From carceral feminism to transformative justice: Women-of-color feminism and alternatives to incarceration. *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, 27(3), 219–233. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2018.1474827>
- Kline, D. M. S. (2016). Can Restorative Practices Help to Reduce Disparities in School Discipline Data? A Review of the Literature. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 18(2), 97–102. doi: 10.1080/15210960.2016.1159099
- Ko, L. (2016). Unwanted Sterilization and Eugenics Programs in the United States. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/unwanted-sterilization-and-eugenics-programs-in-the-united-states/>
- Krachman, S. and Larocco, B. (2017). “The Scale of Our Investment in Social-Emotional Learning.” *Transforming Education*. <https://www.transformingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Inspire-Paper-Transforming-Ed-FINAL-2.pdf>

- Krehbiel, R. (2019, September 12). State Superintendent Joy Hofmeister takes 'message of hope' to Congress. *Tulsa World*. Retrieved from https://www.tulsaworld.com/news/state-superintendent-joy-hofmeister-takes-message-of-hope-to-congress/article_54fa27e3-e22e-56a3-a764-cb79b83d10e6.html
- Kundu, A. (2020). *The power of student agency: looking beyond grit to close the opportunity gap*. Teachers College Press.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). It's Not the Culture of Poverty, It's the Poverty of Culture: The Problem with Teacher Education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*. 37. 104 - 109.
10.1525/aeq.2006.37.2.104.
- Lander, J. (2018, September 26). Helping Teachers Manage the Weight of Trauma. Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/09/helping-teachers-manage-weight-trauma>
- Lazzell, D. R., Jackson, R. G., Skelton, S. M., & Thorius, K. K. (2020). (Re)imagining school policy & practice: Virtual schooling. *Equity Digest*. Indianapolis, IN: Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP EAC).
- LeBlanc, B., & Martindale, M. (2021, July 31). *Oakland Co. girl jailed for not doing homework gets released*. The Detroit News. <https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/oakland-county/2020/07/31/oakland-co-girl-jailed-not-doing-homework-ordered-release/5557997002/>
- Lee, N. (2017, March 17). *What the coronavirus reveals about the digital divide between schools and communities*. Brookings. <http://brookings.edu/blog/techtank/2020/03/17/>
- Levine, J., & Meiners, E. R. (2020). *The feminist and the sex offender: confronting harm, ending state violence*. Verso.

- Linley, Z. (2021, May 21). *Oklahoma City School Board Rejects New Anti-Critical Race Theory Law, Says It Only Exists to “Protect White Fragility.”* The Root. <https://www.theroot.com/oklahoma-city-school-board-rejects-new-anti-critical-ra-1846880509>
- Loewenberg, A. (2020, November 16). *School Discipline in the Age of COVID-19.* New America. <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/school-discipline-age-covid-19/>
- Love, B. L. (2019). *We want to do more than survive: abolitionist teaching and the pursuit of educational freedom.* S.l.: BEACON.
- Love, B.L. (2020, April 29). Teachers, we cannot go back to the way things were. *Education Week.* Retrieved from <http://educationweek.org/ew/articles/2020/04/30/teachers-we-cannot-go-back-to-the.html>.
- Lucas, S. (2008). Constructing Colorblind Classrooms. In M. Pollock (Ed.), *Everyday Antiracism: Getting real about race in schools.* New Press.
- Lund, M., Hillis, A., Green, J., & Mofield, E. (2021). Mindsets matter for equitable discipline: Aligning beliefs to practice among middle grade educators. *Middle School Journal, 52*(3), 15–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2021.1893592>
- Lustick, H. (2020). Culturally Responsive Restorative Discipline. *Educational Studies, 56*(6), 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131946.2020.1837830>
- Mader, J. (2021, February 4). *Five strategies schools are using to address learning loss.* The Hechinger Report. <https://hechingerreport.org/5-ways-schools-hope-to-fight-covid-19-learning-loss/>
- Madison, D. S. (2012). *Critical ethnography: Method, ethics, and performance.* Sage.

- Mahfouz, J. & Anthony-Stevens, V. (2020). Issue 43: Possibilities and problems in trauma-based and social emotional learning programs, Why Trouble SEL? *Bank Street College of Education*, (43), 58-70.
- Mahmood, R. (2020, March 31). *Online Teaching Can Be Culturally Responsive*. Learning for Justice. <https://www.learningforjustice.org/magazine/online-teaching-can-be-culturally-responsive>
- Maynard-Moody, S., & Musheno, M. C. (2003). *Cops, teachers, counselors: stories from the front lines of public service*. University Of Michigan Press.
- McGlynn, C., & Westmarland, N. (2019). Kaleidoscopic justice: sexual violence and victim-survivors' perceptions of justice. *Social and Legal Studies*. Vol. 28 (2), 179-201.
- McGraw-Hill. 2018 Social Emotional Learning Survey. (2018, October). Retrieved from <https://www.mheducation.com/prek-12/explore/sel-survey.html>
- McKenzie, L. (2019, November 5). Changing the conversation about "at-risk" students in California. Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2019/11/05/changing-conversation-about-%E2%80%9C-risk%E2%80%9D-students-california>
- McKenzie, K. (2020, June 8). *Social Emotional Learning Activities for the Virtual Classroom*. Xello. <https://xello.world/en/blog/social-emotional-learning-activities-growth-mindset-kids/>
- McKown, C. (2017). S P S Social-Emotional Assessment, Performance, and Standards. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1144767.pdf>
- McLeod, S., & Dulsky, S. (2021). Resilience, Reorientation, and Reinvention: School Leadership During the Early Months of the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2021.637075>

- McNally Jackson Presents: *Judith Levine in conversation with Melissa Gira Grant* [Video file]. (2020, July 22). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-gwf5CXfyo>
- Meiners, E. R. (2016). *For the children?: protecting innocence in a carceral state*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2015). *Rac(e)ing to class: Confronting poverty and race in schools and classrooms*. Cambridge, MA, MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Milner IV, H. R. (2018). Confronting Inequity / Broadening the Curriculum . *ASCD* , 76, 84–85.
Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct18/vol76/num02/Broadening-the-Curriculum.aspx>
- Milner IV, H. R., Cunningham, H. B., Delale-OConnor, L., & Kestenber, E. G. (2019). *"These kids are out of control": why we must reimagine "classroom management" for equity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin, a SAGE Company.
- Mingus, M. (2020, January 11). Transformative Justice: A Brief Description. Retrieved from <https://transformharm.org/transformative-justice-a-brief-description/>
- Morales, Y. (2018). *Dreamers*. Neal Porter Books/Holiday House.
- Morris, M. W. (2015). *Pushout: The criminalization of Black girls in schools*. The New Press.
- Morrison, B., & Vaandering, D. (2012). Restorative justice: Pedagogy, praxis, and discipline. *Journal of School Violence*, 11(2), 138–155.
- Murray, A. (2011). Montessori elementary philosophy reflects current motivation theories. *Montessori Life*, 23(1), 22-33.

National Center for Education Statistics (2019). "School Profile". Institute of Education Sciences.

https://nces.ed.gov/globallocator/sch_info_popup.asp

Newmann, F. M. (1992). *Student engagement and achievement in American secondary schools*.

Teachers College Press.

Nelsen, J. & Gfroerer, K. (2017). *Positive Discipline: Tools for Teachers*. Harmony Books.

Nickerson, A. (2018, October). Can SEL Reduce School Violence? *Ed Leadership*, 76 (2), 46-50.

<https://www.azed.gov/sites/default/files/2020/03/Ed%20Leadership%20Can%20SEL%20Reduce%20School%20Violence%20%20pages.pdf?id=5e5e804703e2b314686454fb#:~:text=Finally%2C%20social%2Demotional%20skills%20may>

Osher, D., Coggshall, J., Colombi, G., Woodruff, D., Francois, S., & Osher, T. (2012). Building School and Teacher Capacity to Eliminate the School-to-Prison Pipeline. *Teacher Education and Special Education: The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children*, 35(4), 284-295. doi:10.1177/0888406412453930

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative evaluation methods*. Sage Publications.

Paris, D. (2012). Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy. *Educational Researcher*, 41(3), 93–97. doi:

10.3102/0013189x12441244

Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What Are We Seeking to Sustain Through Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy? A Loving Critique Forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85–100. doi:

10.17763/haer.84.1.9821873k2ht16m77

Paris, D., & H Samy Alim. (2017). *Culturally sustaining pedagogies: teaching and learning for justice in a changing world*. Teachers College Press.

- Payne, R. (2003). Understanding and Working with Students and Adults from ... Retrieved July 29, 2020, from <https://www.ahaprocess.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Understanding-Poverty-Ruby-Payne-Poverty-Series-I-IV.pdf>
- Peshkin, A. (1988). In Search of Subjectivity. One's Own. *Educational Researcher*, 17(7), 17. doi: 10.2307/1174381
- Pier, L., Hough, H., Christian, M., Bookman, N., Wilkenfeld, B., & Miller, R. (2021, January 24). *PACE - COVID-19 and the Educational Equity Crisis*. Policy Analysis for California Education. <https://edpolicyinca.org/newsroom/covid-19-and-educational-equity-crisis>
- Preston, C., & Butrymowicz, S. (2021, February 20). *How the past year has altered school discipline — perhaps forever*. The Hechinger Report. <https://hechingerreport.org/how-the-pandemic-has-altered-school-discipline-perhaps-forever/>
- Pyscher, T. (2018). A Literacy of Resistance. *Literacies, Sexualities, and Gender*, 41-53. doi:10.4324/9780429458514-4
- Pyscher, T. (2016). Domestic Violence and Girlhood: The Making and Breaking of a Disordered Subjectivity. *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, 17(5), 399-405. doi:10.1177/1532708616674992
- Pyscher, T., & Crampton, A. (2020). Issue 43: Possibilities and problems in trauma-based and social emotional learning programs, Introduction. *Bank Street College of Education*, (43), 3-9.
- Pyscher, T., & Lozenski, B. D. (2014). Throwaway Youth: The sociocultural location of resistance to schooling. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 47(4), 531-545. doi:10.1080/10665684.2014.958964

- Pyscher, T., & Lozenski, B. (2017). "I got in trouble, but I didn't get caught": The discursive construction of "throwaway youth" (K. Fasching-Varner, L. L. Martin, R. Mitchell, K. Bennett-Haron, & A. Daneshzadeh, Eds.). In *Understanding, dismantling, and disrupting the prison-to-school pipeline* (pp. 53-64). London, UK: Lexington Books.
- Ragsdale, S., & Saylor, A. (2014). *Groups, troops, clubs & classrooms: The essential handbook for working with youth*. Minneapolis, MN, MN: Search Institute Press.
- Ratnayake, S. (2019). Mindfulness is loaded with (troubling) metaphysical assumptions – Sahanika Ratnayake: Aeon Essays. Retrieved July, 2020, from <https://aeon.co/essays/mindfulness-is-loaded-with-troubling-metaphysical-assumptions>
- Rich, S., & Stein, B. (2019, August 31). *Increasing AWAREness of MTSS through University Partnerships*. Communique. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1225014>.
- Rigby, C. S., Deci, E. L., Patrick, B. C., & Ryan, R. M. (1992). Beyond the intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy: Self-determination in motivation and learning. *Motivation and Emotion*, 16(3), 165-185.
- Rios, V. M. (2011). *Punished: policing the lives of Black and Latino boys*. New York University Press.
- Rockwell, N. (1964). *The problem we all live with* [oil on canvas]. Norman Rockwell Museum
Stockbridge, MA.
- Rothstein, R. (2017). *The color of law: a forgotten history of how our government segregated America*. Liveright Publishing Corporation, A Division of W. W. Norton & Company.

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). (2014). *SAMHSA's concept of trauma and guidance for a trauma-informed approach*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Samuels, C. (2020, January 14). 'At-Promise'? Can a New Term for 'At-Risk' Change a Student's Trajectory? Retrieved from <https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2020/01/09/at-promise-can-a-new-term-for-at-risk.html>

Schumaker, K. (2021, May 19). Perspective | What is critical race theory and why did Oklahoma just ban it? *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/05/19/what-is-critical-race-theory-why-did-oklahoma-just-ban-it/>

Schenwar, M., & Law, V. (2020). *Prison by any other name : the harmful consequences of popular reforms*. The New Press.

SEL+ Handbook. N.d. self-published.

Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist*, 55, 5-14

Shah, V. (2019b). Calling in the self: centering socially engaged Buddhism in critical pedagogy through personal narrative. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy* , 10(2), 45–67.

Shah, V., Gorski, P., & Kelley, Y. (2019, October 8). *Quitting Grit, Ditching Deficit Ideology, and Embracing an Equity and Justice Approach to Poverty and Education: A Conversation*.

Retrieved from

register.gotowebinar.com/recording/viewRecording/6329599670712925185/7213882997737130

759

Simmons, D. (2019, April 1). ASCD. Why We Can't Afford Whitewashed Social-Emotional Learning.

Retrieved

http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/education_update/apr19/vol61/num04/Why_We_Cant_Afford_Whitewashed_Social-Emotional_Learning.aspx

Simmons, D. (2017, April 18). *How to Change the Story about Students of Color*. Greater Good; Berkeley.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_change_story_of_students_of_color

Simmons, D. N., Brackett, M. A., & Adler, N. (2018) "Applying an Equity Lens to Social, Emotional, and Academic Development," Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University.

Smith, D., Fisher, D., & Frey, N. (2015). *Better than carrots or sticks: restorative practices for positive classroom management*. ASCD.

Snyder, J. (2014, May 6). "Teaching Kids 'Grit' is All the Rage. Here's What's Wrong With It." *The New Republic*.

Souers, K., & Hall, P. A. (2016). *Fostering resilient learners: strategies for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom*. Hawker Brownlow Education.

Spade, D. (2020). *Mutual aid: building solidarity during this crisis (and the next)*. Verso.

Sporleder, J., & Forbes, H. T. (2016). *The trauma-informed school : a step-by-step implementation guide for administrators and school personnel*. Beyond Consequences Institute, LLC.

- Starck, J. G., Riddle, T., Sinclair, S., & Warikoo, N. (2020). Teachers Are People Too: Examining the Racial Bias of Teachers Compared to Other American Adults. *Educational Researcher*, 49(4), 273-284. doi:10.3102/0013189x20912758
- Stearns, C. (2020). Issue 43 Possibilities and Problems in Trauma-Based and Social Emotional Learning Programs, Let Them Get Mad: Using the Psychoanalytic Frame to Rethink SEL and Trauma Informed Practice, *Bank Street College of Education*, (43), pp 23-32.
<https://educate.bankstreet.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1347&context=occasional-paper-series>
- Stipek, D. J. (1996). Motivation and instruction. In D. C. Berliner & R. C. Calfee (Eds.), *Handbook of educational psychology* (pp. 85–113). MacMillan.
<http://take5selfreg.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Take-5-Transformative-SEL.pdf>
- Stovall, D. (2018). Are We Ready for ‘School’ Abolition?: Thoughts and Practices of Radical Imaginary in Education. *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education*, 17 (1). <https://doi.org/10.31390/taboo.17.1.06>
- Take 5! Institute. (n.d.). *Transformative SEL in Action Equity, Social Justice & Social and Emotional Learning*. Retrieved June 1, 2021, from <http://take5selfreg.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Take-5-Transformative-SEL.pdf>
- Teske, S. C. (2011). A Study of Zero Tolerance Policies in Schools: A Multi-Integrated Systems Approach to Improve Outcomes for Adolescents. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 24(2), 88–97. doi: 10.1111/j.1744-6171.2011.00273.x

- The Free Thought Project. “How US Public Schools Have Come to Increasingly Resemble Prisons Instead of Learning Centers.” 2015. Available online: <http://thefreethoughtproject.com/public-schools-increasinglyresemble-prisons-learning-centers/#EoBuGBko33cAwbdr.99>
- TNTP. (2018). *The New Teacher Project: Opportunity myth*. Tntp.org. <https://opportunitymyth.tntp.org/>
- Tough, P. (2012). *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character*, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Ukpokodu, O. (2016). *You can't teach us if you don't know us and care about us: becoming an Ubuntu, responsive and responsible urban teacher*. Peter Lang.
- Varghese, A. (2021, April 12). *COMMENTARY: Social-emotional learning can help prevent school shootings*. EdSource. <https://edsource.org/2021/social-emotional-learning-can-help-prevent-school-shootings/652876>
- Vitale, A. S. (2018). *The end of policing*. Verso.
- Voke, H. (2002, February). <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/feb02/num28/Motivating-Students-to-Learn.aspx>. Retrieved from <http://www.ascd.org/publications/newsletters/policy-priorities/feb02/num28/Motivating-Students-to-Learn.aspx>
- Walls, J. (2021). Tensions in care and control in the middle school classroom: Lessons for equitable social-emotional learning. *Middle School Journal*, 52(3), 25–34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2021.1893591>

- Walsh, Z. (2018). Mindfulness under neoliberal governmentality: critiquing the operation of biopower in corporate mindfulness and constructing queer alternatives, *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion*, 15:2, 109-122, DOI: [10.1080/14766086.2017.1423239](https://doi.org/10.1080/14766086.2017.1423239)
- Walt, C. (2020, July 23). *Nice White Parents*. This American Life; NPR.
<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/712/nice-white-parents>
- Wang, J. (2018). Packing Guns Instead of Lunches: Biopower and Juvenile Delinquency. In *Carceral Capitalism* (pp. 193–227). Semiotexte.
- Warren, C. A., Presberry, C., & Louis, L. (2020). Examining teacher dispositions for evidence of (transformative) social and emotional competencies with black boys: The case of three urban high school teachers. *Urban Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085920933326>
- Way, K. (2021, March 8). *The Frantic Push to Reopen Schools Ignores Educational Inequality Before COVID*. Truthout. <https://truthout.org/articles/the-frantic-push-to-reopen-schools-ignores-educational-inequality-before-covid/>
- Weare, K. (2018, October). “The evidence for mindfulness in schools for children and young people.” Retrieved from <https://mindfulnessinschools.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Weare-Evidence-Review-Final.pdf>
- Weis, L., & Fine, M. (2012). Critical Bifocality and Circuits of Privilege: Expanding Critical Ethnographic Theory and Design. *Harvard Educational Review*, 82(2), 173–201. doi: 10.17763/haer.82.2.v1jx34n441532242

- Weisburst, E. (2018, November). Patrolling Public Schools: The Impact of Funding for ... Retrieved from <https://texaserc.utexas.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/21-UTA034-Brief-BPCAB-11.1.18.pdf>
- Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (1998). Backward Design. In *Understanding by Design* (pp. 13-34). ASCD.
- Will, M. (2021, February 22). *Teachers Are Stressed Out, and It's Causing Some to Quit*. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teachers-are-stressed-out-and-its-causing-some-to-quit/2021/02>
- Wilson, D. B., Solomon, T. A., & McLane-Davison, D. (2020). Ethics and Racial Equity in Social Welfare Policy: Social Work's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Social Work in Public Health, 35*(7), 617–632. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2020.1808145>
- Wolcott, D. B. (2005). *Cops and kids: Policing juvenile delinquency in urban America, 1890-1940*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press.
- Wright, T. (2014). Too scared to learn: Teaching young children who have experienced trauma. *Young Children, 69* (5), 88-93.
- Yusem, D. (2019, October 23). Restorative Justice in Schools: SEL in Action. Retrieved from <https://www.mindfulschools.org/inspiration/restorative-justice-in-schools-sel-in-action/>
- Zehr, H. (2002). *The little book of restorative justice*. Good Book

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Guided Visualization Narration example

In your pocket is a key that you and oh, you have to your secret garden day. So, you're walking towards your garden gate. **Notice** how you have made your garden gate is it made from wood, iron, eyes are closed, you're being very still, or your head is down if you don't want to close your eyes. Have you painted your garden gate? Take the key out of your pocket, visualize taking your key out of your pocket. Unlocking the gate is a terrible stepping in plugging a gate behind. As soon as you step into your secret gardens, you start to feel good, you feel at peace, you feel happy. And you know that you are safe in your secret garden. It's a sunny day. The fruit trees are cool. So maybe walk over and get your favorite piece of fruit off the tree or a bush. Visualize yourself doing that. Notice how it feels to bite into the fruit. What are the flavors? Is it juicy or dry? And there's a little babbling creek that makes really nice sounds you can hear birdsong and the flowers are blooming, you're gonna find a place in your secret garden to lay down where you can relax. Maybe that's in a hammock. Maybe you have a treehouse, and you decide to go into the treehouse to lie down. Maybe you just go over to a really mossy Green Hill and lay down on the earth with the sun on your face. I'll give you a moment to get settled into your resting place. Where can you learn how much to record on my recording. Once you're there, you're going to relax your shoulders, let the lower jaw fall away from the upper jaw. Soften the skin of the face and feel at ease and safe and relaxed. And then quite suddenly, your inner adviser appears. So, your inner advisor is someone that you make up. It could be someone who is alive, someone who has passed on. It could be someone who is spiritual to you. It could be the wind; it could be as color. So, with your eyes closed, feeling very relaxed, I want you to just get a vision and visualize who your inner advisor is, who or what your inner advisor is. One thing that you do know is that when you're in the presence of your inner adviser, you feel safe. And like you can tell your inner advisor anything. I'm going to give you a moment to be very quiet while my voice turns off while you show your inner advisor around your secret garden.

While you're showing your inner advisor around, if you have a problem, or a word that's making you nervous, you can chat with your inner advisor about that that's what your inner advisor is here to do is help you listen help listen to anything that's bothering you. So, I'll be quiet for a moment while you continue showing your inner advisor around and talking to your inner advisor about anything you want.

Your breath is very slow and calm. Your body feels good being around your inner advisor. So, it's time to go and leave your secret garden. But the cool thing is that we're going to continue to do this throughout the rest of the year. And very soon you'll be able to go to your secret garden on your own and your inner advisor will always be here. So, it's not sad that you're parting your inner advisor because they or it will be in the garden in time you need them. So, I'll give you a moment to figure out how you would like to say goodbye to your inner advisor.

Once you've said goodbye, you can walk to your secret garden gate. Take a breath, maybe a sigh like this. Knowing that you feel better, more relaxed, step outside, lock the gate, put the key back into your pocket, walk through the forest, right back into your classroom. You can open your eyes or sit up. Let's seal in our inner advisor so we'll remember to come back Okay, so get some friction going with your hands the heat and then seal it in anywhere you need it today. I kind of needed in my brain today my brains really sluggish. Maybe my heart. **Would anyone like to say what or who their inner advisor was?**

APPENDIX B: Student Survey Data Sample

(Question: Overall, how much do you feel like you belong or part of Marbury?)

Stub: Overall, how much do you feel like you belong or part of Marbury?

	Q2: What grade are you in?			
	Total	3rd grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
Total Count (All)	42.0	24.0	10.0	8.0
not at all	14.3%	12.5%	10.0%	25.0%
a little bit	16.7%	12.5%	20.0%	25.0%
mostly	11.9%	4.2%	20.0%	25.0%
completely	45.2%	50.0%	50.0%	25.0%

Stub: Overall, how much do you feel like you are accepted in your class?

	Q2: What grade are you in?			
	Total	3rd grade	4th Grade	5th Grade
Total Count (All)	42.0	24.0	10.0	8.0
not at all	11.9%	4.2%	30.0%	12.5%
a little bit	14.3%	8.3%	20.0%	25.0%
mostly	21.4%	16.7%	20.0%	37.5%
completely	35.7%	41.7%	30.0%	25.0%

APPENDIX C: Individual Teacher Interview Protocol Example

Background Information and General Thoughts on education: (All teachers)

1. What are some things that you would like to share about yourself? (Think of it as part of your biographical profile that will help readers know more about you)
Personal Background: Where are you from originally? Did or do other members of your family work in education? What events or experiences led you to become a teacher? Where or how did you train to become a teacher, if at all? What are the principles or philosophies that undergird your approach to teaching?
2. What do you think the purpose of education is and how have external events such as the pandemic, the focus on equity, antiracist, Black lives matter, etc.... affected your view of that?
3. How would you describe your journey as you learn more about equity, antiracism, and other topics that challenge the status quo? How is that manifesting in your methods and topics you teach?
4. What do you usually contact families about? How would you describe your relationship with your families?

Thoughts on Community Building/ Community Circle

5. When you first started your community circle in the mornings, what were your initial thoughts on the purpose of the circle? How has that changed as the semester has progressed? And what about the **closing circle** (what you learned/ shout outs) in the afternoon?
6. What would you consider a successful year of community circle? What would that look like? How would you describe the final product of community building/community circle?
(Possible follow up- how would those circles become spaces where students can redress harms and do more restorative practices?)
7. What is the role of SEL in the classroom? How has your view of its role or what it offers changed, if at all?
8. How have you cultivated a space where students feel like they belong and built trusting relationships with them?
9. What are some suggestions you have for future SEL+ lessons and curricular choices? Are there particular traits, skills, or topics, you think should be addressed to better support the needs of you and your students?

Thoughts on Equity, CRP, and its Challenges in teaching during a pandemic

10. To whom do you feel most accountable for when it comes to teaching “controversial” or “political” topics? How does that affect who or what you teach about such as systemic racism and student cultures?

APPENDIX D: Administrators, Coordinators, Wellness Team Interview

Protocol

Meeting Families' Needs

First, introductions: If you could introduce yourself and what your general role is at the school including populations you serve. How are you feeling as this first semester is wrapping up?

1. What have been some of the biggest challenges this year? What have been the biggest successes?
2. How has Marbury responded to these challenges and what are areas where you still need more support?
3. What have been the overall goals of the Wellness team and how have those been fulfilled?
 - a. For Michelle (social worker) (What are some of the general trends you've noticed and differences (between previous years and this one)
 - b. As a social worker how has your relationship with families changed, if at all? Duties changed if at all.
4. How would you describe the populations you serve? And how do you think Marbury families perceive the school?
5. What are some things that you would change with the way that the school responded to the pandemic to better serve its families?
6. What information would you like to have in order to better serve Marbury families?

Equity, Antibias/Antiracist implementation

7. How do you see your decisions and approaches reflective of the antibias, antiracist trainings during the summer?
8. How would you describe the sense of community the school has built/is building with its families?
9. How would you imagine that this school year's equity-centered approach/restorative justice approach would have been different if it was in person?
10. What does the following look like to you: being an equity-centered school/A trauma-informed school/an antiracist school?

Restorative Justice

11. How much do you feel that implementation of the restorative justice mindset is present in the school? Can this exist in a public-school setting?

APPENDIX E: Parents/Caregivers Interview Protocol

Background

1. What would you like us to know about you (for example: children at the school, how long at Marbury Elementary, where you grew up)?
2. How would you describe your experience and emotional connections to school growing up? What would you like for your children to experience?

School-Parent Partnerships

3. Would you feel comfortable sharing a time that you felt the school listened to you? Felt ignored or even put down by the school?
4. How can the school show that it welcomes your cultural and family values? What would that look like to you?
5. How do you your children talk about school with you? Like do they have mostly positive or negative stories to tell? Can you share an example of a positive story? A negative story?
6. What do you know about SEL+? (Provide a short summary...*it is a social-emotional learning program that focuses on the ways that movement (like yoga), self-regulation (like breathing exercises, and thinking about how our emotions affect our body) and playing games that also help us think about heavy issues all give a space for children to be more empowered and in control of how they react to things whether good or bad.*)
 - a. What are some topics that you think would be helpful to include in SEL+?

Thoughts on School and Society

7. What are ways that online learning has impacted your feelings about school (your relationship with the school)? About teaching?
8. What are some topics or people that you would like the school to talk about more? Talk about less? (What about issues around mental health? Politics? Race? Policing?)

Follow up: What are some topics, skills, or ideas that you wish you were taught in school? What would you like your children to be taught to be future well-balanced adults?
9. How would you describe the communication you receive from the school? What suggestions do you have to better communicate with parents? What kind of information would you like the school (including teachers for example) to communicate with you?

APPENDIX F: Student Interview Protocol Example

Second Interview (February)

Identity/In-person learning

1. How are you feeling about school right now? What's your favorite thing you've done at school this year?
2. Is there something you would like to about at school? Or a topic you want to learn more about or teacher your classmates/teachers about? (Maybe a person you look up to? Or someone or something you learned about from Miss Emma or your teachers)?

SEL+ Emotions and Culturally responsive Lessons

3. How would you describe SEL+ to someone who does not know anything about it like to a new student or your siblings or parent?
4. How do you feel about the SEL+ activities you are doing? Are you doing them outside of class time at all? How often? (**repeated from first interview**)
5. What do you do that helps you when you are feeling really sad, mad, or upset? (How does SEL+ help with those feelings)?
6. What do you like most about SEL+? What do you want to do more of? Do less of? Why?

Community Building and Activist Dispositions

7. How do you feel about your community circles in the morning? What about your closing circles at the end of the day? What's your favorite part of each? *What else would you like to do during those times?*
8. In school we have talked about communities and what communities you feel part of. So, What communities do you feel part of (where do you feel like your opinions matter and you feel safe?) What does community mean to you? (**repeated from first interview**) ADDED: What are the descriptions of the community you would want to be part of?
9. There are things that happen in our community that are wrong and unfair. What is something that is wrong or unfair that you have been thinking about lately (like maybe something you see on TV, or read about)? In the school community, or in the United States?
 - a. what do you think we should do about that?
 - b. How do we make sure that everyone feels like they belong and that they are safe in our classroom community, our school community, the United States?
 - c. I would love to know your ideas about how can we make sure that these unfair or wrong things don't happen again?

APPENDIX G: Summary of Participants (featured in this dissertation)

*Students featured are not indicative of those interviewed with the exception of Rhianna (11 total), rather they were observed within online and in-person classroom settings. Students interviewed will be featured more directly in future publications and were cited in more general terms in this document.

Administrators/Wellness Team:

Ramona- Principal
Emma- Social-Emotional Learning Coordinator
Nate- Counselor
Michelle- Social Worker
Audra- Parent-school facilitator
Poppy- ELL Coordinator

Teachers:

Ms. John- Third Grade Reading/SS
Ms. Warren- Third Grade Math
Mr. Styles- Fourth Grade Self-contained
Mrs. Eagle- Fifth Grade Self-contained

Parents (further identification may affect anonymity):

Leena- mother of two
Ronda- mother of two
Nikki- mother of five

Students (sex descriptors only since students did not self-identify race):

Simon- third grader, male
Rhianna- third grader, female
Derrick- third grader, male
Daryl- third grader, male
Kalvin- fourth grader, male
Ray- fourth grader, male
Farrah- fourth grader, female
Maya- fifth grader, female
Jesse- fifth grader, female

VITA

Jinan S. El Sabbagh

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Dissertation: “MOVE, PLAY, REGULATE”:

A CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A COMMUNITY-BASED SEL CURRICULUM’S
TRANSFORMATIVE IMPLICATIONS AT A LOW-INCOME PUBLIC ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL

Major Field: Curriculum Studies

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum Studies at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in December, 2021.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Education in Reading at Northeastern State University, Tahlequah, Oklahoma in 2016.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History at University of Tulsa, Tulsa, Oklahoma in 2012.

Experience:

6 years Secondary ELA Teacher
3 years Research Assistant/Teaching

Professional Memberships:

(I)AAACS, AERA, AESA, NCTE, OKCTE, OSA, OSU Writing Project