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Leadership for Inclusion: Navigating the Evolving Landscape of the Further Education and Training (FET) Sector in Ireland

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Abstract

The Further Education and Training (FET) sector in Ireland offers a significant level of diversity, in student population, level of study, and form of delivery. As such, inclusive provision is crucial to the sector's success as a viable learning pathway. Key to this process is the work of leaders, as there is ample evidence of their impact on effective inclusive policy and practice. The vast majority of existing research in this area has focused on primary, post-primary, and higher education sectors with an evident lack of such work in FET. This project addresses this gap, illuminating perspectives and practices around leadership for inclusion in Irish FET settings, based on first-hand accounts from senior leaders. Five leaders in a range of FET settings participated in an exploratory qualitative inquiry with two researchers. The findings reveal a common conceptualisation of inclusion as rights-based and far-reaching where leaders are evidently committed to fully including all members of their respective populations. Leaders acknowledge their own role in modelling inclusive practice, but somewhat dichotomously, highlight a lack of visibility around inclusive teaching and learning. Finally, they acknowledge that FET's diminished status in comparison to other sectors has resulted in difficulties around gaining and employing supports for learners, but they also demonstrate a belief that this same status has undergone a sense of renewal in recent times.

Keywords: further education and training, leadership, inclusion, Ireland

Introduction

Recent reports highlight increasing diversity in the learner population as well as form of provision and pathways in Further Education and Training (FET) in Ireland (Solas, 2021a). Inclusive provision is evidently central in successfully navigating this evolving landscape as it reaches beyond the affordance of resources and pedagogical modifications, embracing learners' preparation for active and full participation in wider society (Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI), 2021). The work of leaders plays a pivotal role in such processes (Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2004). Existing research on leadership and inclusion appears to neglect insights from the FET sector. This project attempts to address the absence of such literature, illuminating the experiences of senior leaders, and drawing out potential lessons for the wider FET sector and indeed beyond.

Background to FET in Ireland

The FET sector in Ireland offers qualifications at Levels 1-6 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). These include post-leaving certificate programmes, traineeships, apprenticeships, and community and adult education programmes (ETBI, 2021). A diverse range of settings cater for the FET community, including (but not limited to) colleges and institutes of FET, Youthreach centres, training facilities, prison-based education, and adult learning centres. Solas (the Irish word for light) is the state agency responsible for funding, planning, and monitoring FET in Ireland on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) and recent figures from the agency illustrate an increasingly diverse learner population (Solas, 2021a). This data reveals that almost half of the c.150,000 learners enrolled are 35-64+ years of age, a fifth are unemployed, approximately 10,000 have reported having a disability, over a quarter report attaining a lower secondary

education or below at the time of enrolment, and they represent c.200 nationalities (Solas, 2021a, Solas, 2021b).

The sector has experienced significant reform in recent years, with ongoing attempts toward centralisation of functions and vision, professionalisation of its workforce, and the strengthening of opportunities for an increasingly diverse population of learners to contribute to broader social and economic development (Solas, 2020). Most recently it has witnessed moves toward greater alignment with higher education, as the current government envisions a more unified tertiary system (DFHERIS, 2022). This of course contrasts sharply with the sector's oft-cited positioning as the 'poor relation' of the broader education landscape, where it has been viewed not as a highly regarded pathway for learning and career development in its own right, but merely as an option for those who fail to gain access to higher education (McGuinness et al., 2014). Nonetheless, Solas (2020) espouses an exciting time ahead, where the sector can seize the opportunity for greater collaboration and cohesion, but in doing so "must simplify its structure and learning pathways, facilitate easier access, ensure a more consistent learner experience, and build a more powerful identity within communities and potential learners" (p. 8). A key element in this process is the retention of a focus on active inclusion and community development as central to FET provision, where the sector will continue to pledge its support to local communities and to the proactive participation for the most marginalised groups, as it recognises the complexity of learners' needs across the sector (Solas, 2020).

Literature Review

The literature review offers a conceptualisation of leadership for inclusion both in education settings more broadly and in the field of FET, with some reference to the Irish context.

Conceptualising Leadership in Education

Research and policy development on leadership in education has grown substantially in recent decades (Bellibaş & Gümüş, 2019). There is however a lack of consensus on what constitutes educational leadership where conceptualisations are based on "a wide spectrum of knowledge, characteristics, dispositions, and skills containing competing perspectives and understandings with little agreement of what is or should be included in the discipline" (Sellami et al., 2022, p. 770). Evidently, the process of "social influence" is key as leaders support the building of a vision and motivation of individuals to realise this vision, through verbal and nonverbal interactional processes where "meaning, context and goal setting are interwoven" (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2016, p. 11), as they "enlist the aid and support of others in the attainment of common as well as ethical tasks" (Sarwar et al., 2022, p. 2).

James et al. (2020) situate leaders at the heart of education communities, whose actions and principles are aligned with their wider social and ethical environment. Leadership therefore emerges through meaning-making interactions that carry key messages about institutional practices, culture, values, and the setting's fundamental purpose. Purpose here arguably aligns with broader notions of vision or mission, and there is clear evidence of how leaders impact the construction, nurturing, and communication of these elements within institutions (Kantabutra & Avery, 2010). This institutional vision is inseparable from the leader's personal vision as it is

grounded in the “personal experiences and values which form their motives and personality” (Yoeli & Berkovich, 2010, p. 451).

Leadership in FET

There is a lack of literature pertaining to leadership in FET in Ireland. However, research from other jurisdictions, and specifically the United Kingdom offers a range of useful insights. Evidently leaders’ roles in these settings have shifted in tandem with the introduction of cost control measures, as well as “private sector management techniques” and “consumerist performance measures and targets” (McTavish & Miller, 2009, p. 351). Collinson and Collinson’s (2009) study with FET leaders revealed a desire for greater flexibility and creativity, with less emphasis on fulfilling managerialist functions. Leaders here called for enhanced capacity for self-regulation where they can respond to the growing economic and social challenges in their local communities. Lambert’s (2013) study offers evidence of three observable dimensions in FET leadership, that is, external-public, internal-public, and internal-private. External-public refers to the highly visible outward facing position where leaders serve the interests of their settings with stakeholders. Internal-public involves the administrative and pedagogic functions of the role, while internal-private refers to non-visible aspects such as strategic thinking and developing the vision of the setting in collaboration with others. A variety of authors offer similar evidence of multiplicity and blending of styles and roles amongst FET leaders (Collinson & Collinson, 2009).

Conceptualising Inclusion

Inclusion is a broad term which is both elusive and highly contested (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Traditionally focused on learners with disabilities, there has been an expansion of this

concept to include all who are at risk of being marginalised or excluded (UNESCO, 2001). Varied legislative mechanisms have attempted to offer clarity and direction here, with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (United Nations, 2006) asserting that member countries will support the inclusion of students into a fully supported education system with "an equitable and participatory learning experience and environment that best corresponds to their requirements and preferences" (para. 11). It therefore places the human rights and dignity of the individual at the centre and affirms that impairment does not equate to deficit, nor does it substantiate reasons to deny individuals of their basic human rights (Degener, 2016). This emphasises the context in which the individual is situated and explores key social, cultural, and economic factors (Quirke et al., 2023). Such a shift towards a human-rights approach to inclusive provision moves beyond individual supports examining how systems are structured to ensure they can meet the needs of all learners (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE), 2013a). Creating environments where each learner can have a sense of belonging is key to inclusive pedagogy as it emphasises what teachers do in facilitating learning for all as opposed to what works for some with mere 'add-ons' for the few (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011).

Inclusion in FET

While most research on inclusive education focuses on compulsory sectors, some publications do offer insights on inclusion in FET, again though primarily from the United Kingdom. In their seminal guide to teaching in the sector Curzon and Tummons (2013) refer to inclusive practice in FET as concerned with an approach that "endeavors to encourage the fullest participation of learners" where educators are committed to an ethical framework that "recognizes and respects quality and diversity, and the potential of all learners" (p. 292) and goes

beyond learners with specific learning difficulties. This stands in contrast to early sector-specific work from Partington (2003) whose project on inclusion of learners with disabilities demonstrates that FET tutors were ill-prepared to fully include such learners. While staff welcomed inclusion in principle, the nature of specific disabilities led to the adoption of a deficit model of provision. Such assertions are supported by Wright (2006) whose work highlighted exclusionary practices, a lack of cohesive planning and policymaking, and increased pressures around economic success criteria. The focus on the latter also features elsewhere with authors highlighting a dichotomy in some FET provision. Meir (2018) aligns early efforts in the UK to foster inclusivity in FET with "a desire for social justice" but highlights how shifts toward performativity and increased marketisation, accompanied by imposed austerity, have left "inclusive practice across the sector … significantly under threat" (p. 333). Wider reports on FET have highlighted the importance of staff and leadership who are committed, motivated and highly qualified, with ongoing access to continuous professional development. They also emphasize the importance of distributed leadership, moving from a top-down to a more collaborative approach (EASNIE, 2013b).

In the Irish context, fostering inclusion has been identified as a pillar of the FET strategy (Solas, 2020) where there is an understanding that FET provision must be accessible by all. However, evidence points toward ongoing challenges in engaging particular groups in FET, including some ethnic minorities, for example, members of the Traveller or Roma communities, those experiencing homelessness, and those with substance misuse issues (ETBI, 2021). Further challenges include inconsistency in forms of support across FET settings, and an evident disjuncture between FET and its sectoral neighbours, that is, post-primary and higher education,

where specific personnel have roles regarding managing inclusive provision. Currently, this practice is not part of the landscape of FET across all providers (ETBI, 2021).

With regard to inclusive pedagogy Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is widely promoted as being a good fit to support the inclusion of and for all (International Disability Alliance, 2021). Currently in Ireland, the UDL Framework is highlighted in policy, strategy, and reports on inclusive education in the FET sector as being a key component of inclusive provision in FET (Quirke & McCarthy, 2020). However, evidently there is a significant gap in research on how teachers prepare universally designed lessons and what the benefits and challenges of implementing UDL are for both the learner and educator (Reynor, 2020).

Leadership for Inclusion: Models and Typologies

Leadership for inclusion in education can be defined "as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners" and is therefore "understood as eliminating social exclusion that is a consequence of responses to diversity in race, social class, ethnicity, religion, gender and ability" (Vitello & Mithaug, 1998, cited in Kugelmass, 2003, p. 3). Such leaders demonstrate a vision that all learners should benefit from "meaningful, high quality" education "in their local communities" (EASNIE, 2020, p. 8). Wider definitions emphasise a focus on valuing individual difference through "respect and equality", as the aim of leadership for inclusion "is to attain mutual goals through creating, changing, and innovating while balancing needs and appreciating differences" (Ackaradejruangsri et al., 2023, p. 3699). Similarly, while acknowledging the presence of inevitable 'goals' in educational processes, Devecchi and Nevin (2010) attest that leadership for inclusion is fundamentally centred on people, and therefore prioritises the wellbeing of all community members, hence rejecting any consideration of staff or students as mere instruments in the process of external goal achievement.

Some authors have focused on styles or typologies of leadership in the context of inclusion. In exploring leaders' actions and behaviours many studies have done so through the lens of instructional leadership. This refers to a form where leaders play a central role in constructing and articulating the vision of the institution, managing teaching, learning and assessment processes, and nurturing a positive climate (Hallinger, 2007). More recent work on inclusionary leadership has shifted toward distributed, democratic, and social justice models (DeMatthews, 2015). At its heart distributed leadership concerns the "interactions, rather than the actions" of leaders, as it "acknowledges the work of all individuals who contribute to leadership practice", necessitating "lateral, flatter decision-making processes" for organisational change (Harris & Spillane, 2008, p. 31). The values-based premise of democratic leadership, as well as its capacity for nurturing ethical dialogue around diversity, and empowerment of education communities in challenging contexts, also leave it well placed to underpin leadership for inclusion (Szeto, 2021). Finally, transformational leadership is frequently linked to inclusive education, via its emphasis on reforming institutional culture, enhancing teacher agency and efficacy, and attending to outcomes for all learners (Romanuck Murphy, 2018).

Although grounded in a fundamental distributed leadership premise, Morrissey's (2021) inclusionary leadership model relies on a triad of interconnected typologies, namely values leadership, managerial leadership, and teacher leadership. Values-based leadership is key as attitudes and beliefs are fundamental to inclusive practice, as is teacher leadership as successful inclusion depends on autonomous decision-making, authentic and relevant professional learning, and professional competence. Managerial tendencies are a necessary element as inclusive provision requires important structural accommodations and the fulfilment of a range of statutory functions. The wider leadership literature cautions against any an excessive focus on managerial

leadership as it may lead to managerialism, where a leader's attention is directed more toward bureaucratic processes and external accountability (Bush, 2018).

Inclusionary Leaders: Characteristics and Practices

The research also offers evidence of specific characteristics that underpin inclusionary leadership. These include "advocating for inclusion, educating participants, developing critical consciousness, nurturing dialogue, emphasizing student learning and classroom practice, adopting inclusive decision- and policy-making strategies, and incorporating whole school approaches" (Ryan, 2006, p. 11). In Northouse's (2021) inclusive leadership model leaders demonstrate pro-diversity beliefs, open-mindedness, and cognitive complexity. Dorczak (2013) offers a comprehensive series of characteristics for leadership in inclusive cultures. These include the valuing of all according to their potential, capitalising on opportunities to hear all voices, giving adequate space for personal and professional development, and an acceptance of ongoing change processes.

Evidently inclusionary leaders exhibit a range of practices. These include modelling through language and gesture in their interactions with educators and learners, collaborative and often multi-disciplinary planning for inclusive provision based on quality data, and the facilitation of meeting structures to allow educators time and space to address learner need (Carter & Awabi, 2018). Such leaders also facilitate educators' engagement in meaningful professional learning and nurture trusting relationships via open dialogue with educators about their experiences in schools and their life beyond. They demonstrate thoughtful resource ascertainment and allocation, including personnel placement, and actively connect with external partners in realising the wider vision of inclusion (DeMatthews et al., 2020). In actuating this vision, leaders evidently face a range of challenges. These include logistical difficulties around

funding and the facilitation of impactful professional learning which can be challenging to source. Teachers' attitudes to inclusion can also impede progress as they may view such provision as beyond their role, a position which may be both reflective of and reinforced by the perspective of wider communities towards inclusive schooling (Alkaabi et al, 2022). Further difficulties arise where leaders are overwhelmed by administrate tasks and are therefore unable to participate in instructional planning or provision (Dennehy et al., 2024).

This review of the literature demonstrates the intricate and evolving nature of educational leadership for inclusion. The varying theories, models, characteristics, and behaviours associated with such leaders highlights the inherent complexity of their role, as they attempt to cultivate inclusive cultures and practices while balancing the demands of internal and external stakeholders. This challenge is perhaps more acute in the context of FET due to its traditional positionality in the education and economic landscape. However, as the review has evidenced, little is known as to how leaders in FET capitalise on the sector's ongoing attempts to meet the needs of a diverse population of learners while simultaneously navigating sectoral reform.

Theoretical Framework

In accepting that leadership for inclusion is socially constructed, contextually bound, and made visible through discernible practices, this project was further underpinned by ecological systems theory (EST) (Anderson, 2017; Anderson et al., 2014). EST has been used in a wide range of projects exploring inclusive education (Kamenopoulou, 2016; Tahir et al., 2019) and educational leadership (King & Travers, 2017; Shah, 2023). EST views the individual at the centre of a series of nested interdependent systems. At the most local level (microsystem) the individual "plays a direct role, has direct experiences and social interactions with others" while the next system (mesosystem) features the interaction between two of the individuals' settings

(Neal & Neal, 2013, p. 276). Beyond these more localised settings, the exosystem accounts for structures in which the individual may not directly participate but are nonetheless impacted by, while the macrosystem accounts for the impact of powerful cultural and ideological factors. This framework facilitated the exploration of leadership for inclusion at varying levels, that is, at an individual level, a local setting-based level, a wider sectoral level, and an "outermost level, comprising the cultural constructs, social and economic conditions, and history" (Fivush & Merrill, 2016, p. 307). Interviews therefore explored a wide range of topics and ideas, including individual constructions of the phenomenon, visible (and non-visible) practices and perspectives in settings, the impact of wider policies and developments, and broader societal factors.

Methodology

There is a lack of research pertaining to leadership for inclusion in FET, and this is particularly acute in the Irish context. This therefore necessitated an exploratory inquiry approach (Patton, 2002). Shani (2023) describes exploratory inquiry as "eliciting experience by generating an understanding of what has taken and is taking place" (p. 180). Schein and Schein (2013) refer here to remaining in a mode of "humble inquiry" where researchers emphasise "exploratory questions that minimize telling and maximise letting the other person tell his or her story in as unbiased a way as possible" (p. 42). As such, this approach focuses on qualitative data collection around ambiguous phenomena with the aim of providing evidence from lived experience (Birchall, 2014).

Participants

Prior to commencing the study ethical permission was granted by the researchers' institution. Notifications seeking participants for the study were sent to senior leaders in varying

FET services. This included the Education and Training Boards (ETB), Youthreach service, Prison Education service, Training, and Adult Education services. The notification asked directors to share with leaders in their respective networks. Inclusion criteria stipulated that leaders should be in a senior position, that is, principals or deputy principals, directors, or managers. To indicate willingness to participate, potential participants completed a Microsoft Form, after which they were contacted by the researchers to clarify any issues and answer queries. Five participants eventually consented to be interviewed. Due to the relatively small community of leaders in Irish FET settings and the risk to anonymity biographic details are limited here and pseudonyms are used throughout. Both Annette and Paul hold leadership positions in colleges of further education and have done so for several years. Likewise, Claire has been in a similar position for a significant period, albeit in the prison education service. Priya and Jackie have less years of experience in a leadership role than the other participants. Priya is employed in a training centre while Jackie is employed in adult education. The participants have a range of relevant qualifications, including post-primary teacher certification and/or varying qualifications in teaching in FET and adult learning.

Data Collection

Data was collected via in-depth semi-structured interviews. This form of interviewing can facilitate engagement in a dialogic exchange "through which the interviewer can excavate deeper layers of a particular topic" (Das et al., 2020, p.2). The interview is fundamentally conversational in nature, and in this case, participants were supported in telling their story of leading inclusion in their respective settings, focusing on a range of aspects (Guion et al., 2011). Questions and prompts included:

- Tell me about your understanding of inclusive education.

- What does inclusivity look like in your setting?
- As a leader, describe your role in fostering inclusion in the setting.
- What challenges do you face as a leader in supporting inclusivity?
- What opportunities for enhancing inclusivity exist in the setting, and what impact can you have?

Participants were given the option of completing their interview via Microsoft Teams or in person. Two opted for the latter, while the remaining three used the online platform. All interviews were audio-recorded. Both researchers had prior experience in completing research projects utilising interviews. Prior to commencing they collaboratively worked through the planned questions and topics for exploration and agreed expectations around the dialogic and narrative tone of the interviews. The emphasis here was on allowing leaders to unpack their own journeys regarding inclusionary leadership. Due to researcher and participant availability, it was agreed that one researcher could conduct two interviews, while another would conduct three.

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with verbatim transcription of the recordings. The process then drew on Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-step thematic analysis method as an accessible yet sophisticated and systematic approach. The first step here required an immersion in the text through reading and re-reading, followed by open coding (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Both researchers completed the coding of two transcripts before meeting to discuss initial codes, where we reflected on commonalities and points of difference. Following this reflective dialogue we independently coded the remainder of the transcripts. We then met again to discuss emergent themes, that is, where we could see codes that could be organised together into broader themes.

Having identified four preliminary overarching themes, we each took some time to read and review the data associated with these to ensure ‘fit’ with the overall dataset. This resulted in the collapsing of one theme into an existing theme, and the highlighting of several subthemes. The final steps involved the defining of each theme, wherein we endeavoured to tell its story, using verbatim quotes to support.

Trustworthiness

Ensuring quality in any qualitative study requires a consideration of its overall trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). This study was guided by Shenton’s (2004) framework for addressing trustworthiness, where it was grounded in an early familiarity with the contexts of the varying settings in which the leaders worked and involved complete transparency around the research process. It proceeded to use conventional and well-established methods to gather and analyse data, including iterative questioning, where researcher and participant could return to topics and ideas for clarification and elaboration. The overall process involved frequent debriefing between researchers where we engaged in critically reflective dialogue. Finally, as a form of member checking the findings were shared with participants who were asked for any further input.

Results

The overall process identified three overarching themes and several related subthemes.

Theme 1: Realising a Vision of Inclusion

The participants offered expanded conceptualisations of inclusion and a common commitment to nurturing inclusive practice. However, while lauding the efforts of their staff, the

visibility of such practices was not always apparent. Professional learning evidently proved key in realising this vision.

Conceptualising Inclusion

While recognising the historical affiliation of inclusion with specific groups, the participants highlighted an expanded configuration:

> It's a bigger term. You're bringing in everyone so that it really is a welcoming space with the appropriate supports for absolutely everybody. Regardless of whether it's a need which is physically based or mentally based, or whether it's something to do with their orientation or their background, or their racial needs. (Paul)

Annette commented on her own development here:

> I had a very limited definition of what inclusivity was. And now I realise, I suppose maybe just time, experience, whatever … I think it's anybody who needs a little bit of support or a lot … whether it's language or whether it's with identity or whether it's with additional needs.

Claire also made a distinction here but connected any narrowness in interpretation to her own experience, particularly in the prison system. Despite knowing it was much wider than "traditionally marginalised groups", she didn't always think beyond this because:

> People with physical disabilities, we very rarely have any. We've had people who've been deaf, but we've found it very difficult to help them. And then in the prison, LGBT people, it's difficult being in jail. It's unspoken.

Overall, therefore, as a result of experience and ongoing interaction with diverse groups the participants' conceptualisations of inclusion had shifted over time, from a traditional focus on those with disabilities to a broader consideration that accounted for anyone in the setting facing potential barriers.

Leader and Educator Commitment

This expansive consideration was clearly underpinned by a sense of commitment in their settings. Paul described inclusion as "embedded into everything that we do". Annette described her team as "doing a really decent job" in how they supported students, referring particularly to the work of their (admittedly under-resourced) Guidance Counselling team. Priya also commented on the commitment of educators:

> The instructors are with them all day, every day for their course … for sometimes up to a year if they're doing a traineeship ... So, they deal with every single issue you could imagine and it's great for the students … because they have an anchor.

This vision of inclusion was also informed by the leaders' own personal and professional journey. Paul commented on personal circumstances around disability that strengthened his commitment to inclusivity while Annette also commented on how the "biggest advocates for inclusion in our staff are those that have family members who require additional support". Claire spoke about her own journey, where she "hated school and couldn't wait to get out" but knew she "wanted to teach". She spoke about teachers in her first school as being somewhat unfair in their description of groups or individuals as problematic, and how this resonated with her as:

> I probably was the Student A in Class A in my school ... There was nothing wrong

with her … I just hate that thing of being warned and Class A to me ended up being the ones where there was a bit of life in them.

Such commitment was evidently challenged at times. Paul highlighted how "there are always challenges when you ask someone to change" but he never experienced any real "kickback", while Annette commented on how the age profile of some educators meant that certain adaptations "might have been challenging" and there will also be staff who "just don't get it … but we have to make allowances". She commented on specific cases, including those with mental health needs where they "struggled to support these students", but she actively involved external agencies here as "sometimes it's better or easier to hear from someone else … because you don't know if you're doing the right things". This reflective stance was echoed by other participants, as they readily admitted that they may not have all of the solutions and experiences may go awry, but the key was to learn from such opportunities and remain resilient.

Overall, the leaders characterised both their own efforts and those of the staff in their settings as committed to cultivating inclusivity. This sense of commitment was impacted not only by present situations with increasing diversity in their settings, but also by past personal experiences. However, while remaining committed they realised that inclusive provision was an ongoing journey that required the management of challenges and seeking of solutions.

Realising Inclusion through Specific Practices

The participants highlighted a range of inclusive practices. Jackie described how she modelled how to:

speak about staff, students, people, things that are happening … It's about me

> modelling how I want that and ensuring through meeting and talking at training with my own staff … this is how everybody who comes into our centres are treated.

Other practices included specific opportunities to support connectedness between students, for example, “Traveller Pride Day, ESOL days and international student days” (Claire), or “coffee mornings for mature students” (Annette). Annette also commented on “whole college events” where they’re not “separating students out” as “everybody’s in this together”. Jackie went further here and involved the local community:

> So, we have our annual quiz, and we have our book launch, and we’ll have our party, and we have … our garden and different things that are not just for you and your literacy class [or] your English language class, but for all of us together.

Participants commented on some specific pedagogical strategies. Priya highlighted the establishment of a voluntary Learner Support Group, as well as a range of other elements:

> We have learning support. We have language support. We have people who look after your mental health and we have technology support … whatever it is, we’re going to start implementing and putting structures in place to make sure that everyone can learn in a similar way to everyone else.

Similarly, Annette commented on individualised support in class where “if you’ve got a busy class and you’re teaching them something and you need to support extra students, the students will work ahead ... and you give the individual support. I think staff do the best that they can”.

Evidently some participants found it difficult to articulate how inclusivity was

cultivated by individual educators in their settings, but in keeping with the sentiments above did not doubt their commitment. Claire spoke of "inclusive practice happening by stealth" while Paul described how its embedded nature meant no particular element "stood out a mile". Annette believed this was specific to the sector:

> I honestly don't know because in further education there's no access for us into the classroom. There's no way of knowing what happens. So, the only way we know that things are going well or not so well is if there's complaints or if there's issues. I can only assume that things are going well. It's not a great way to be.

Claire highlighted how "it's nearly left to individual teachers just to do what they can", while Priya commented on its sometimes ad-hoc nature and how "most of the time they don't realise they're actually supporting learners as much as they are".

Professional Learning for Inclusion

Professional learning was key to the leaders' vision. They were committed to supporting staff in their in-career development for inclusive practice. Paul highlighted how "I have to be shown to be the first one to take part in it and to do it". Priya spoke about "getting staff to the point where they can engage … and do all that professional development". She commented on a "step change" and an absence of "resistance", where it's "around keeping the student at the centre of things and making sure the staff are supported". Paul also described spending "an awful lot of time on continuing professional development (CPD) to make sure that the staff are very well aware of their requirements". At times this is facilitated by external agencies and at others takes the form of "peer to peer learning". Similarly, in Annette's setting they engage in "CPD as much as we can" while

realising that “you can give all the CPD in the world, but it’s how students actually get the benefit. That’s the hard to thing to know”. Claire however highlighted the challenges offered by CPD, as although “we have our responsibility as leaders to keep our staff as modern as possible in terms of their teaching and learning ... I don’t think there’s a lot for leaders... around inclusion and diversity”. Priya however reflected on her participation in specific inclusion programmes as “through the process of doing short courses or the post grad, the more clarity there is around my own thinking and where I want to go.”

Overall, the leaders clearly valued CPD for educators to support inclusion in their settings. This took a number of forms and was facilitated both internally and externally. They also clearly valued opportunities for their own CPD as inclusionary leaders.

Theme 2: Diversity in the FET Learner Population

While acknowledging a broad understanding of inclusion, the participants demonstrated a heightened awareness of the increasing diversity in FET settings and the resultant impact on practices and perspectives. They demonstrated a deep awareness of their learners’ identities and were also aware of the often-transitory nature of the population.

Supporting Transition into and through FET

The participants demonstrated an acute awareness of the multiple and sometimes shifting identities of the FET population as they bring a range of prior experiences, perspectives, and expectations. Paul described the population of his setting as made up of mostly “youngsters who are just trying to get into a university programme”, while Annette commented on the setting as a “second choice” to higher education but added that this positioning “is changing in the last couple of years”. Both also referred to mature learners,

who can bring with them “certain expectations” (Annette) and require specific supports as they may be “struggling coming back to education and find it very daunting to do all this” (Annette). Participants also identified students with specific needs, including learners on the autism spectrum, those experiencing challenges with literacy and numeracy, and learners with intellectual disabilities. Annette commented on their status regarding support where they “have a large cohort of students with additional needs” as “we’ve gained a bit of a reputation … if you come to this college, you’ll get looked after.”

The Nature of Diversity in FET

The participants highlighted not only diversity within the overall FET population, but within their individual settings. Priya described the complex makeup of learners in her setting, including an apprenticeship cohort who “really want to be here … because passing means that they go up in their pay rate”. An equally committed, albeit unpaid, group of trainees attended at night and a third group of “long-term unemployed” learners attended so as to maintain their jobseekers benefit status. However, despite their determination to succeed, these varying groups present with an “array of difficulties and problems”, including “learning support and mental health issues”. This somewhat fragile characterisation featured elsewhere in the narratives, where in an adult education setting Jackie described how they “prioritised the wellbeing of our students above other things … we are aware some of our students are not in a great place ... in terms of their living accommodation, their social situation, their health situation”. Similarly, Annette commented on the population of Ukrainian learners who may require support due to the “traumatic background” of their transition, while Jackie highlighted the needs of those with refugee or asylum status.

The participants recognised the importance of considering ‘who’ their learners were,

and the trajectory they had experienced up to that point, as key to meeting their needs. Priya commented on how some of the learners may "have had substance abuse issues" but in the setting "they need to present in here. They need to clock in and clock out, and they need to account for themselves at all times". Claire described the complexity of the prison-based population, where distinct groups are on "protection from other groups", necessitating strategic planning on the part of educators. She also highlighted the evident over-representation of members of the Traveller community in the prison system and how this is the "only group that have been identified as having special needs in education terms", so they engaged with a "Traveller Liaison teacher who tailors programmes to them". Claire recognised the fundamental journey that had brought learners to this point in prison, hence her philosophy of learning focused on a need to instil a sense of value in the learners, supporting them in "critical thinking" processes about valuing themselves and indeed others. Similarly, Jackie recognised the specific benefits of cultural diversity offered by her setting, and how increasing the community education programmes could impact wider inclusion:

> Sometimes this is the only place where people actually meet people from other cultures or people who have different lifestyles from them … It's a great fostering ground for inclusion, to get people to think differently ... They may have had stereotypical ideas about other people and now they've … met a guy in their group who says he's gay or somebody from Somalia, when previously they would have had kind of racist assumptions or whatever. So, I think that is great.

One further point of interest made by Jackie concerned the mirroring of the diversity within the student population with those in educator roles. She expressed a belief that staff aren't:

> reflective of the kind of diversity in the community ... I think we need to see that ... we need ... (teachers) from different places ... I can guarantee if we had a Traveller woman on staff ... Traveller women would be very happy to come up here to our centre.

The nature of the diversity in the settings represented a complex makeup of learners. This represented challenges for leaders in nurturing a vision of inclusion that accounted for the entire community, but also represented significant opportunities to foster key messages about respect, tolerance, and the celebration of difference.

Theme 3: Navigating the Wider Landscape

Participants were profoundly aware of the impact of reform on their efforts toward inclusion. They also reflected on more localised arrangements and the impact of resourcing, as well as ongoing efforts to balance the requirements of quality assurance with maximising inclusive learning experiences.

'Fit' and the Wider Landscape

Leaders explored where FET fits as a sector, where they fit as a provider, and the impact this can have on learner supports. Paul commented on how:

> for a long time, FE has been halfway between second level and third level and didn't know what it was…they have huge support in second level, and they have them at higher level. And then we are again, the Cinderella, you're in the middle. And once again, we don't have them (supports).

It was acknowledged that the sector is developing, but that "the support piece is still

not there" (Annette). Evidently the somewhat dispersed nature of FET makes support provision vastly different from other sectors, where "it's a bit more difficult when you're part of something kind of sprawling like ETB-A … and we are all struggling with how to do that" (Priya). Jackie also commented on a sense of disconnection:

> I do think there's a little bit of a disconnect within (our) ETB between...who's making policy and who's implementing it...I certainly would not feel that I'm at the table when decisions are being made ... I think that there are things that the Adult Education Service have done that have gone really unrecognised ... it can be a little bit disregarded. (Jackie)

The FET landscape is evidently in a state of flux, but for these leaders is challenging its traditional positioning as lesser in the wider system. However, this is not to say that their voices are fully accounted for in broader developments in the sector.

Funding and Resourcing

Some participants acknowledged that funding in FET is available e.g., through the Fund for Students with Disabilities, but there is a recognition that learners in certain settings cannot access same. Paul summarised this discrepancy where "you've got Youthreach services, you've got adult education services, you've got the training centre services, they don't get additional needs funding. There's a huge area for expansion there and how to improve the system". Moreover, despite the availability of funding for certain support personnel e.g., Personal Assistants and interpreters, participants commented on recruitment challenges and procurement. Annette directly attributed this to "things like the rate of pay is so poor" and difficulties in "putting in place the mechanisms to draw the funding down" (Annette). Making a direct comparison to other sectors, participants referred to staffing

problems which “can be a bit difficult” (Priya), and unlike higher and post-primary, specific staff members aren’t consistently assigned to roles in inclusion and support. Annette highlighted how they “don’t have a Disability Officer, we don’t have people within our ETB that are driving, that are there to support colleges or centres”, and while funding for physical supports such as technology can be accessed, good will is at the heart of educators’ implementation of inclusive supports. Claire asserted that “this should be a full-time job for somebody” and if she could “wave a magic wand, I do think...that the prison service could have Inclusion and Diversity Officers, and things like that”. For some participants, maintaining the physical environment so as to maximise inclusive experiences has also proven problematic. Jackie referred to the importance of the built environment being a student friendly, inclusive space, but highlighted that there are:

> always problems with kind of money to do up buildings... but I think there’s huge work that could be done there. Because it’s where you’re kind of saying to people … that you put them in a grotty old room somewhere, you know you’re kind of saying something about what you think of them or how important you think they are.

Overall, logistical difficulties persist for inclusionary leaders, as they navigate complexities around resource allocation, infrastructural supports, and accessing key personnel in the wider system.

Balancing Wider Expectations and the Learner Experience

The participants reflected on the changing status of the sector in relation to the potential dichotomy between quality assurance and productivity, and the learner experience.

In the context of prison-based education, Claire saw greater value in offering "philosophy or the critical thinking classes" rather than programmes focused on "exams and accreditation". This broader perspective was reflected in the wider narratives, as the leaders recognised the societal impact of education and the key role of FET:

> There needs to be more of a recognition of the benefits of education and not just about getting a job or not just about progression onto the next steps of the ladder but there's actually the social benefits…and then lots of other benefits to people just engaging in educational activity... it can have huge knock-on effect in their families and the communities. (Jackie)

There is a sense of pride in these benefits as "you look at how much that learning has given them an advantage you think we were part of that success" (Annette). There is a therefore a growing awareness of how being part of a diverse learner population provides opportunities for the learners themselves to be more understanding, and inclusive and how this contributes to a more socially just and tolerant society. Claire highlighted the positive impact of this:

> It's very encouraging. And I do have a lot of hope for the future, and I do think things are changing … because culturally things are so much better with young people, with the kids these days, but the 20-year-olds are so 'woke' for want of a better word or whatever … I think society, in general, is going to look better in 10 years' time for people who might feel marginalised or excluded at the moment.

The leaders therefore highlighted the need for a careful balance between learner-centred inclusive settings and any sectoral expectations around quality and productivity.

Discussion

The discussion unpacks the themes in light of the wider literature. In doing so it further contextualises the leaders' conceptualisation of inclusion and the implications of their interpretation of this complex concept. It also explores inclusive practices evident in the themes, for both leaders and the educators in their respective settings and elaborates on the role of CPD as a key support in inclusionary leadership. Finally, it discusses inclusionary leadership in the context of the wider literature, and how the themes illuminate the experience of this group of rarely heard leaders.

Conceptualisations and Implications of Inclusion and Diversity

In keeping with the broader literature, the participants in this study demonstrated a vision of inclusion that was far-reaching and embracing of all in the FET community (Florian & Spratt, 2013). They did however articulate their journey from confined notions around learners with disabilities toward something more akin to a social-contextual or human-rights perspective. Some linked this shift to engagement in professional learning or ongoing experience with increasing diversity in the learner population. The impact of experience has been discussed elsewhere where educators can be surprised by knowing "more than they thought" with regard to meeting the needs of diverse learner populations, suggesting that "just by doing it", they may prove themselves "capable of developing knowledge and positive attitudes to inclusion" (Rouse, 2006, p. 12). The influence of personal experience on their vision for inclusion was also evident in some of the participants' narratives and is a common feature in the wider literature. There is evidence that those who have personal connections to groups at risk of marginalisation are more likely to have more positive attitudes toward inclusion and a higher degree of self-efficacy (Kunz et al., 2021).

Despite envisaging inclusion as all-encompassing, the participants did refer to specific groups in need of interventions and targeted supports. The broader literature on FET has indicated how the learner population can present with often fractured learner identities, where past experience and sometimes uncertain futures can result in self-doubt as they navigate a transitional no-man's land (O'Donnell et al., 2018). The leaders in this study acknowledged the challenge in including such diverse populations and appeared to approach such provision with the capacity to problem-solve and learn from potential mistakes, thereby "going through the trial-and-error process with teachers as partners and sharing frustrations" (Poon-McBrayer & Wong, 2013, p. 1523). Some leaders did however highlight the significant needs of those from ethnic minorities, those facing socio-economic disadvantage and homelessness, mature students, learners experiencing mental health difficulties, and those with past and current substance misuse issues. Their concerns echo some wider Irish research around at-risk groups in FET, and the challenges experienced by leaders and educators as they attempt to create settings characterised by active inclusion, that nurture positive transitions and a sense of belonging (ETBI, 2021). While acknowledging the challenges offered by the increasing diversity in the sector, the participants in this study heralded this as a positive development, particularly where learners would be confronted by groups and individuals that might challenge preconceptions and assumptions. Their claim that this can result in more inclusive and tolerant learning spaces, and indeed societies, is of course a common trait in the wider inclusive education literature.

Inclusive Practice(s)

The leaders demonstrated a commitment to inclusive provision both in terms of their own leadership, and a resolute belief in the wider practices in their settings. Some highlighted their attempts to model inclusive practice echoing research completed elsewhere, as leaders who

successfully nurture inclusive cultures actively model through “attitude, language and actions” (Sider et al., 2021, p. 237). One point of interest however is, in spite of an assuredness of educators’ commitment, the visibility of inclusive practice was problematic. The leaders in this project were not always clear on how specific educators were cultivating inclusivity in their respective classrooms. Some rationalised this in terms of ‘trusting’ educators to ‘do their best’ in line with the inclusive vision of the setting. The centrality of ‘trust’ here as a marker for healthy and productive relationships and the cultivation of inclusive cultures is of course well documented (Coviello & DeMatthews, 2021). However, some leaders also linked this lack of visibility to limited direct involvement in, or observation of, teaching and learning. The latter can be contentious with a range of authors offering evidence for and against the practice as part of the leaders’ role (Garza et al., 2016). Moreover, observation of teachers in the Irish education landscape, irrespective of sector, is not a routine practice, potentially due to the “culture, managerial resistance and the prevalence of observation during (teacher) training and (inspectoral) school reviews” (Walker et al., 2022, p. 50). Of course, this is not to say that leaders need only rely on informal or formal observation to gain an accurate picture of inclusive pedagogy in their settings. Matthews and Lewis (2009) refer to other avenues here, including “generating of dialogue about teaching and learning (and) setting expectations for high achievement and thinking about how learning could be improved” (p. 23).

Further measures include the use of data by both teachers and leaders in making sense of learners’ progress and the allocation of resources. The participants in this study did reference dialogue with peers as informing the development of their vision of inclusion, but its critical nature, or focus on teaching, learning and assessment, is unclear from the narratives. Moreover,

while resource allocation was a feature within the transcripts, the use of data in informing decisions around inclusive provision was also unclear.

Professional Learning for Inclusion

For the leaders in this study, a key element in realising their vision for inclusion involved capitalising on opportunities for professional learning. The impact of meaningful CPD in cultivating inclusive cultures is of course well documented in the literature. However, wider research indicates a preoccupation with 'ability' in CPD interventions that focus on inclusive practice, with an emphasis on special educational needs and disability (Makopoulou at al., 2022). In keeping with their broad understandings of inclusion, the leaders in this study referenced both CPD that focused on interventions that supported them in meeting the needs of students with disabilities, and learners from other 'at risk' groups. However, while there were some references to more diverse forms of professional learning e.g., peer learning, the general form of CPD was offered by external organisations and individuals providing workshops on successful inclusion. Fostering relationships with external partners and the building of capacity through professional learning is reported as characteristic of leadership for inclusion (McMillan, 2020). However, a range of authors have criticised any over-reliance on this form of CPD as failing to successfully impact educator practices or learner outcomes (Gulamhussein, 2013), indicating a preference amongst teachers, and evidence of greater overall benefits from teacher-led forms for example, "peer observation, professional discussion, and even informal networking" (El-Deghaidy et al., 2015, p. 1580).

The reference here to observation is problematic in the Irish context, as discussed, and while there is ample evidence that professional dialogue can prove vital in meaningful CPD (Rose & Reynolds, 2006), it can also prove challenging in terms of culture, resourcing, and

authenticity (Timperley, 2015). As above, while the leaders in this study did comment on dialogue, the criticality and focus of same remains questionable. There is however a point of note where some leaders referenced challenging conversations with colleagues around effective inclusion for particular learners. The presence of these 'difficult conversations' are evidently key to healthy inclusive cultures, where positive working relationships with staff are underpinned by trust. In cultivating such relationships, leaders can then "present themselves as coming from a place of care when difficult conversations about practice [around inclusion] are necessary" (MacCormack et al., 2021, p. 13). Finally, with regard to CPD, it is noteworthy that some of the participants in this study highlighted the lack of targeted professional learning for leaders, more broadly and in terms of leadership for inclusion. Evidence suggests that leaders in Irish FET settings experience somewhat informal CPD processes (CEDEFOP, 2011), and while there is an absence of research exploring the professional learning needs of leaders with regard to inclusion in the Irish context, studies completed elsewhere recommend ongoing inclusion specific CPD (Crockett et al., 2009).

Models of Inclusionary Leadership

In keeping with broader work on the shifting and highly contextualised nature of leadership, the participants in this study did not prescribe to any single model or style of leadership (Lumby & Tomlinson, 2000). The narratives do however offer common characteristics, particularly a reflective stance, where they openly acknowledged that experimentation and error were part of their journey in leading inclusion, and a resolute commitment to learners' needs and to the influential positioning of their setting in wider communities. There is therefore a clear values-based premise amongst the leaders in this study, where their far-reaching vision of inclusion acknowledges the challenges experienced by many

of their learners in their transition to, and ongoing journey within FET, and indeed their lives beyond the education setting (Szeto, 2020). In attending to better social and academic outcomes for the learners the leaders also demonstrate a transformational tendency (Romanuck Murphy, 2018), but this is perhaps weakened by the aforementioned lack of visibility around inclusive practice. While they might nurture agency and efficacy on the part of teachers (Precey et al., 2013), their inability to readily articulate how inclusive pedagogy is actuated in their settings raises questions about the intentionality of this approach i.e., on what basis has their evident trust of educators to cultivate inclusive teaching and learning environments formed? Is this evidence-based, intuitive, or perhaps the result of long-held traditions across the sector around teacher autonomy and accountability? This position can also lead us to conclude that leaders in such settings may not have a consistently instructional dimension, where they are actively involved in setting-wide instructional practices and reform (Yu, 2009). There is of course some evidence of their contribution to the development of teaching and learning practices via, for example the introduction of CPD or particular interventions, but again, the inability to account for how these are then manifested in teachers' daily practices demonstrates a somewhat inconsistent approach.

All of the leaders depicted their role as managerial and/or administrative to some extent. This echoes research elsewhere, as leadership for inclusion always necessitates some functional aspect around structural or statutory obligations (Morrissey, 2021). Their commentary here generally focused on resourcing and the acquiring of supports for students with additional needs, which again represents a somewhat dichotomous stance, that is, where they view inclusion as far-reaching beyond disability etc., but acknowledge that 'sanctioned' supports target this particular group. Such a position might lead us to conclude that those bodies responsible for resourcing in FET have a particular conceptualisation of inclusion, which in keeping with

traditionalist tendencies focuses on learners with identifiable special educational needs. A further point of contestation concerns the funding for such supports, where leaders referenced substantial financial aid, but in tandem highlighted administrative issues in accessing funds and ongoing problems with utilising these for resourcing purposes. The first point here represents a direct contrast to reports in wider research where financial support that contributes to fostering inclusive settings can prove insufficient (Pearce et al., 2010). With regard to resourcing, and specifically the recruitment of support personnel, there is clear evidence of ongoing difficulties as these positions can offer poor pay and conditions (Kerry & Kerry, 2003). When commenting on the latter, leaders also highlighted the absence of certain roles in FET, specifically disability officers, psychological support personnel, individuals who support with assistive technology, and dedicated professional learning teams that support inclusive provision. This is in stark contrast to post-primary and higher education sectors, where some of these positions are inherent in existing structures (Zorec et al., 2022).

Leading Inclusion in FET

The comparative nature of the above commentary, where FET is juxtaposed with other sectors, is a common trait in wider literature (Ozga & Deem, 2000). In some cases, FET is presented as markedly different, in learner population and approach to provision as learners may be characterised as ‘non-traditional’ (Grummell & Murray, 2015), while elsewhere it is perceived as of lower status or the second-best option to higher education (McGuinness et al., 2014). However, despite their acknowledgement of the lack of consistency across settings regarding supports for inclusive provision, the leaders in this study were clear that they felt that FET had turned a corner with regard to its status. They depicted a sector that was receiving renewed attention as a viable and meaningful pathway for a diverse population of learners, and

where they felt their respective FET settings were making a tangible impact on the lives of learners, and their wider communities. This contrasts with any depiction of FET as preoccupied solely with economic drivers and echoes other Irish literature where the sector is seen as key to enhanced social participation and inclusion in communities (O'Leary & Rami, 2017). In the case of this study, the contribution of FET to prison-based education, and its role in training education for certain groups deserves particular attention. Leaders in these settings made it clear that the sector was offering their learners a pathway that could fundamentally alter their lives, changing not only their skillset but their identity and worldview (Illeris, 2014). Positive identity development, where learners are supported in asking and answering key questions about who they are and what they want from the learning experience can prove key to effective inclusion, with some authors encouraging leaders to take an active role in identity development practices (DeMatthews & Mueller, 2022). However, while acknowledging that policy reform and governance processes are attempting to raise the status of FET, some leaders called for greater inclusion of their voices in future restructuring, while also expressing concern around the ultimate success of any reform due to the kaleidoscopic nature of the overall sector. Such calls are common in FET, where there is a recognition that its somewhat fragmented identity has been borne out of historical attempts to meet the varying demands of government departments (Grummell & Murray, 2015). At a systemic level there is however a recognition of the need for greater collaboration and cohesion across settings, and more consistency in the learner experience (Solas, 2020). The concern of course, as highlighted by some of the participants in this study, is that in unifying the sector, the very nuanced characteristics that make it so readily attractive, accessible, and inclusive, may be impacted.

Limitations

The sample size is perhaps the most significant limitation in this study. However, a small sample size is in keeping with broader qualitative inquiry that seeks to engage in in-depth analysis of information-rich accounts (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019) thereby facilitating the "unfolding of a new and richly textured understanding of the phenomena under study" (Vasileiou et al., 2018, p. 2). Given the dearth of literature on leadership for inclusion in FET this focus on the richness of the participants' narratives was key in this exploratory study. While it is a strength of the study that the participants offered perspectives from diverse settings, a further limitation concerned the absence of those from certain parts of the sector, for example, Youthreach. Given the significant number of learners attending the latter (Solas, 2023) and evidence that nurturing inclusive environments is a key priority in Youthreach as an "alternative" setting (Cahill et al., 2020), it is plausible that a leader from such settings would have added to the richness of the narratives. Further research might therefore include such voices.

Conclusion

The leaders in this study demonstrate a fervent commitment to inclusivity in their settings and a profound awareness of the role FET plays in supporting diverse populations of learners in forging new pathways and constructing renewed learner identities. Furthermore, while recognising FET's positioning as somewhat lesser in recent decades in comparison to neighbouring sectors, the leaders here hold significant hope for the future of FET, its evident capacity for authentic inclusion, and potential to make a profound impact on communities and broader society. However, a lack of clarity on how inclusivity is manifested in the daily practices of educators persists, and while professional learning plays a key role, its implementation remains inconsistent. In attempting to retain their dedication to inclusion and address these

potential shortfalls, the sector might consider a multidimensional framework to guide inclusionary leadership. This could utilise Morrissey's (2021) triadic model which focuses on values-based leadership, managerial leadership, and teacher leadership. The evidence from this study would suggest that inclusive values are at the core of the work of these leaders, and similarly, that even amidst somewhat complex and evolving conditions, they are making significant efforts at dealing with the administrative and often resource-heavy aspect of inclusionary leadership. Teacher leadership does however require further attention, particularly around leaders' contributions to instruction, reflective dialogue on teaching and learning, and effective inclusive pedagogy. Enhancing this aspect of the triad could greatly benefit their future development as inclusionary leaders. Moreover, a further element could be added here so as to take account of the leaders' positioning within the dynamic FET landscape and the evident lack of influence they feel around its direction. Hence, in tandem with the values-based, teacher, and managerial dimensions, capitalising on their capacity for impactful systemic leadership could be harnessed to a greater degree. This would ensure that FET leaders feel that their voice is included in wider sectoral reform, both around effective inclusion, and indeed, other key areas of policy and practice. This study demonstrates that they have much to offer, hence drawing on their passion and vision could potentially enrich the future trajectory of the sector.

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University Leadership Within the Neo-liberal Agenda: Reframing the Landscape Through a Principled Leadership Approach

Sharon Blanchard

Abstract

This article emerged from a doctoral study that explored Nova Scotia university leaders' leadership beliefs and values, and change agency approaches. "Principled leadership" was conceptualized as an expansion of authentic leadership theory and involved – authenticity (identity), spirituality, and love (an ethic of care). Principled leadership was examined as a possible approach which could facilitate successful change agency. The leader-participants included university presidents, vice-presidents, directors, and deans. A key finding was that leaders were operating within a conceptualization of authenticity. They held honesty, integrity, and trust as critical to their change agency. Another finding was that principled leadership offered an antidote to the depredations on positive leadership resulting from neoliberalism that has seriously impacted Canadian higher education. This study raised questions surrounding the nature of authentic leadership and identity; that is, the core of authenticity is knowing oneself and being true to one's own values, but what if a leader has "drunk the Kool-Aid of neoliberalism" thereby truly believes that their top-down, autocratic (or destructive leadership) approach was 'efficient' (a neoliberal tenet) and crucial to organizational effectiveness and change agency. Can they still be considered authentic leaders? Thus, this study indicated that principled leadership was a useful expansion of Avolio and his colleagues' authentic leadership theory.

***Keywords*:** leadership; principled leadership; authentic leadership; neo-liberalism; destructive leadership; change management; provosts; senior leadership; servant leadership; toxic cultures; love; courage; identity; integrity; transformational leadership; university leadership; spirituality.

Introduction

This article reveals the findings of a doctoral study that explored university leaders' conceptualizations of leadership, their beliefs and values, and approaches to their change role agency as change agent. A key proposition was to identify factors and characteristics which promoted leadership effectiveness to explore if a conceptualization of "principled leadership" facilitated leaders' change agency. Principled leadership was posited as encompassing authenticity (a leader's identity), spirituality, and love (an ethic of care).

In scoping the context of higher education, the economic principles of neoliberalism appears to have had a significant impact on many higher education systems including Canada (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Smyth, 2017).

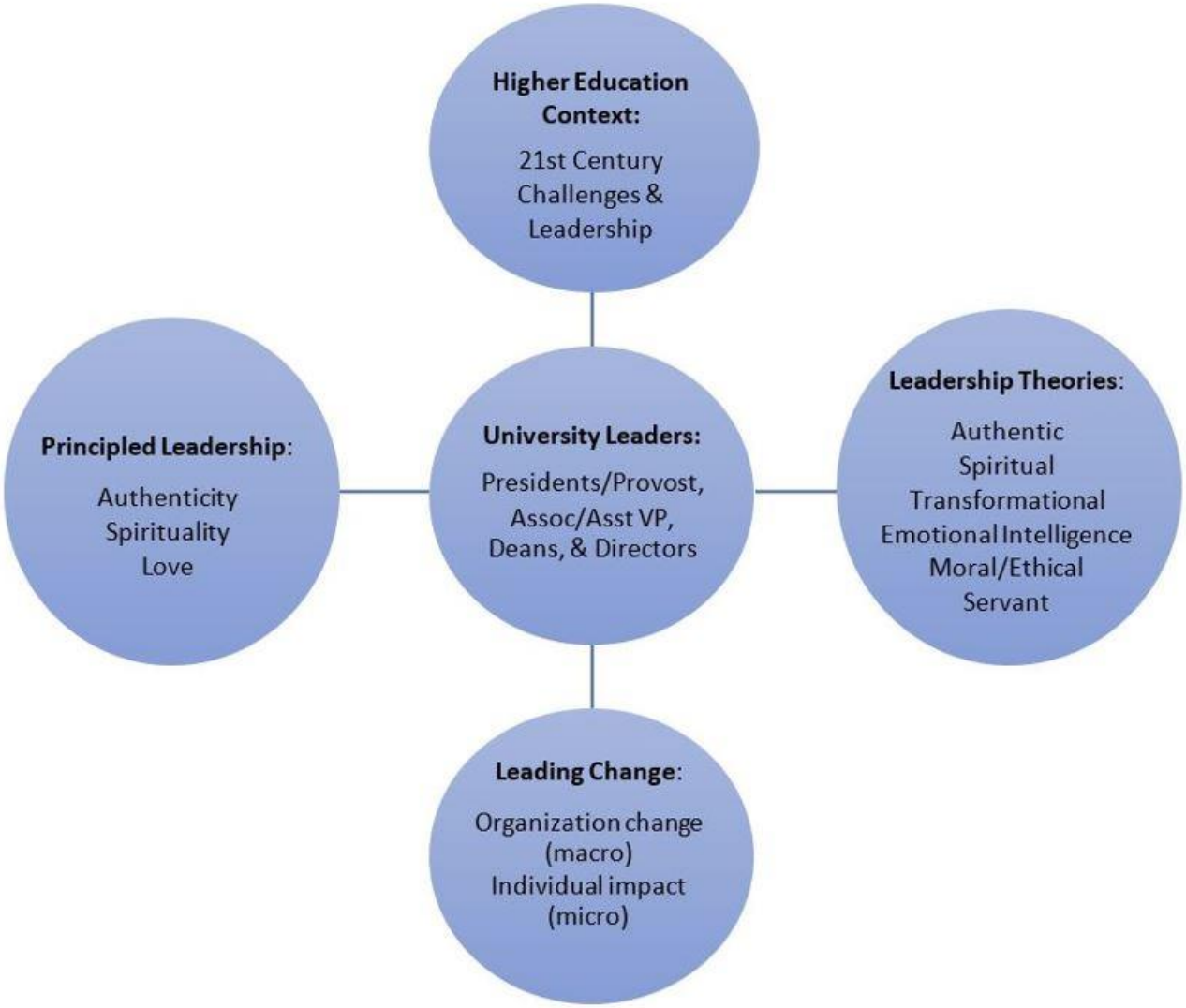
These impacts include reductions in funding to universities, increased accountability, decreased provincial funding, greater competition and so on, and have influenced leaders' operating context. These changes are under the premise that privatized is good and a service or public good is a drain on society within the lens of capitalism (Apple, 2000, 2006; Camicia & Franklin, 2011). As Smyth (2017) described it, neoliberalism has produced a "toxic university" context. He further cited the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on the academic work and culture of universities as toxic, destructive, and has radically altered higher education in many western nations. Larner (2000) described the term neoliberalism as a form of political economic governance based upon market relationships or principles. Apple (2000, 2006) warned of the damaging impacts of neoliberalism and capitalistic approaches to higher education. Thus, this examined the tensions of how leaders can remain authentic, true to their identity, values and beliefs, and caring within universities that are increasingly corporatized and influenced by the principles of neoliberalism. The article provides insights on the contemporary leadership culture within Canadian higher education institutions, relevant leadership theories, introduces principled leadership theory, a

glimpse into the research methodology, results of the study and its potential impact on leadership within the higher education sector.

Conceptual Framework

As means to provide context, I have included the conceptual framework, as well pertinent key terms and how these were applicable to the study. Four main areas guided the literature review for this study (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:
Conceptual Framework



These four areas included: the higher education context, leadership theories, principled leadership dimensions, and leading change. The higher education context resulted in an examination of the impacts

of globalization and the application of economic principles of neoliberalism as the most significant influences on universities in many western nations and those which have affected leadership roles and responsibilities (Tarc, 2012). The leadership theories deemed to be the most informative and applicable to the study's research questions were: authentic, spiritual, transformational, moral/ethical, and servant leadership. These were selected because of their relational orientations which were likely to support positive change within universities. Principled leadership was posited to be a coalescence of authenticity – that is, a strong leadership identity, spirituality, and love or a genuine ethic of care. This was identified as broader than simply authentic leadership or moral and ethical leadership (Blanchard, 2018) and it was proposed that the three dimensions working in concert could be more powerful than simply adopting one leadership approach. Universities are constantly facing change from both external and internal forces (Beach et al., 2005; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Erkutlu et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2002; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; McRae, 2009; O'Neill, 2010; Paul, 2011; Rowland, 2008; Shaw, 2020). Thus, the capacity to be a successful change agent is important, however, leaders' approaches to change can be either positive or negative. This means they can establish change, but how they engage with the change can either damage or support their faculty members (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lavigne, 2022; Smyth, 2017).

The study provided the opportunity to discern a range of leadership theories, specifically, authentic, transformational, spiritual, ethical, moral, and principled leadership and included an exploration of the neoliberal ideology as it has played out in contemporary higher education contexts. A consistent emergent theme regarding humanistic leadership resonated throughout the methodological stage resulting in the need to re-frame the leadership approaches identified under the umbrella of 'humanistic-type' leadership defined as a 'humanistic leadership style' that is strategic, compassionate, ethical, and considers the strengths, weaknesses, and emotions of others (Parameswar & Prasad, 2017, p. 48). The study further integrated neoliberalism, change management in universities, authentic leadership, and principled leadership. The definition of principled leadership proposed that the journey to discover one's

identity, spirituality, and choice to love is connected to the ability to become fully authentic, and where to be an authentic leader requires a genuine internally-rooted desire to believe in, and care for, others and that this comes from a deep knowledge of self, identity, and personal values (Blanchard, 2018).

This article posits an emergent theme from the research questioning, if we do not have principled leadership we can be left with pseudo-transformational leaders who can be destructive while remaining authentic and true to themselves (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lavigne, 2022; Lumby, 2019; Padilla et al., 2007; Shaw et al., 2011; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). Einarsen et al. (2007) defined a destructive leader as: a bully, abusive, undermining, self-gratifying, and deviant to the extent of being corrupt (p. 215). The framework of the study was further underscored by the understanding that bad leadership is not always a result of the individual leader but possibly due to internal and external political and neo-liberal forces that promotes negative leadership approaches (Einarsen et al., 2007). However, the hegemonic practice of bad leaders, coupled with the inherent political pressures within higher education institutions, could subconsciously promote deconstructive/constructive leadership approaches. As one research participant shared, “There are more examples of bad leadership than good and I think we just have to be open to that … of more political issues these days, people wring their hands and moan about the lack of leadership”. Hence, the need to further examine contemporary leadership within higher education as a means of providing a deepened understanding as it compared to principled leadership theory. This next section provides a review of the literature as a means of discerning the contemporary higher education context, leadership theories, change management theory, and introduces principled leadership theory in more depth as related to the study.

Higher Education Context/Examining the Higher Education Culture

Although the focus of the study was to primarily investigate leadership attributes, leaders provided insights regarding the challenges faced while leading within the 21st century higher education context. In addition to financial, human resource, and enrolment management challenges, participants

noted similarities to Lawrence and Pirson (2015) who discussed the unprecedented global challenges facing 21st century institutions such as social inequity, climate change, and terrorism. An increased pressure to provide a quality education while competing with a culture in which provincial funding is continuing to decline, competing with local and national universities for enrolment with decreased enrolments being experienced across Atlantic Canada, and a lack of financial and human resources (including leadership) support was especially highlighted by participants. In their move from academe to administration, leaders indicated that many assumed their role without proper leadership training, and that their leadership experience was the accumulation of their experiences with mentors, former supervisors, and family members who positively impacted them.

Universities are by their very nature places of conflict and dissent which has been reinforced and expanded due to the influence of the neoliberal ideology that has swept through the higher education context internationally generally, and now throughout Canada specifically (Poole, 2007; Rigas & Kuchapski, 2016; Sattler, 2012). It was apparent through the literature that universities have to make space for those who are working outside of the neoliberal frame; embrace conflict, for the higher education leader to be able to accept when others says, "I disagree", and ask the questions: Am I an agent of the corporation, myself, or for others to whom I serve? Do I leave space for honest debate? How do I navigate my team environment where there is resistance to change, multiple perspectives, and deal with the messy situations? An emergent theme in the literature highlighted destructive leadership and the impact of neoliberalism on higher education where Apple (2000, 2016) associated neoliberalism with public institutions that have become, "'black holes' into which money is poured – and then seemingly disappears – but which do not provide anywhere near adequate results" (p. 59). Higher education institutions notions of "bums in seats" provided a dramatic but realistic example of the terms used and the impact of neoliberalism. This aligned with concerns associated with globalization and the impact of economic competition, where benchmarks for comparison are essential in order to measure systems'

status (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Cannella & Lincoln, 2015; Giroux, 2014; Winter, 2012). Given the neoliberalism context in higher education, students are further conceptualized as 'clients', parents are considered "consumers" and universities are designed to produce a product or a marketable commodity that supports a nation rather than successful well-rounded graduates (Apple, 2006, p. 23).

Leadership in 21st century neoliberal higher education institutions require leaders to determine where they fit or desire to be, to question whether there is a difference between the 'academic leader' versus 'business leader' (Davies & Thomas, 2010; Wolverton & Poch, 2000). The study raised the question of whether higher education institutions are equipping their academic and administrative leaders to succeed, and the need for future leadership training (Cohen, 2009; de Boer & Goedegebuure, 2009; Eddy & Kirby, 2020; Wolverton et al., 2007). This led to the need to examine existing leadership theories that aligned or misaligned with the conceptualization of principled leadership theory so as to determine if there were gaps in the literature.

Principled Leadership: a comparison of humanistic-type leadership approaches.

Principled leadership is defined as a leader who is rooted in authentic behaviors, free from the influence of one's ego, firm in the knowledge of self through identity, has a balanced perspective based on strong morals and values, and works in service of others based on love and respect (Blanchard, 2018). As part of this definition authenticity was integrated where to be authentic is to remain true to one's core values, identities, preferences, and emotions, in doing this, the more authentic you will become (Avolio et al., 2004). In this study, I proposed that authenticity and authentic leadership, as an element of the conceptualization of principled leadership required a genuine internally-rooted desire to believe in, and care for others and that this comes from a deep knowledge of self, identity, and personal values which aligns well with Avolio and his associates' (2004), explanations of authenticity. This involves the ability to desire authenticity in others and results in a leadership approach where the primary goal is to bring out the best in others and to do this with honesty, integrity, and trust. A principled leader is committed to

action to a morally justifiable set of principles and values (Becker, 1998, p. 157) enabling them to be a leader with integrity, and a leader who is rooted in love that operates as Fromm (2006) describes, "genuine love is an expression of productiveness … an active striving for the growth and happiness of the loved person, rooted in one's own capacity to love" (p. 55). To love becomes a choice to act out of free will for the good of another. With true humility at its core, this act of love by the leader creates an environment built on the respect, dignity, and value of each individual (Freire, 1994; Fromm, 2006). The desire to be or become principled is grounded in a desire to serve others, authentically, freely, with the hope that the 'other' will benefit from this leadership approach.

Leadership Theories

A need to understand the noted challenges faced by higher education institutions provided a foundation for examining leadership. A broad literature search on historical leadership theory, definitions, and approaches uncovering inherent weakness, strengths, and limitation associated with each, noted a change in the literature moving away from traditional leadership as noted by Parameswar and Prasad (2017) who indicated that traditional transactional forms of leadership "are no longer celebrated as the best forms of leadership in organizations" (p. 47). Parameswar and Prasad argued, "great leaders are expected to move out of their comfort zone, be more transparent to the situations and have a macro as well as a micro view on the problems and challenges that they face" (p. 47). This supported the observed trend toward 'humanistic-type' (Blanchard, 2018) leadership approaches which will be further examined in this paper. For the purpose of this study, the following leadership definition was integrated into the study for context, "leaders ignite change; in that leadership produces useful change" (Kotter, 1996, 1999, 2002, 2005) and "leadership is essentially concerned with bringing about transformational change" (Burnes & Todnem, 2012, p. 241). Authentic, spiritual, moral/ethical, servant and emotionally intelligent leadership theories were reviewed to further understand humanistic leadership theory as it related to principled leadership theory and the study.

Humanistic Leadership Theory

One of the reoccurring themes throughout the study was the consistent humanistic character and leadership approach of the research subjects. The term humanism continued to be a theme and as such a review of humanistic leadership theory was required. A literature scan highlighted the tremendous amount of breadth and depth in defining the terms, humanism and humanistic. The following definitions were examined based on purpose, clarity, and intent relative to the study: humanism "a devotion to human welfare" (Merriam-Webster, 2024); and, humanistic "treating people with respect and making sure they are safe, happy, healthy, etc." (Cambridge University Press & Assessment. 2024). In describing humanistic leadership, Parameswar and Prasad (2017) described a 'humanistic leadership style' as "a strategic, compassionate, and ethical style that considers the strengths, weaknesses, and emotions of the people they work with" (p. 48). They further described a humanistic leadership style that develops the potential of those they lead and creates a culture "where excellence, trust, camaraderie, care of all stakeholders, transparent communication, creativity, etc. start to flourish naturally which in turn produces excellent performance" (p. 48). The importance of understanding and integrating human-like qualities as part of responsible leadership approach was further reinforced by Lawrence and Pirson (2015) who said "responsible leadership needs to be informed by a better understanding of human nature and understand the ensuing responsibilities" (p. 391). Perucci and Schwartz (2002) further reinforced this stating "the leader-followers relationship is fraught with the qualities associated with being human – compassion, betrayal, seduction, love, and hate. A humanistic approach, therefore, can help us develop an understanding of the leadership dynamic" (p. 15). Humanistic-type leadership for the purpose of the study and emphasizing the elements of the conceptualization of principled leadership (Blanchard, 2018), was further understood through the examination of six leadership theories, authentic, spiritual, servant, ethical/moral, emotionally intelligent, and transformational as compared to the definition of principled leadership.

Authentic leadership

Perhaps the most renowned researcher influencing the last three decades of leadership theory is Avolio, a significant scholar who has been studying evidence-based leadership for over twenty-five years. Avolio posited authentic leadership is sustainable beyond all other forms of leadership and is what saves us (leader), from ourselves. An authentic leader may influence followers' attitudes and behaviours, but these same leaders also use intervening behaviours such as hope, trust, positive emotions, and optimism (Avolio et al., 2004; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Avolio et al. (2004) conceded that authenticity is a root construct and key characteristic of a leader indicating that "authentic leadership is at the very base or core of what constitutes profoundly positive leadership in whatever form it exists" (p. 818). For the purpose of the study authentic leadership characteristics were described as: transparent, have a capacity to build trust, genuine – meaning what you say and saying what you mean, credible, know your own values and beliefs, and prepared to ascertain the values of the individuals who follow you as well as the collective they lead (Agote et al., 2016; Avolio et al., 2004; Avolio & Gardiner, 2005; Kreber et al., 2007; Walumbwa et al., 2008).

Understanding authentic leadership underscored the research study as a means of determining how and why principled leadership was applicable. The study uncovered that through the journey of becoming authentic or integrating authentic leadership there was a need to understand one's identity and the interplay of whether you can be principled and be authentic or do you have to be authentic to be principled? Either way, the concern that without either what you could be left with are pseudo-transformational leaders who are described as being destructive leaders (Einarsen et al., 2007; Padilla et al., 2007; Schyns & Schilling, 2013; Shaw et al., 2011).

Spirituality

Spirituality comes from the Latin, "spiritus", meaning 'breath of life', is a way of being and experiencing that comes about through awareness of a transcendent dimension and that is characterized

by certain identifiable values in regard to self, others, nature, life, and whatever one considers to be the Ultimate (Elkins et al., 1988, p. 10). The literature provided a varied definition of spirituality but there was consistency connecting spirituality to a higher being, love, authenticity, and caring for others (Klenke, 2007; Phipps, 2012) aligned to the conceptualization of principled leadership. The general characteristics of a moral/ethical leader were identified in the literature as one who: displays commitment to right action; has strong values and morals; has virtue; leads from the heart; in touch with their spirit; giving; honest; fair; integrity; understands social responsibility; motivated to act morally; and, leads with the head (Ah-Kion & Bhowon, 2017; Bolman & Deal, 2001; Burnes & Todnem, 2012; Lawrence & Pirson, 2015; Levine & Boaks, 2014; Salter et al., 2014; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2005). Researchers (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Burns, 1978) also suggested that people with high moral reasoning should be motivated to act morally based on this internalized moral identity (as cited in Salter et al., 2014). The literature on moral/ethical leadership within the context of spirituality supported the conceptualization of principled leadership as part of the study.

Servant Leadership

A servant leader was described as: servant first; serves others; serves the ideas and values that shape community; they are a relational leader; operate with moral authority; make the switch from hierarchical to steward; leadership is built on trust; acts with humility; combines desire to serve with motivation to lead; exercises empathy; is authentic; works with purpose; and, is a connected leader (Fry, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977, 2003; Sergiovanni, 1996, 2005; Williams et al., 2014). Greenleaf's seminal work on servant leadership puts forward the notion that the servant leader is attuned to basic spiritual values in serving others including colleagues, the overall organization, and greater society. In discerning servant leadership as part of the conceptualization of principled leadership, the following was identified: a) connected to the element of spirituality, b) not necessarily apparent that it is connected to a knowledge of self, identity, and personal values, connected beyond oneself, and c) a deep sense of integrity and trust.

Given this, the elements of servant leadership were applicable to the conceptualization of principled leadership when understood within the context of spiritual and authentic leadership and their associated attributes.

Transformative Leadership

It was challenging to consider transformative leadership without thinking of the leadership reformation over the last twenty years as historically connected to change, and not necessarily removed from transactional leadership (Burnes & Todnem, 2012; Eisenback et al., 1999; Gill, 2003; Kotter, 2005). In comparing the core elements of a transformational leader to those included within the conceptualization of principled leadership there was not conclusive evidence that a transformational leader was firm in knowledge of self, had a desire to bring out the best in others, or was connected beyond oneself. Although a transformational leader encourages ethical and moral behaviours, is inspirational, and charismatic, it was not evident that they operate with high moral integrity, strong ethics, or values. In addition, the elements of love, humility, and spirituality were not indicated to be attributes of a transformative leader.

Emotionally intelligent leadership

In discussing the conceptualization of principled leadership and emotionally intelligent leadership, there was alignment with the elements of: care (strong emotions that engender care); self-awareness (authenticity); ethics; and trust, loyalty, and respect. The emotionally intelligent leader was described as one who leads from a place of emotion, and from a place of care (Avolio et al., 2004; Gill, 2003). The elements of emotionally intelligent leadership are applicable to the conceptualization of principled leadership when understood within the context of spiritual and servant leadership and their associated attributes. The attributes of both spiritual and servant leadership, if combined, support emotional intelligent leadership within the context of principled leadership.

Change Management

The study explored leadership within the context of change and specifically those factors/leadership approaches impacting the leaders' ability to navigate change. The study raised the key indicators of difference for macro and micro change as principled leadership was found to be aligned with supporting a micro system, where the influencer of change is the leader with an eye on the macro but focused on individuals to authentically enact. Given this context, it was found that change leadership, organizational change management, and educational development pointed to processes that primarily involved and/or impacted human behavior, while change, organizational change, institutional change, and organizational design focused primarily on processes, techniques, and output. For the purpose of the study, change and change management was the focus of the theoretical literature within the context of change and included the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) where Hall (2013) argued change processes had become too predictable and continued to focus on the problem, working to attain a desired outcome rather than focusing on the impact of individuals. CBAM provided an evidence-based approach to change in the education sector for the past four decades where seminal research, examination, and application was thoroughly identified throughout the literature (Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007; Hall, 1974, 2013; Hall & George, 1979; Hall & Hord, 2011; Kapustka & Damore, 2009). For the purpose of the study, the following change context was applied; change management refers to the human aspects of change, where project managers use tools and processes to control change, but people are at the center (Griffith-Cooper & King, 2007, p. 14).

Research Design

The study benefited from a mixed methodology research approach underpinned by the pragmatic philosophical orientation as I hoped to have outcomes that could practically inform leadership change practices (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This enabled a mixed methodology approach using both quantitative and qualitative approaches where the deficits of any one of these methods could be

ameliorated by the inclusion of the other. The qualitative component was influenced by an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach (Cooperrider, 1996) as this was deemed to be respectful and positive stance which could facilitate leaders to open up and be more candid and revealing about their challenging roles.

Using two research instruments through mixed methods provided the opportunity to compare and contrast the findings supporting the interpretation and integration of corroborated data (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 19). The research study utilized qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (questionnaire) research instruments as a means of gathering data regarding leadership practices and attributes. The mix of methods employed in the study involved a questionnaire that was administered to university senior administration (n=27) and an Appreciative Inquiry-framed semi-structured interviews (n=33) with a total of 60 participants throughout the higher education sector in Nova Scotia, Canada (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Based on the qualitative data, the overall research sample consisted of sixteen females and seventeen males with three emergent population groups: university presidents (n=5), vice-president/vice-presidents (n=18), and senior/executive director or dean (n=10). The following demographic information was based on the quantitative results only. The average age of the sample group was 57. A 44% response rate was achieved with universities (n=5) involved. All interviews were transcribed and coded using an iterative thematic coding.

The semi-structured interview schedule was sent to participants in advance of the interview so as to provide the opportunity for reflection and preparation. This approach provided face-to-face interaction with the interviewees, and direct learning from their answers/responses to the questions, providing the opportunity for further discovery and exploration of leadership concepts.

The **qualitative methodology** was framed within the discovery dimension of “appreciative inquiry” (AI) (Cooperrider, 1996). Appreciative inquiry is a four-stage enquiry process including 1. Discovery where through narrative and provocative questions participants delve into what is life giving, 2. Dream of what might be, to imagine, and envisioning a scenario for realizing a positive future, 3.

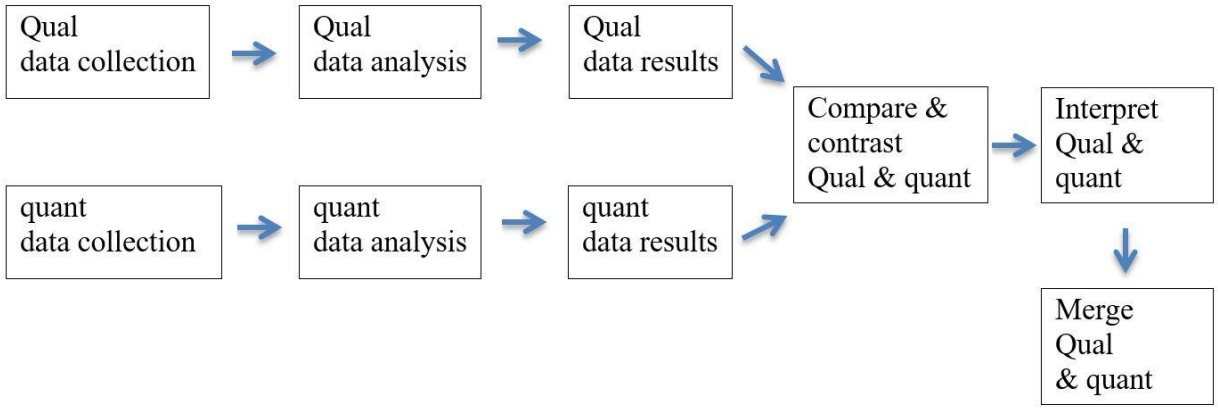
Design, the co-construction of *what should be* to create the ideal is discerned, and, 4. Destiny where the powerful envisioned future/destiny is mapped out (Cooperrider, 1996). The study integrated stage one of the four "D" process that involved 'Discovery' where through narrative and provocative questions participants described their experience in leading a change phenomenon. In designing appreciative inquiry questions for use in higher education, Cockell and McArthur-Blair (2012) acknowledged, "leadership in higher education is not for the faint at heart. It is highly complex, with multiple stakeholders … using an appreciative outlook can be uplifting during those times" (p. 93). Cooperrider (1996) further supported the positive use of this type of questioning stating: "the new methods will be distinguished by the art and science of asking powerful, positive questions" (p. 2). Integrating AI allowed a focus on individual strengths, that is, "drawing attention to what people feel has been achieved, the reality they experience is one in which things can be done well, whereas focusing on problems creates a reality in which things are always failing" (Reed, 2007, p. 28). It also provided a process to build relationships, trust, and enable their voice to be heard.

The **quantitative discovery** utilized a questionnaire with rating type questions using "agreement" Likert scales. The questionnaire included 25 questions that included the following: demographics, gender, age, leadership development, current role/position, and then in-depth response to qualitative questions as it related to leadership position and style. Each was discerned for the purpose of measuring leadership qualities and attributes as related to my research questions. I designed my own questionnaire given the specific definitions and research questions required for the study, however, I explored a number of different questionnaires to provide a stronger foundation for my own (Bass & Avolio, 2000). Fifteen questions focused on extracting demographic information, nine questions looking for descriptive statistics, and four qualitative-based questions.

Analysis and Integration of the Data

The research included qualitative and quantitative tools so as to draw out data that could then be contrasted and compared to ensure accuracy. The analysis stage of the research integrated a crossover analysis (see Figure 2, informed by Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009).

Figure 2
Cross-over Analysis



These data were presented focusing on the qualitative data with quantitative data substantiating its correlations. The qualitative results provided the themes and sub-themes where the quantitative data were integrated into the overall results and findings as a means of providing validation and increasing trustworthiness of the qualitative data collection process.

Results

An interesting contention arose in considering effective leadership, change agency and authenticity in an age of embedded and pervasive neoliberalism, that is: Can a bad leader be authentic? Can someone who behaves badly act with good intentions, be honest, true to his/her core identity? and, How do you determine if a leader is the 'real deal'? In other words, the core of Avolio et al.'s "authenticity" is knowing oneself and being true to one's own values, but what if a leader has "drunk the

Kool-Aid of neoliberalism" thereby truly believes that their destructive leadership approach is crucial to organizational effectiveness and change agency – can he/she still be considered an authentic leader?

A significant finding was that senior leaders, while acknowledging the intense challenges of their institutional mandates and the influences of neoliberalism, were highly aware of the need to be authentic and to develop positive relationships with their leadership teams and staff. They perceived honesty, integrity, and trust as crucial to their leadership approach. In the analysis it became apparent that principled leadership could offer an antidote to the pervasive negative influences of neoliberalism which tends to strip humans of their humanity – to reduce them to automatons – and conceptualizes operations purely in terms of 'dollar and cent' values. Additionally, the forms of leadership approaches that are encouraged and nurtured within the neoliberal agenda are that top-down and autocratic which tears the fabric of collegiality (Smyth, 2017); however, authentic leadership offered an alternative to these "destructive leadership" and power approaches while remaining effective in terms of their change agency (Einarsen et al., 2007; Lumby, 2019). For the purpose of this paper, three key results were reviewed as related to principled leadership as the antidote to the neoliberal agenda within higher education, they were: The Challenges of Leading the Academy, Key Indicators of a Principled Leader, and Reframing Love and Leadership.

The Challenges of Leading the Academy

Research participants agreed that effective leadership is not to be taken lightly, that it is hard work. Leaders need to maintain a balanced perspective of "we're not saving lives", "we are not performing heart surgery", that failure is ok, you can be successfully vulnerable, and that courage is an absolute essential necessity for navigating not only institutional change but the everyday associated with leading higher education institutions. Having a balanced perspective grounded in passion and motivation, influenced by desiring work/life balance and healthy communication, regarding leadership enables this sample of leaders to be more effective.

On and off the record, leaders shared examples of challenging situations and experiences that have enabled them to reach deep into the depths of their being when making decisions regarding their response and approach. Participants discussed the lack of collegiality and described faculty in-fighting, toxic environments, highly judgemental colleagues, critical and appalling communication, and the abusive behaviour experienced amongst colleagues. These challenges were felt internally as well as externally, from furious donors to furious alumni and the feeling of being completely undervalued, overlooked, and disrespected. “There's so much distrust and there's us versus them and people are very suspicious particularly at times when resources are thin”, said one participant.

Participants shared that as part of navigating these challenging environments they, “keep your friends close, your enemies closer” or “dance with those who want to dance with you” just to survive, said another participant. Participants had dealt with former leaders and bosses who would, “scream at you at the drop of a hat” and situations where, “there was lots of infighting”, said another participant. This participant said, “I would go home in tears some days, thinking this is the most challenging thing I've ever undertaken”. While participants shared the good with the bad, they indicated their environment was “a very fractioned work environment”, or that the environment in which they worked “left people in a P.T.S.D. (post-traumatic stress disorder) type of environment, people were shell-shocked, underappreciated, he had pitted people against each other. It was just a toxic work environment”. They described how when they came into their leadership role, “it was huge for me because I was turning a ship around that was headed in a very dangerous direction”. This participant provided the example of a former leader/boss who had lied to cover up a situation on campus, “trying to cover up a sexual assault which for me tore at the very foundation of who I was, I’m still scarred by that complete lie”. Participants also felt not supported by their leaders, as indicated by this participant, “He had put me in a number of different situations over the years where it was like, here's something I don't think you can do”.

Key indicators of a Principled Leader

The study provided evidence of leaders working within the range of attributes as presented in the conceptualization of the definition of principled leadership. The significant attributes of principled leadership consistent with the emergent values and beliefs of the leadership sample were: authenticity, integrity, trust, building relationships, being collaborative, enabling, caring, loving, kind, moral, ethical, respectful, treating others with dignity, honest, encouraging, having spirit, heart, and courage. Higher education leaders in Nova Scotia echoed a 'higher calling' theme, that was shared across all participants and stressed by one participant who said, "we're not just having impact, it's a calling, we're part of this community, we're part of creating prosperity for everybody".

Through a comparison of the findings and interview observations, potentially eight out of thirty-three research participants lead from a high level, conceptualization of principled leadership stance, six from a medium level, and six from a low level. This finding was possible through comparing and contrasting the transcribed interviews, interview observations, overall qualitative data results, as compared to the characteristics of the conceptualization of principled leadership authenticity, love [care], spiritual [moral/ethical], and service, which correlated with the conceptual framework. In determining this, a point was given to each participant who had a propensity to one or more of the four characteristics as a means to determine alignment with the conceptualization of principled leadership. As one participant said, "leadership is really about defining principles and it doesn't have to be emotional, it can be emotional but it's really about saying what's fair, what's at stake here" and another, "an effective leader is: personable, gracious, passionate, connected".

Participants indicated that a leader needed to move beyond just being inspirational and motivational, and provided evidence of leadership closely aligned with Avolio et al. (2004) concluding that without authenticity as a root construct of a leadership approach, the associated behaviours and characteristics were not sustainable in one's leadership practice. Integrity was a vital attribute of

effectively navigating higher education institutions, and this was a theme that deeply resonated over each of the thirty-three interviews. Nova Scotia leaders operate from a high degree of integrity. This was demonstrated by 85% of research subjects who indicated that ensuring decisions are made with integrity is most important to their leadership approach. The following statement by one participant provides evidence of how important integrity is to this sample of leaders, "I am nothing without integrity". And further noted by one participant, "I stand on my own integrity and I always use that, and I define integrity as doing the right thing when nobody else is looking". Only 11% of participants agreed/strongly agreed that it is becoming increasingly difficult to hold to their own sense of integrity while leading in the contemporary university culture, indicating that this leadership group feels it is a critical component of their leadership as well as that they are confident in navigating challenging situations while holding onto their integrity.

In summary, the *principled leader's* focus is on the individual; being the best version of themselves so that they can unleash the potential in others, reconciling who they are with who they want to be, consistently whether at work, at home, or in their community. It is a call to be firm in identity, 'to be you, in all that you do' where providing balance to one's life and to those you work with, is fundamental. The principled leader's focus is on the 'other' with humility at the core, and a firm desire to serve others through caring (love). A principled leader also has the courage to be vulnerable, to have open, direct, and honest dialogue and works to create a culture entrenched in honesty and respect, ensuring the dignity of the other is upheld in all situations. 'To make mistakes. To love. To care'.

Reframing Love & Leadership

Even though there was a difference of opinion regarding definitions of the terms *love* and *care*, most posited that caring for others was important in ensuring overall employee satisfaction as well as in meeting the goals of the university. It was evidenced by the research study that higher education leaders were continually challenged to manage the ever-changing and dynamic landscape found within

universities while balancing the internal and external forces impacting financial, academic, and social sustainability. Love and care were integral to the conceptual framework as presented in the study. One of the potential challenges expected in the research study was that there would not be evidence of participants leading from a place of love. But as this sample evidenced, their leadership was not about learning to love, but aligned with hooks (2000) notion of love as "the will to nurture" and choosing to love through caring. The leadership sample did not consistently use the term love when describing their leadership approach but they did provide solid examples of caring and choosing to care from a place of love using the terms, "encouraging, care, self-efficacy, service of others, empowering others, being kind, heart, believe in, desire to help others, care for others, love my team", as Freire (1994) pointed out, it was their conscious act to choose to care.

A positive result of the study as evidenced by the research sample is found in the examples of their care which substantiated love as connected to caring and being in service of others. One participant described that they did not feel the need to care for their employees where universities have departments who take care of employees needs and, did not believe that care was necessary for leadership. However, this same participant further described an experience of undergoing a major renovation to ensure that they (their employees), had a comfortable and enjoyable work environment "because I just love those guys", indicating that caring was still important but manifested through love.

Discussion

The study provided evidence that current higher education leaders integrated elements of the conceptualization of principled leadership assisting them in facilitating the requisite changes to meet the neo-liberal challenges experienced by 21st century higher education institutions. One of our conclusions is that principled leadership offered an antidote to the destructive impacts of neoliberalism in higher education leadership. A principled approach, one that incorporates authenticity (identity), care (love), and spirituality (in service of, knowledge of other), was the antidote to the negativity embedded in

leadership constructs and expectations within the neoliberal ideology, where eight out of the thirty-three leaders provided evidence of a Principled Leadership approach.

The study provided evidence of authentic leadership where the leader not only incorporated elements of the authentic leadership construct but also chose to love, care, and be in the service of others in the workplace. There was an indication that participants understood authentic leadership and, in many cases, believed that they were an authentic leader (Blanchard, 2018). Thus, this research provides an extension and deepening of our understanding of the underpinnings of authentic leadership. Can a bad leader be authentic? Can someone who behaves badly: Act with good intentions? Be honest? True to her/his core identity? How do we know the difference?

Destructive Leadership: Can Principled Leadership be the antidote?

Of interest to the study was that leaders provided evidence of working with, and challenges of, destructive leaders (ship) in the form of previous employers or bad bosses indicating that internal forces impacted leaders working in higher education. This speaks to the internal challenges faced by higher education leaders and their strategies for coping when discussing their experience with "bad bosses" that actually enhanced their overall leadership approach or became integrated into their leadership approach. As noted in the seminal work by Kouzes and Posner (1999), leadership is dichotomous, it is "about toughness and tenderness. Guts and grace. Firmness and fairness. Fortitude and gratitude. Passion and compassion" (pp. xv-xvi). As noted by Fry (2003), "one should lead and manage by using values that drive fear and abuse out of the workplace and engage the hearts and minds of the people" (p. 704). In comparing the leadership attributes that emerged regarding a transactional leadership approach, it wasn't surprising to find a low alignment with the literature where 5/23 of the transactional leadership attributes aligned with the conceptualization of principled leadership attributes, which were: integrity, respect, sincerity, honesty, and relationship contrary to Lawrence and Pirson's (2015) homo economicus; a transactional leader who engaged in an exchange only (p. 383).

Einarsen et al. (2007) posited a definition for destructive leadership and the need for a positive leadership model as, "integrating research on such diverse constructs as leader bullying, incivility, abuse, counterproductive behaviour, deviance, undermining, corruption, and theft" (p. 215). Principled leadership, as conceptualized in the study, provided an example of how traditional forms of leadership such as transactional or destructive leadership as described by Ah-Kion and Bhowon (2017), and Einarsen et al. (2007), could be "flipped upside down" where it is not about me, the leader, it is about the others to whom I am in service. It moved beyond authentic and servant leadership due to the integration of love; the choice to act in the best interest of another, based on love. Although the leadership sample did not consistently use the word love, their intonations of caring for others was insightful in evidencing love through care and this in turn had the potential to impact their organization. As noted by this participant who described an analogy of the leaders' impact and the axis of an organization with regard to higher education in Nova Scotia:

> I think that if the axis of an organization is tilted towards honesty and integrity and that's exemplified through the leader of the organization, or by the leader, then that drives a certain series of activities of all the people who work there, right?

Higher education institution leaders at the senior level are charged with increasing productivity and in many ways, simply sourcing funding for their institution, and are expected to behave in ways that move the institution forward under the guise of productivity and financial viability. The study findings raised the question of destructive leadership (or bad bosses), and the collateral damage to result from poor leadership. The study also raised the question regarding the auspiciousness of efficiency over effectiveness and that this is a quandary for 21st century institutions of higher education. As the road to 'efficiency' is ever present, the goal of creating break-even operations is more apparent, and the reality is, (although this study does not overtly cover this dilemma although it came up in many discussions), there needs to be an awareness of an imploding crisis regarding those who work within higher education,

and the negative behaviours of those leaders working to create efficiencies at any cost, while leaving a path of destruction in their path.

Whether or not it is the current context of higher education that is causing and/or promoting destructive leadership at all levels of the university, the study raised the awareness that current leaders have been impacted by negative and destructive leaders which raised the following questions: How do you build a leadership development model built on the foundations of honesty, authenticity, respect, love, care, and a knowledge of spirit? What happens if leaders are incapable of principled leadership as proposed in this study? What would those implications be? In an ideal world, what would I advise the administration of a university to do, if they had "destructive leaders"? (Einarsen et al., 2007). What are the implications of the "neoliberal university" administration starved for financial support to keep operations running, and given this context, is this actively promoting destructive leadership? (Smyth, 2017). What do you do when destructive leaders are in the system and being promoted, when bad leaders are being rewarded? How do university leaders respond to bad leaders being promoted? How do we work toward creating compassionate leaders as described by Kouzes and Posner (2017), those leaders that drive out the fear and abuse inherent in destructive leadership, and engage the heart of those they lead (Fry, 2003; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Lastly, what is the ultimate damage of toxic leaders' capacity to wreak havoc, to damage work cultures and collectives, and how does the leader mitigate the damage and limit the impact of destructive leaders (Smyth, 2017)?

In responding to the findings and the questions raised by this study, it was important to consider leadership development and how this could be integrated into a methodology or teaching curriculum, as well as how leaders could integrate this into their professional leadership practice. A leadership development model could provide a roadmap for leaders in responding to what leaders should do when they notice a poor or destructive leader; help that person (through coaching, mentoring, professional development, counseling), and/or what happens if there is no change in destructive leader who has gone

through a process for changing behaviours negatively impacting others? What actions should be taken with problematic leaders? What happens if you have leaders participate in a leadership development program similar to the principled leadership approach, and they are not a good leader, people-centered, caring, or humanistic? What if they are incapable of being principled but continue to be promoted even after you have tried to help them become more people-centered? What happens when 'good' managers become leaders? What do you do about tenured leaders that are destructive? As evidenced in this study, it takes courage and strength for leaders to question the status quo, and to push beyond the boundaries in dealing with those they lead, ask the hard questions, and in some case, to remove those who may not be a good fit, and/or who are negatively impacting others. Is it possible to build programs that foster principled leadership and how? These questions precipitated a response to provide a leadership development model that could benefit 21st century leaders. A range of strategies could be implemented to support leadership decision making when supporting those they lead.

Conclusion

The need to create an awareness of destructive leaders and the impact of destructive leadership was an important finding, and although this dissertation was limited to the exploration of the conceptualization of principled leadership, the findings contribute to building leadership theory and informing professional practice. The study provided relevance and evidence of a leadership approach aligned with authenticity and care (love) closely aligned with the conceptualization of principled leadership that is not fully or explicitly defined in the current literature.

This study provided evidence to support the conceptualization of principled leadership for further research, or integration through professional development and in real terms, described a leadership approach that may continue to help others in helping Nova Scotia and Canadian leaders, guide their universities through challenging times. The conceptualization of principled leadership as described in this study and evidenced through the participants provided a clearer understanding of how to create and

support work cultures founded on the importance of knowing self, being authentic, and caring for others, one that could lead to deeper, trustful relationships, stronger leadership, honest communication, and fostering the dignity, respect, trust, and love of those whom a leader is responsible for; to re-define effective leadership. Of further note, if a leader has the desire to work from a construct similar to the conceptualization of principled leadership, then leaders could potentially "better communicate … Knowing these boundaries we could better assimilate unique follower training programs to enhance organizational behavior, which could create an efficiency of productivity" as noted by Kreitner and Kinicki (2013, p. 18).

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Every Voice Counts - Embedding the Principles of Universal Design for Learning into Higher Education Online Course Design

Elaine Fournier

Abstract

University classrooms are diverse settings. With online courses becoming increasingly more common instructors in post-secondary institutions must create inclusive learning environments that meet the needs of adult learners with exceptionalities. Goldberg et al. (2003) asserted that innovative technological tools can be used to promote student engagement, motivation, and enhance the quality of learning for students with disabilities.

One such tool is the Voice Thread which can be thoughtfully and intentionally incorporated into the course design phase. Friedman and Lee (2009) contend that using visual images to present content is a necessary pedagogical strategy and provides an opportunity to reduce visual clutter. Making content visual and auditory rather than exclusively in print is a Universal Design for Learning strategy that makes the information more accessible to all students not just those who struggle with reading.

Hampton and Mason (2003) reminded us that many students with learning disabilities require additional time to formulate their thoughts to make meaningful contributions to an online discussion. The features of the program offer a comfortable way for students to share their knowledge and understanding, analytical skills and personal reflections related to a particular concept. Offering a choice in the response format allows students to utilize their strengths and concentrate more fully on demonstrating their learning.

Fostering an inclusive learning environment using innovative technologies, such as Voice Thread, offers online instructors a meaningful way to adopt inclusive approaches to curriculum and assessment. Pre-existing structures such as the Community of Practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) provide inclusive leaders the opportunity to share these innovations with colleagues and ensure that every voice counts.

***Keywords*:** equity, inclusion, technology, Universal Design for Learning, higher education, leadership, course design.

Introduction

> *Investing in a better understanding of and support for inclusive education will benefit us all, because it will create a more cohesive, equitable and compassionate society.* (Towle, 2015, p. 6)

As an elementary school principal for twenty years, I experienced firsthand the need to ensure that we were creating equitable, compassionate learning environments for all students. This was, however, not an easy task. Educators at all levels continue to struggle to meet the needs of diverse learners.

In my leadership role, I facilitated many learning opportunities for novice and experienced teachers based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning. I was witness to the powerful impact that these principles played in creating inclusive learning spaces for students in a K-12 setting. As the educators immersed themselves in these principles, they had to learn to reframe their understanding of knowledge and how it is operationalized within the classroom setting.

It is helpful to better understand where these principles originated. Ronald Mace (1985) is credited with coining the term Universal Design. In the 80s and throughout the 90s his architectural work, at The Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, was the basis for a framework which sought multiple means of providing building and design options that could support a wide range of people. Mace et al. (1991) created a framework that incorporated seven guiding principles:

- Equitable Use – the design is useful to people with diverse abilities;
- Flexibility in Use – the design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities;
- Simple and Intuitive Use – the design is easy to understand;

- Perceptible Information – the design communicates information effectively;
- Tolerance of Error – the design minimizes hazards or the consequences of unintended actions;
- Low Physical Effort – the design can be used efficiently and comfortably with minimum fatigue; and
- Size and Approach – the design provides for approach, reach, and use regardless of the users' body size or mobility.

In the early 2000s Rose and Meyer (2002) along with their colleagues at the Centre for Applied Technology (CAST) incorporated these architectural/product design ideas into educational settings. Initially the work was focused as a strategy to support the needs of students with disabilities. Their work however quickly showed promise to benefit all students not just those with disabilities. They condensed the seven principles of universal design first posited by Mace into three guiding principles for Universal Design for Learning (UDL):

- Multiple means of representation (to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge;
- Multiple means of action and expression (to provide learners alternative ways to demonstrate what they know; and
- Multiple means of engagement (to utilize learners' interests, challenge them and motivate them).

(CAST, 2018)

As a principal, I proudly bore witness to countless former students who graduated and transitioned to a variety of higher educational settings. As tales of their sometimes less than optimal experiences in higher educational settings made their way back to me, I began to consider how to create more equitable spaces in a post secondary learning environment. My appointment to a Faculty of Education in central Canada, teaching online master's level courses, soon afforded me

just such an opportunity to experiment and to apply my ethic of care to integrate more inclusive practices within my online university classroom.

Methodological Framework

I utilized an autoethnographic approach to engage with and present the critical reflections and interpretations of my personal experience as an inclusive educational leader. This methodological framework afforded me the opportunity to triangulate evidence as a participant observer, a researcher with access to my own course design and reflective journaling (Chang, 2008; Hughes et al., 2012). As well, I was able to use student report documents gathered from my role as an online instructor in a higher educational setting to inform my conclusions.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) posit that this approach offers forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us. I sought to critically examine my own practice within the context of existing theories and scholarship. This enabled me to draw conclusions and ponder further questions related to inclusive leadership at a post secondary level.

Universal Design in Higher Education

In addition to recent secondary school graduates a more diverse range of adults are now returning to school (Denhart, 2008; Nuske et al., 2019; Sarrett, 2017). Post secondary education instructors can expect greater diversity of learners in their classrooms. This includes their background preparation, their learning situated in context and their learning based on their age and development (Rose & Fischer, 2009). Many of these adult learners have multiple roles and responsibilities. Universal Design for Learning offers an effective conceptual framework to support this diverse population of adult learners. This holistic framework highlights an epistemological shift which situates the problem within the instruction rather than the student. The

focus then becomes addressing goals, methods, materials, and assessment strategies that are not flexible enough to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Many students face barriers in accessing information when it is presented in a manner that assumes a common background for all. Universal Design for Learning addresses this diversity as it reorients how knowledge is defined, obtained, and expressed by embracing difference (Meyer et al., 2014). Rogers-Shaw et al. (2018) assert that Universal Design for Learning offers the opportunity for the instructor to engage with, develop and appreciate not only the content and learning objectives but also the interaction between learners, their unique histories, abilities, cultures, and characteristics (p. 23).

Rose et al. (2006) utilized the neuroscience of brain networks in the learning process to inform their work on the guiding principles of Universal Design for Learning. Recognition networks (how one learns to recognize objects or patterns in the external environment) support content acquisition and are linked to *representation*. Strategic networks (which reveal the methods of learning) supports the generation of effective patterns of action or response and are linked to *expression* and affective networks (evaluating the significance or importance of the patterns that we encounter or generate) are connected to *engagement*.

The three guiding principles of Universal Design for Learning: multiple means of representation, engagement and expression provide the foundation for designing courses that support each student to acquire, generate and use knowledge in a way that is just right for their learning style. Hollingshead (2017) posits that this flexible instruction ensures that learners have multiple means to engage in learning, are provided the content through multiple modalities and can demonstrate their learning via multiple means (pp. 1-2).

Edyburn (2005) describes the path to Universal Design for Learning along a continuum which begins with advocacy. At this stage an awareness of inequity is highlighted, and accommodations are the typical response to advocacy. Inaccessible environments and materials are modified and made available. He asserts that these types of accommodations maintain inequity since there may be a delay, require a special effort to obtain or require going to a special location (p. 19). The following vignette highlights this issue:

> Allen is a full-time special education teacher in a large suburban setting. He has a nonverbal learning disability that makes reading a challenge. Throughout the undergraduate portion of Allen's academic career accommodations such as additional time for assignments, a quiet space to write exams and the availability of a scribe for notetaking were available. Allen has found that the traditional read-write response format of the online additional qualification courses taken to date have not effectively addressed the issues that are inherent to his above stated learning challenges. While all instructors have offered the opportunity to post his responses to online discussions in an alternative format, this made him the exception to the norm and as such he felt awkward doing so.

True accessibility according to Edyburn describes an environment where access is equitably provided to everyone at the same time. It is to that end that I set out to incorporate the principles of Universal Design for Learning in my own graduate level course design. Friesen and Kuskis (2003) remind us to consider both pedagogy and technology in terms of online interaction. They highlight the importance of student interaction with content and the need to establish a positive social presence to increase learning. The authors posit that incorporating flexibility and choice at the design phase allows the instructor to meet instructional objectives while enhancing student

interaction, addressing diversity, and increasing access. Meier and Rossi (2020) highlight the need for proactive planning and the importance of considering barriers to learning at the design phase. The authors assert that to fully address learner variability an instructor should consider two types of barriers: skill and curricular. When considering skill barriers instructors can for example utilize the strategy of scaffolding to ensure that all learners have the support they need. They describe curricular barriers as roadblocks to a students' ability to access and learn the content of a particular course. By focusing on this type of proactive planning instructors can begin to consider how these instructional barriers may affect a students' ability to master a particular learning goal.

Meier and Rossi's approach is useful however there is also great value in recognizing that learners want to exercise control over their own learning, make decisions about how to learn, use their personal life experience in the learning process and apply their knowledge to solving authentic problems. The applicability and relevance of the content comes to the foreground when the principles of Universal Design for Learning are effectively embedded into the course design. Zeff (2007) reminds us to 'build out' the curriculum from a set of goals rather than trying to meet the needs of diverse learners after an issue has surfaced. The principles can be applied to the course objectives, teaching techniques, learning materials, outcomes, and assessment methods. In so doing, all students will be able to learn regardless of their skill level, needs, motivation or interest. This can however feel like a daunting task. So how does an instructor know where to begin? Tobin (2018) suggests adopting a 'plus one' approach. He offers the following example, instead of creating all possible alternative formats for multimedia, select one consistently throughout the course (p. 22). It is with this 'plus one' mindset that I set out to utilize the VoiceThread tool to embed the principles of Universal Design for Learning into my course design.

Technology – Voice Thread

Many higher education students possess digital literacy and are comfortable expressing themselves in a web-based environment that incorporates expression through audio, video, and graphics. Smith (2012) asserts that technology offers higher education students a convenient means for increased productivity and a way to stay connected to others. She posits that the flexible features of digital media offer opportunities for students to interact with the content, connect in conversation with others and demonstrate their understanding. The infusion of digital media via the Universal Design for Learning lens also offers instructors a way to customize students' learning experiences (p. 36). Dede (2008) argued that the effective use of web 2.0 tools would help form the basis of this epistemological shift away from the traditional classroom. He asserts that active learning pedagogies emphasize a constructivist approach where students cocreate knowledge. In many online classrooms a 'traditional classroom' takes the form of mandatory weekly assignments that require a read-write response format and do not afford the students the opportunity to engage with one another in constructive and collaborative ways.

As I set out to infuse digital media into my course design, I was presented with a myriad of choices. Why then did I focus my efforts on the VoiceThread tool? VoiceThread is an asynchronous platform that helps users communicate and collaborate around a variety of topics. It provides an opportunity for students to share their voice in multiple ways (audio, text, imagery, and video).

VoiceThread provides a visually stimulating inclusive learning environment. It can be used across fields of study with a variety of content areas and a multitude of learners. VoiceThread allows the discussions to be either instructor or student led. The video and voice comment features of the tool increase the sense of community and enhance the students' perception of the instructor's

social presence. The instructor can offer individualized audio or video feedback to the students' responses and the students are able to learn from their peers.

Student Voice

To better understand its impact, I turned to the students to gain deeper insight. Throughout this section several graduate students share their thoughts and perceptions related to the use of VoiceThread and the role it played in their learning (pseudonyms have been used to protect privacy).

Melissa, a graduate student shares her thoughts about the VoiceThread, "*It was a nice way to connect with my peers to see them and hear their voices. It felt like I was actually in the classroom at times*."

The sense of community that is created by the VoiceThread also reduces the isolation that can often be associated with online learning. Rao (2012) reminds us that there are several challenges for adult learners in online courses: uncertainty about expectations, technology issues, and insufficient learning community. The concern related to a sense of community is at the heart of Gino's comments related to his experience using the VoiceThread, "*I appreciate how interactive this course has been for an online course. Often online courses are very solitary*."

The collaborative knowledge creation that can be shared via the VoiceThread may motivate students to higher quality work since they know that their contributions will be viewed by others (Smith & Dobson, 2009). Speaking directly to her classmates on the VoiceThread another student, Shana declares the following:

> Thank you for being so engaging. I learned so much from your stories and your experiences. I felt inspired by how passionate everyone was. I really appreciated how engaging this class was. I have never used VoiceThread before and I've never done

> that type of group project, so I got to spend time with a couple of the ladies in the class and we had an awesome time collaborating.

The features of the program offer a comfortable way for students to share their knowledge and understanding, analytical skills and personal reflections related to a particular concept. Offering a choice in the response format allows students to utilize their strengths and concentrate more fully on demonstrating their learning. Students who may not be comfortable speaking out in a face-to-face class are able to have their voice heard in a less intimidating environment. The tool also allows for students to have time to reflect on their response prior to sharing it with others. The feature of the tool which allows for a student to listen to a portion of his/her response and choose to delete and rerecord made the editing process much more manageable. Michael's description of his experience using the VoiceThread highlights the importance of choice:

> It was interesting because it made it feel like we were all part of a group that was a lot closer together than the distances that we actually had which was across the country and around the world. The videos that we created ourselves were easy to upload and to put onto the course to the VoiceThread. Once there was VoiceThread there, it was quite easy to actually respond to each person's ideas by using either the text option, or the audio, or the video options that were there and it was nice because we could choose which options we wanted to use. I really enjoyed using this and I found it quite easy to use. It made it more interesting and more personable. It was interesting to hear what their ideas were and hear that they could emphasize the parts that they felt most passionate about.

Lerner and Johns (2009) posit that students who are often considered passive learners become more actively involved through ongoing interaction with both the instructor and their

peers. Another positive benefit to the use of this multimedia tool is the ability for the instructor to reduce visual clutter, a factor that often impedes students with learning disabilities from fully engaging with the academic task. Presenting the content both visually and in an auditory format makes the information more accessible to students who struggle with reading. Zemlyanova et al. (2021) assert that the use of VoiceThread for foreign language learners enhances active and meaningful second language learning, improves critical thinking skills, and provides opportunities for interactive and collaborative learning.

Mayer (2001) focused on how the virtual learning environment (VLE) can be enhanced. He posits that tools such as the VoiceThread can offer a media rich experience that enables a more natural, social, and collaborative learning experience. Fox (2017) found that the use of the VoiceThread increased the instructor's online presence and reduced the sense of isolation that is often cited as a concern by students enrolled in online courses. Peter's comments reinforce this notion of a more natural learning experience, *"Having the opportunity to use the VoiceThread to hear/see my classmates. It is nice to see some real faces on the other end of the line."*

Brunvard and Byrd (2011) put forward that the important ingredients for learning success include the ability to engage, sustain attention, participate actively, maintain high levels of motivation and complete assigned tasks (p. 29). Enrique's thoughts on his success in the course support this assertion, "*I have gained insight from the interactive sessions.*"

Innovative technological tools can be used to promote student engagement, motivation, and enhance the quality of learning for students with disabilities (Goldberg et al., 2003). Brianne, a graduate student with a learning disability makes the following statement related to the VoiceThread's response format options, "*I like being able to verbally communicate back and forth*".

Friedman and Lee (2009) contend that using visual images to present content is a necessary pedagogical strategy when using the VoiceThread. It provides an opportunity to reduce visual clutter within a particular thread. Making content visual and auditory rather than exclusively in print makes the information more accessible to students who struggle with reading.

Hampton and Mason (2003) remind us that many students with learning disabilities require additional time to formulate their thoughts to make meaningful contributions to the discussion. VoiceThread automatically creates wait time and allows students the time they need to respond and the time to listen and make changes prior to posting.

The VoiceThread tool proved to be an effective means for supporting the principles of Universal Design for Learning. It afforded students the opportunity to acquire the course content knowledge in several ways (audio, visual, and text). The students were then able to demonstrate what they had learned in any one of these response formats. Collaborating with one another via the VoiceThread challenged and motivated these adult learners. This did not however happen by chance. Thoughtful planning at the course design stage was the key to successful implementation.

Online Course Design

As I began to 'build out' the curriculum the first step was to focus on developing clear goals. Smith (2012) reminds us that, from a Universal Design for Learning lens, this approach will ensure the separation of the intent of the goal (the outcome) from the way in which the students acquire the goal. This paves the way for offering more than one option to achieve the desired outcome. An example of this type of goal from a Graduate level course I teach is as follows:

> Students will be able to investigate, critique, and apply different approaches to addressing various problems of practice related to the academic learning of students with exceptionalities.

Once the goal had been clearly formulated the next step was to ensure that I had embedded a variety of methods to present the information (UDL Guiding Principle 1 – Multiple Means of Representation). Smith (2012) posits that instructional environments that capitalize on the flexibility of digital mediums offer opportunities to strengthen the specific guidelines within the first UDL principle (p. 34).

Focusing on the above stated goal, course material was first presented in a synchronous learning session using a PowerPoint, video, and small group breakout rooms with interactive whiteboards. Closed captions were enabled, and the session was recorded. These multiple means of representation afforded students the opportunity to see and hear the information. The recording of the session enabled students to go back and review the material as often as they needed at a time and pace conducive to their learning style/needs.

The adult learners in my graduate courses present with a range of capabilities, preferences, and approaches. Their past experiences may mean that there are gaps in their prior knowledge, different cultural or regional learning experiences and some may be challenged by a disability. Ensuring that the options presented strengthen comprehension is a key tenet of the Universal Design for Learning approach as it affords the opportunity to activate prior knowledge. The use of the small group breakout rooms is one example that offered students the opportunity to share their understanding in a smaller group setting. The students learn from one another, share previous background knowledge, highlight patterns and relationships while using digital technology to capture this learning. Rose and Fischer (2009) confirm that learners vary widely in how they make use of instructional information in a learning situation. By offering multiple opportunities for students to gain, express and demonstrate their understanding (UDL principle 2 – Multiple Means of Action and Expression) student variability can be addressed more effectively.

In this online course design example, the content material related to concept mapping first shared in the synchronous session described above is then purposefully followed up with an interactive activity using the VoiceThread. Edyburn (2005) reminds us that access to information is not access to learning. He highlights the need to consider how technology and digital media engage a student in meaningful learning activities. Therefore, to be most effective, the use of the VoiceThread should be incorporated into the course design phase. It should be purposeful, thoughtful, and intentional.

Students were tasked with creating and sharing their original concept maps on the VoiceThread. This afforded the students the opportunity to continue to consolidate their learning asynchronously while choosing the means of expression that best suits their learning style (text, video, audio).

Delmas (2017) focuses on the role that the VoiceThread can play in strengthening the instructor's social presence and thus creating a more effective online course design. To foster greater social presence instructors should consider incorporating the following elements:

- Viewing and thinking carefully about the VoiceThread;
- Leaving a succinct spoken or written comment that adds value to the current conversation; and
- Leaving an effective spoken or written comment that promotes future participation.

Students engage in meaningful ways with the content and with one another (UDL principle 3 – Multiple means of Engagement) as they constructively critique one another's concept maps on the VoiceThread. Engagement however is more than interaction with one another, it includes meaningful opportunities to recognize the value, relevance, and authenticity in what they are learning. Zeff (2007) reminds us that the concepts of Universal Design for Learning can also be applied to assessing what students have learned. In the example below, the success criteria for the

online discussion portion of the course using the VoiceThread embeds the key tents of relevance and authenticity. The following should be evident in the online discussion:

- What the key points are of the theory, discussion, or argument in the course materials;
- A critique of the strengths and weakness of the theory, discussion, or argument in the course materials;
- How these may apply or may not apply to the real-life context - incorporating one's own work or personal experience; and
- A thoughtful response to other students' submissions including opposing viewpoints when appropriate.

The excerpt below is drawn from the final assignment in this course and demonstrates another way in which the principles of Universal Design for Learning can be built into the formal assessment components of a course design. The example highlights how additional choice within and between the assignment is conveyed. These choices relate to the 3rd guiding principle as the focus is on expression and engagement:

Final Assignment - Critical Report Choice

For the Critical Report students are to identify a specific learning challenge of particular interest (Learning Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Conduct Disorder etc.) and share in a report style format specific strategies that would support students with this learning challenge in one of the content areas covered in the course (literacy, numeracy, or science). The report must include a critical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses related to the supports discussed. The report should draw upon at least 3 peer reviewed articles in addition to course material. The report should adhere to the stylistic guidelines of APA 7th edition.

Original Online Educational Resource Choice

For the Original Online Educational Resource students are to identify a specific learning challenge of particular interest (Learning Disability, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, Conduct Disorder, etc.) and create **in an online format** (i.e., web page, virtual classroom space etc.) a resource that will support students with this learning challenge in one of the content areas covered in the course (literacy, numeracy, or science). The online resource must also include an educator section that includes a critical discussion of the strengths and weaknesses related to the supports presented to the students and draw upon at least 3 peer reviewed articles in addition to the course materials. References should adhere to APA 7th edition and should be included in this section.

So What Does This All Mean?

The online course examples described above highlight the need to purposefully plan. Beginning with a clearly articulated goal ensures that each of the elements of the course design that follow (synchronous or asynchronous) support the attainment of the learning goal. It is important to keep in mind that the goal is the destination not the path traveled. In keeping with this journey metaphor, how your students arrive at the destination will depend on their skill set, preference, and interest. It is our role as effective inclusive educators to ensure that from the onset, we intentionally embed opportunities to effectively explore and utilize the various options for travelling along the path. In addition, collaborating with peers (sharing course designs embedded with the principles of universal design) in a Community of Practice or similar professional learning setting provides the opportunity to broaden our impact. This affords all students, not just our own access to more meaningful learning experiences.

Challenges

Designing this type of meaningful experience is however not without its challenges. Moore (2007) reminds us that technology alone is not flexible or accessible – we build those sorts of environments through deliberate design that include universal design and accessibility as part of the framework (p. 523). The versatility of digital media such as the ability to manipulate, store, or network are valuable characteristics that are mediated by technology. Moore highlights the need to ensure that conscious design considerations must be built into the tools. We can not assume however that just because we are using a resource such as the VoiceThread that that alone makes it accessible. For example, currently the use of VoiceThread presents accessibility concerns for students who are blind/low vision as it is not compatible with screen readers and while audio comments can be captioned there may be a lag time before it appears to the student. Moore posits that there is a need to work in tandem with the instructional design community who she asserts are uniquely equipped to explore flexible learning infrastructures (p. 524). As instructors continue to strive to make their learning spaces more equitable, nurturing these valuable partnerships will benefit all learners.

Recommendations for Inclusive Leadership

Leading inclusive teaching is multifaceted. It requires effort and a desire to challenge yourself. The first step is a willingness to engage in earnest self-reflection. Begin by critically reviewing your current course design. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Have I provided learners with more than one way to acquire new knowledge?
- Have I provided learners with different ways to demonstrate what they know?
- Have I embedded ways in which learners can utilize their interests to strengthen motivation and engagement?

For each of the above questions, if the answer is no, then consider ways in which you can begin to do so. If the answer is yes, reflect on ways to enhance and improve what you already have in place.

The second step is to engage in further critical reflection with peers. Inclusive leadership is not a solitary endeavour. Consider joining a professional Community of Practice or take on more of a leadership role within a group to which you already belong. These are practical and meaningful ways to deepen your understanding and enactment of inclusive leadership practices.

The third step is a willingness to stretch the boundaries of your comfort zone. Learn about and try to embed technologies that support these principles. Lead by example and learn with humility. These are the necessary ingredients for a deeply rewarding experience for you and your students.

Conclusion

As previously stated, I spent a large portion of my career in a K-12 educational setting. I have experienced firsthand the benefits of implementing a Universal Design for Learning framework from our youngest learners in kindergarten all the way through to those graduating from secondary school. For instructors who have embraced an epistemological shift from the notion that a failure to learn is inherent in the learner to a belief that reflects a flawed curriculum, the Universal Design for Learning framework has provided an effective point of departure. Applying these experiences to the higher education context has brought me full circle as most instructors want to create more equitable learning spaces in their online higher education courses. A meaningful example of the power of this framework is highlighted in the discourse of one of my graduate students. Steven, a health care professional shared that not only had the course design benefitted his own learning but that the principles of Universal Design for Learning were so

profoundly impactful he was planning to utilize the framework in his own healthcare course design.

Embedding the principles of Universal Design for Learning into the online course design in a purposeful and systematic way is an effective starting point for online higher education instructors regardless of their field. The first step is to ensure the creation of a clearly articulated goal focused on the desired outcome. This important first step will set the stage for success. Next thoughtful consideration must be given to representing the content knowledge that learners need to acquire in a variety of ways. This will support meeting the diversity of needs that are present in every online learning space. Instructors are then able to offer their students the opportunity to demonstrate this newly acquired knowledge in more than one way. By doing so they can ensure that no one is left behind. Finally, incorporating the students' interests will challenge and motivate them. Embedding these carefully planned steps into the initial course design will lay the foundation for students to ultimately display the various indicators of successful learning discussed previously (engagement, sustained attention, motivation, active participation, and task completion). Utilizing the principles of Universal Design for Learning offers a framework to create meaningful and effective course designs.

Making thoughtful decisions about which digital technologies to use and how best to incorporate them into the design of the course from the outset will further ensure that online instructors move towards a more student-centered approach. Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2010) remind us that reflective educators seek opportunities to adjust and improve their practice and redevelop their classrooms into rich and meaningful learning spaces.

Fostering an inclusive learning environment using the principles of Universal Design for Learning and innovative technologies such as VoiceThread offer online instructors a meaningful

way to adopt inclusive approaches to curriculum and assessment and ensure that every voice counts!

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Biography

Dr. Elaine Fournier – Elaine is an Assistant Professor of Teaching Students with Exceptionalities and Educational Leadership at University of Western Ontario (UWO), Canada. She is dedicated to creating inclusive learning spaces. Elaine has thirty years of teaching and administration experience. Twenty of these years were spent as an elementary school principal. During this time, she served on a number of committees including the Principal's Advisory Committee for Special Education and the District Advisory Committee for Indigenous Education. She also served as the Coordinator for the New Teacher Induction Program (a role she held for seven years). Elaine's research focuses on inclusive education, leadership, the use of technology to create equitable online learning spaces and novice teachers. Elaine was awarded the 2023 Vice-Provost (Academic Programs) Award for Excellence in Online and Blended Teaching and the 2020 Canadian Educational Researchers' Association, Todd Rogers Research Award.

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Leadership as Métissage:

Seeking to Indigenize Our Faculty of Education.

Joshua Hill, Kathryn Crawford, Sherry Martens, Crystal Pelletier,

Christy Thomas, and Arch Chee Keen Wong

Abstract

As a faculty of education, we have ethical, professional, and legal commitments that compel us to make meaningful and significant contributions to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This work is long overdue, justice has too long been denied, the ongoing legacies of colonization that play out through education need to be disrupted now. Yet this work must be done in a good way, decolonization is required, many complexities exist stemming from the past and present dominance of Eurocentric knowledge in our society, K-12, and post-secondary education systems. The authors of this paper made up all of the full-time staff members in a faculty of education. We used a collaborative scholarship of teaching and learning research project and a Métissage methodology to seek to collectively lead the Indigenization of learning, teaching, leadership, and scholarship in our faculty. In braided narrative vignettes, we situate ourselves in relationship to this work, explore tensions and complexities, wrestle with axiological considerations, reflect on practices we have engaged in, share how we have taken up this work with our students, colleagues, and school partners, identify questions and steps in front of us, and reflect on how Métissage has served as a shared leadership process to support the Indigenization of our faculty and our University as a whole. Our stories are situated in a Bachelor of Education after degree program that serves approximately 120 students located in the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut'ina Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda Nations.

Keywords: indigenization; scholarship of teaching and learning (SOTL); post-secondary education; collective leadership; Métissage; collaboration; teacher education

Introduction

Chair of the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRCC) Senator Murray Sinclair, pointedly summarized the Commission's findings regarding education: "It is precisely because education was the primary tool of oppression of Aboriginal people, and miseducation of all Canadians, that we have concluded that education holds the key to reconciliation" (Stromquist, 2015, n.p.). The TRCC is the latest in a long line of national reports to call on education to become more inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning (National Indian Assembly of First Nations, 1972; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; United Nations, 2007; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011). Precipitated, in part by these reports, Provincial Ministries and Deans of Education across Canada have developed policies intended to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students and to promote reconciliation (Council of Ministers of Education, 2018; Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2010). In the Alberta context, the professional quality standard for teachers includes "Applying foundational knowledge of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit" as one of six standards (Alberta Education, 2017).

While the ethical, professional, and legal mandates are clear and compelling, complexities exist stemming from the ongoing legacies of colonization and the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge in our k-12 and post-secondary education systems. Battiste (2013), pointedly frames the historical context: "for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimilation plan — their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system" (p. 23). This historical legacy must be considered and reflected on in engaging in this work. Connected to this, the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge in education has contributed to what Donald (2009) describes as a "colonial divide" in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada are perceived as occupying separate realities of

"us" and "them". Donald (2014) found that most teachers, whatever their level of experience, "feel woefully unprepared to lead their students in meaningful consideration of Aboriginal perspectives" (p. 2). Donald concludes that teacher education programs need to help student teachers identify the ways in which colonial logics and structures continue to have tremendous influence over the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada and help them understand Indigenous philosophies to engage with Indigenous perspectives in qualitatively different ways. A significant challenge to fulfilling Donald's call lies in the reality that the post-secondary context itself is steeped in Eurocentric dominance. Furthermore, the research methodologies, curriculums, pedagogies, and very structures of the university have played significant roles in advancing the colonial project (Smith, 1999).

In this space of tension our faculty has been seeking to create an "ethical space" to include and promote Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching in our faculty of education (Ermine, 2007). Willie Ermine's (2007) "ethical space" offers a construct for Eurocentric and Indigenous Knowledge systems to be brought together. Ermine provides that a necessary precursor to creating an ethical space is to interrogate the deeply embedded cultural interpretation of dominance of Eurocentric knowledge. Connected to this he suggests that the assumptions underlying each foundation knowledge must be considered and appropriate points of inclusion identified. Ermine envisions a trans-systemic space "in between worldviews", that reaches beyond two distinct systems of knowledge (p. 193). Elder Albert Marshall deems a bringing together of Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge as "Two-eyed seeing" (Bartlett et al. 2015). Kimmerer (2013) offers the metaphor of braid which we draw on to support the organization of this chapter.

In this collaborative scholarship of teaching and learning Métissage, we engaged in a journey of seeking an ethical space to include Indigenous perspectives in our faculty of

education. The Métissage project itself offered a vehicle for us as a team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty to collaboratively lead this work. We chronicle our journey in this chapter and proceed as follows: first, we situate this work on the Land and in our university; next, we describe the research approach of Métissage and the Medicine Wheel Protocol that guided our journey; and finally, through braided narrative vignettes, we situate ourselves in relationship to this work, explore tensions and complexities, wrestle with axiological considerations, reflect on practices we have engaged in, share how we have taken up this work with our students, colleagues, and school partners, identify questions and steps in front of us, and attend to how Métissage has served as a shared leadership process to support the Indigenization of our faculty and our university as a whole.

Métissage

Worley (2006) provides that Métissage is a critical pedagogical praxis well suited for education because of its commitment to diversity and polyphonic nature. We drew on Métissage as a protocol for shared leadership of Indigenization in our faculty. Métissage offered a framework for our diverse team to bring our unique perspectives, experiences, and histories to reflect on, (re)create, and renew practice (Hasebe-Ludt et al., 2009). It provided a protocol for equal partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, a necessary design feature of decolonizing methodologies (Kovach, 2009). Métissage is a process of interpreting and braiding one's own and others' perspectives to enable a deeper understanding of the complex nature of relationships and foster more ethical terms for extending these relations (Donald, 2012). Co-creating an interpretive narrative provided us with a means for hearing each other's narrative and provoked reflexivity (Kovach, 2009). Through monthly co-writing meetings we used Métissage to engage in an iterative and cyclical process of listening, sharing, reflecting, and recreating our teaching and service work in the university.

Donald (2012) provides that Métissage does not prescribe methods but rather requires "*aokakio'ssin"* careful attention to the details of the research context (p. 544). To this end, we drew on Medicine Wheel Teachings as a framework for bringing forward and sharing our perspectives. The Medicine Wheel Teachings were gifted to author Kathryn Crawford from Elder Georgina Mercredi and deepened by Knowledge Keepers Carol Crowe and Doug Dokis. Each month we drew on the four directions of the Medicine Wheel to write, share, listen, and engage in dialogue (Mercredi, 2000-01; Crowe, 2020; Dokis, 2020). We have used the Medicine Wheel Directions to braid our voices in this chapter.

Donald (2012) highlights Métissages' ability to bring Indigenous perspectives to bear on policy discussions in educational contexts. In this chapter, we have curated our ongoing writing process with the aim of making our journey visible and opening up possibilities for others.

East-Who am I?

Kathryn

A few years ago I accompanied a group of preservice teachers to Niitsitapi Learning Centre, an early childhood through grade two school in Calgary, Alberta whose design and pedagogical approach is rooted in First Nation perspectives and experiences. As we sat in circle in the teepee space, our host asked us to share where we are from. I do not have a straightforward answer— the immediate thought that comes to mind is that I feel unrooted. I lived in numerous places when I was young, often away from my large extended family. Recently we have explored my mom's adoption, likely one of the Sixties Scoop adoptions, revealing families who are of both European descent and Dené and Metis. We have been adopted back into both families, and the teachings I receive are shaping my evolving sense of my place in my family, my work, and my response abilities (Haraway, 2016). Stories of identity exploration with

colleagues Josh Hill and Crystal Pelletier, peers, and preservice teachers that have occurred through relationships with Indigenous communities have been profoundly meaningful to my sense of self as an educator (see Crawford et al., 2022).

Crystal

I am grateful to my ancestors. Their struggles, hardships, and triumphs have laid the foundation for me to be here today. Here on the land, here as an educated Métis Woman, and here sharing my story… our story. Being the first of my family to complete graduate school, so many educational firsts, yet there is a distinct presence of loss and wonder. My paternal grandmother was the glue of our family, our gatherings, and our Métis traditions. It seems as if my learning and research has brought me back to the wonderful work the Métis women in our family have done. While I knew my Grandmother's stories, it was a gift to find out that she was included in Troupe's (2009) thesis on the social structure and political activism of Métis women in Saskatoon.

I have travelled to new communities with my husband and these opportunities have helped shape me into the educator I am now. Having the opportunity to return south, I feel more at home near the foothills and prairie. I don't always have words for that feeling of awe and connection to the land. It is a sense of homecoming.

Arch

My Chinese name has to do with a person of wisdom. I am a Malaysian Chinese Canadian who is 1.5 generation; that is to say, I was born overseas but grew up in Canada. I came to Canada as I began primary school and entered the public school system not understanding a word of English. As can be imagined, this brought with it a lot of cultural and identity complexities. One of these complexities was beginning to understand the dominant culture and where one belongs in that culture. For me, where this journey began might be a

strange place in that it did not start in school but the Chinese Canadian church. Even though Chinese immigrants have opportunities to take part in various kinds of ethnic organizations such as cultural clubs, language schools, and other religious groups, there are certain needs that only the Chinese church has been able to meet. In asking my parents why they sent their children to a Chinese church, even though they were moderately Confucius in their values, the answer came back clearly: to preserve Chinese culture, language, and identity.

Sherry

> Home: what you visit and abandon; too much forgotten/too much remembered. An asylum for your origins, your launchings, and departures, the derivations of your dream geographies; where you invented destinations/ Always and unrelentingly (home) after it is too late to be or to revert to (home), even after it pre/occupies the past tense. (van Herk, 1990)

As an educator interested in identity research, I position my own sense of self in multiple ways. My name is Sherry Lee Martens, daughter of Henry and Joan, born, raised, wandered and returned to live in Calgary. I am a descendent of immigrants on both sides of the family tree who came to Turtle Island with the promise of escaping persecution in their homelands not knowing that the land they would work for was gained through injustice. Although I have lived my life as a teacher on concrete and asphalt, I feel deeply connected and rooted in the Prairie landscapes of rolling hills whose crops fed five generations of my family. I wrestle with the juxtaposition of my identity against the story of Indigenous People in this country.

Christy

Early in life I had the desire to become a teacher and was encouraged by my family to pursue teaching. I sensed a calling to continue this path. I am a settler of European descent and

my family immigrated from England and France and when I reflect on my early teaching philosophy, I can see the influences of my family and culture. Much of my educational experiences were shaped by a western worldview so it is not surprising that my teaching practices and training have been largely influenced by dominant culture. I recall teaching the history of Canada and residential schools in a grade 10 social studies class. I connected with a friend who worked at the Native Center at the University of Calgary to find a guest speaker to share Indigenous knowledge with my students. At the time, I thought I was providing a great learning opportunity for my students, but it had not occurred to me that beyond this learning experience, I was doing little to dismantle the narrative of dominant culture or consider other pedagogical possibilities for my teaching practice.

Josh

"Hello, Mr. Wolfleg sir" I stammered, "I am a grade 7 teacher and I would like to include Indigenous Voice in my class but I am not sure how to do that well." "Would you consider guiding me?" I can still feel the pit of nervousness in my stomach so many years later. Reflecting on it now, I realize how these feelings were in part a product of 'us' and 'them' logic (Donald, 2009). When faced with a new social studies curriculum on Canadian history I knew the stories I had been told in school were inadequate. I knew the stereotypical language and attitudes I had encountered growing up on the Prairies were inappropriate. I knew I needed my students to have an opportunity to learn from Indigenous perspectives. Yet, I felt woefully unprepared to do so (Donald, 2012). My k-12 and post-secondary education had left me, a Metis person, unable to envision how to meaningfully include Indigenous Perspectives in my classroom. I recognize now how much this story of assimilation was by design. When I reflect on who I am in this work, I think of my commitment to disrupt this story. I think of being my Grandmother's grandson, seeking to reclaim, seeking to be a living testament to the resilience and strength of the Metis

people. I think of being my children's father, seeking an educational experience for them and their generation that includes Indigenous people. I think of being my future Grandchildren's Grandfather and envision more just relationships with all of creation.

South-Where have you been?

Kathryn

When I moved to a North Denésuline community to teach early in my career, I had taken a few books of Indigenous legends with me. I shared these stories with my students, excited to incorporate cultural stories into my practice. I was dismayed when they did not know any of the stories, believing their community had disregarded their own culture. That my first inclination was to place blame on the community, and not on myself, and my lack of awareness of the importance of place, invitation to receive local knowledge, and the rootedness of First Nation stories remind me of my situatedness in the western curriculum. As a young teacher, I had not learned "to think otherwise to bring thinking itself into question" (Findlay, 2011, p. xi). I had made assumptions from my own limited experience. I share this story with my preservice teachers to reveal the ignorance from which we often make teaching decisions as well as judgments of students, parents, and communities that are shaped through our own life histories and disconnection to places.

Crystal

Again, I return to gratitude, grateful for the opportunities I have been given through my work as a classroom teacher, an instructional coach, and as a collaborator. While I was raised not far from the homeland of Our People, I also had the opportunity to move to new places. Not nomadic, but with purpose, just like my ancestors did. While the colonized view was that Our People were nomadic, an Elder recently corrected me when I used that term. *I still have much to learn.*

After 16 years in Fort McMurray, I am back to the foothills and prairies, close to the mountains. I have travelled to new communities and these opportunities have helped shape me into the educator I am. Having the opportunity to return south, I feel more at home near the foothills and prairie. It is a gift to be connected to your community and to participate more fully in cultural practices and traditions. I don't always have words for that feeling of awe and connection to the land. It is a sense of homecoming and I am *grateful*.

Arch

A number of theoretical frameworks have been helpful to me moving forward in identity formation over the years that indicate where I have been and where I am going that provide a language to think about identity and culture. Ecological theory presumes that it is not imaginable to know a person's development in isolation apart from their social and historical contexts (Darling, 2007). This theory is able to describe the complexity of my immigrant minority experiences: a rich resource of Chinese history and culture that began in Malaysia, shifting to a new Canadian cultural context and the many changing environments and systems along my journey.

The concept of intersectionality from critical race theory allows for each individual to hold multiple identities simultaneously. Chinese Canadians have a complex identity that interlaces their culture, faith, gendered experiences, educational background, and immigration status into their lived experiences in Canada. Intersectionality "avoids essentializing a single analytical category of identity by attending to other interlocking categories" and also "enables us to ... include the impact of context and to pay attention to interlocking oppressions and privileges across various contexts" (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008, p. 5).

Sherry

I have struggled to know where to begin this story of decolonization, teacher education, and my place within it. I began my teaching career in a remote Northern Metis settlement in 1987. It was for me, a year of many firsts- the first time I had lived away from home, the first time I had lived in a rural community, and the first time I had the opportunity to be in a relationship with Indigenous people. It was a challenging year for me on so many fronts notwithstanding a lack of knowledge and appreciation of the stories of Indigenous people in Canada despite my studies in Western Canadian history that I have only in recent years began to understand was shaped through a colonized and limited perspective. I am grateful to students, community members, and Elders that engaged with me as an outsider; came to my home and drank tea, took me out on the lake in worn canoes and on the land in the coldest of winter. While I professed that I was all about student interest and endeavored to find ways to engage them, it was still steeped in my Western perspective about the culture of school and the prioritizing of curriculum. I spoke with our school board chair, and Elder, Felix, who was also father to 13 kids- 6 of them in my classes. He helped to implement a Cree culture activity in our Art classes by coming and teaching wood carving. He supported all of the teachers by asking his children to respect us; I can see now what that cost him as a former student of residential schools- not that I knew anything about that at the time.

Christy

When I started teaching pre-service teachers at the post-secondary level, the government had introduced a new teacher quality standard and this included a standard where pre-service teachers are required to develop and apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit. This new standard served as a catalyst for my own journey of unlearning colonial approaches to teaching and learning. I am grateful for the experiences that I have had, while

limited, where Indigenous Knowledge was meaningfully included. I had the opportunity to participate with our faculty in land-based learning with Tsuut'ina elders Deanna and Bruce Starlight at the Brown Bear Center, and Blackfoot elder, Saa'kokoto and more recently at Dodginghorse Ranch with Sonya and Brent Dodginghorse. I've been inspired by these experiences and listening to the stories and teachings I find myself compelled to reflect on my own teaching practices and biases. I recall attending a chapel on campus where Holly Fortier was speaking and sharing her story and a film she produced about her mother's story and experience in residential schools titled *A Mother's Voice*. Holly challenged those of us there to consider not just learning about Indigenous people but to consider "How can we learn from Indigenous people?" I am realizing how important this is for me to engage in the work we are doing with our students around decolonizing our practice and in interrupting the dominant narrative and experience.

Josh

Descending from Nose Hill, students in front of me and the big, bright Alberta sky beyond I couldn't help but feel a sense of optimism. Student's spirits were high, conversations revealed possibility thinking, a genuine enthusiasm about the prospects of Indigenous land based learning. We had harvested Rose Hips to make tea, learned the names of plants, investigated animal stories, and engaged in forest play led by my four young children. Sharing Métis cultural ways of knowing with the next generation of teachers feels like a reclaiming, I find hope in moments like this. The next day in class students shared reflections on their experience. Some enthusiasm persisted yet much focus shifted to perceived barriers: weather, bussing, curriculum, student ability. I have come to realize that alongside Indigenizing experiences students need to learn to recognize and reflect on the perspectives they hold and help them interrogate the ways in which their experiences in the education system have perpetuated a monopoly of Eurocentric

knowledge. Without this decolonizing work, attempts at including Indigenous knowledges can become manifestations of tokenism. Without interrogating the singular western gaze, Indigenous land based learning at Nose Hill is seen as little more than an add on, a field trip.

West-Where am I going?

Kathryn

My identity is a continuously shifting evolution that depends on place, relationships, responsibilities, and knowledge sharing. My Elders are Nitsitapi, Nehiyawak, Métis, Denésuline, and Tsuut'ina. My Blackfoot name, Natooyiksistakyaki, was gifted to me and guides my responsibilities toward my relations. In recent conversations with Elders from Tsuut'ina, the Blackfoot Confederacy, and Onion Lake I asked for guidance in my role in Reconciliation. Each replied that they wanted educators to play a role in amplifying the truth of what has and continues to happen in First Nations communities. These conversations provoked further reflection and consideration on my engagement with all my relations and how I enact decolonizing knowledge and responsibilities in all aspects of my life. I have been taught that I am Nitsitapi, I am grounded in my communities and with that comes a sense of pride and a sense of answerability to disrupt our cultural memory.

Crystal

I am beginning to notice that in my learning I have been missing the Matriarchal voice. While her voice has always been, I know that with the loss of my grandmother many stories and traditions were lost. Thankfully, I have been able to revive some of the family practices of medicine gathering, berry picking, and beading. These gifts seem to be hidden when I was younger. More like taken for granted and just thought of as always there. I am now doing the work to build relationships with Métis Elders, Knowledge Keepers, with ceremony, and to bring that learning into our teaching and classrooms.

Oster and Lizee (2021) bring Métis women's stories to life with their new book. It offers Kookum stories of the past and how things were when they were growing up. It is a gift to learn from and be reminded of traditions and memories in their work. It makes me miss my Grandma! While I wish I had learned to bead with my Grandmother, her traditional practices of New Years Day celebrations with Boulet Soup have been revived. I hope that after the pandemic eases, I can grow that celebration as she did. I am listening to stories when possible and reading stories as I miss that time with the elders of our family.

I wonder how I can grow that hospitality into my classroom, my work, and our community?

Arch

The theories mentioned above, are a number of theoretical frameworks that have assisted me moving forward to understand better identity and culture. One of these identities is a teacher educator. My wonderment is about this: in what ways might an Indigenous framework around epistemology, ontology, and axiology continue to add to my construction of identity in which wisdom keepers and elders provide wisdom and direction to my teaching identity? hooks (2010) says that engaged pedagogy begins with the assumption that we learn best when there is an interactive relationship between student and teacher. It seems to me that this discovery happens only if teachers are willing to engage students beyond a surface level. Engaging in Indigenous ways of knowing in my own teaching has so far opened up a number of spaces and I would like to see where this goes and how this is helpful to me and my students.

Sherry

Entering the space of Advanced Education, I carried with me the stories of teaching and the excitement of possibility in the growth of a School of Education, including the work of adding several faculty members, increasing enrolment, and shaping a scope and sequence that meaningfully incorporated the Teaching Quality Standard (Alberta Education, 2020) into its core

content. Heeding the Calls to Action, the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and histories in the Teacher Quality Standard opened up another path that I had not expected to take- the unraveling of a story that I thought I knew about Indigenous people and my own understandings and beliefs. My initiation into this work occurred at the annual faculty retreat and our participation in a Blanket Exercise, led by two members of Arts and Science faculty. The experience shook me to my core, and I was left in disbelief of what I did not know about the history of Indigenous people in Canada. All at once, my emotions overwhelmed me, and I could not catch my breath. Tears began to flow, and I nervously wiped them away; not feeling comfortable in this room of new colleagues, strangers to me. I watched and listened to my colleagues in the room, wondering how others were impacted by the experience. For some, it elicited visceral reactions, for others, they were unmoved. There was a short debrief in the form of a sharing circle and then, we moved on to the next activity like nothing had happened. Driving home, I called a friend and began to unpack with her what had occurred. She wondered if an Elder had led the circle? No. Something was shifting in the storyline that I thought I knew.

Christy

Working collaboratively with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous faculty has been helpful for me in continuing in this work has furthered my thinking about how I might decolonize my practice. Teaching two courses with a colleague, Josh, contributed to a deeper understanding around Indigenizing our course. We engaged in dialogue and reflection around creating an ethical space and how we might model decolonizing teaching practice to the pre-service teachers we were working with. Engaging in these kinds of discussions with colleagues and pre-service teachers has been challenging and has required me to be vulnerable but I recognize the necessity of this work in imagining a better future for everyone. We drew on Louie et al. (2017) article which informed our pedagogical decisions (e.g., storytelling, negotiating,

democratizing). This led to us co-authoring an article on our experiences in seeking to decolonize our teaching practices in this course and to share our learning journey with others. This was a humbling experience as I still do not feel equipped to even write about this but am willing to put it out there with the hope that it will be helpful to others who are in a similar journey.

Josh

Yet, confronting deeply seated biases and digging at the roots of Eurocentric dominance and white supremacy is tricky work. It can evoke disbelief, disengagement, anger, and sadness. It can result in student teachers becoming unable to get started for fear of doing the wrong thing. I am working towards creating a community that supports one another to attend to the emotional nature of this work and inspires reflexive action. I'm working on creating a safe space of trust. I am working on creating a decentralized classroom power dynamic. I am wrestling with the tensions of doing this work within university strictures and structures dominated by Eurocentric ways of being. I am working on recognizing and disrupting ways that my own thinking and practices are shaped by colonization.

North-What are my responsibilities?

Kathryn

Maracle (2015) states that "stories govern us" (p. 35), reminding me that we each embody our stories, our communities, and our histories. I feel a response-ability (Haraway, 2016) to the stories I carry. I am committed to sharing first-person stories to facilitate relationships and (re)storying education, curriculum, and identity formation. These threads are entwined with my reflections on where I have been, where I am going, and what rights and responsibilities I have to my communities and myself. In particular, I have been reflecting on and thinking forward on preservice teacher placements in First Nations community schools and the

importance of being in relation with the people, the language, and the knowledge of each place. The early formation of Ambrose's field experience partnership with two local First Nations was done through relationship building, storying, and meetings with the Band Council and Educational Authority, as well as to the schools. This has evolved to include community-led teachings that facilitate preservice teacher sense-making and draw their awareness to the importance of reflecting on who they are in that space in a critical way. I feel particularly responsible to frame their visits through a critically reflective lens of their own situatedness and relationship with the school community, teachers, students, and curriculum. I am troubled by the reproduction of colonizing practices in First Nations schools when preservice teachers go to schools to observe them, especially if they leave that experience without sensemaking the local traditions, curriculum, practices, and theories of learning.

Crystal

How I move forward is up to me. I believe that right relations, community participation, and social activism are my responsibilities. Not only to my profession which I view as a vocation, but to Our People. My grandmother worked tirelessly to support families that were going to be separated by family services. She was a case worker that facilitated detox care of Indigenous parents dealing with alcohol use disorder. While I was fortunate to not experience this as a child, it was because of my Grandmother and parents and the choices they were able to make. Many challenges can impact a child's life as they grow up. Who knew that while my parents and grandparents worked to shelter me from these things, I would grow up to be a teacher! Teachers are the frontline in a school to support students and work with families.

I had no idea when I graduated university with my teaching degree that one day I would be supporting students in the ways that we are called to do. I had no idea that one day we would work collaboratively to discuss how we might consider decolonization and the Calls to Action

from the TRCC. One of the ways I enact my responsibility to my ancestors is to provide mentorship and support to students who are exploring their Métis and Indigenous ancestry in adulthood. By connecting with the Métis community and inviting Knowledge Keepers to share our ways with our preservice teachers, I can create new learning opportunities and reach future generations of students. It is my hope that the racism my sister and I experienced as students will be disrupted and replaced with respect. I again, am grateful for this opportunity. We are not there yet. There is still work to be done. I am grateful to be here now, doing this work with these colleagues for the betterment of our profession.

Arch

Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall states that Two-Eyed Seeing is, "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett et al., 2012, p. 335). In using both eyes, I need to locate myself, and my students need to locate themselves in their own stories of identification in the classroom because this helps with the issues and history of self-identification. According to Anuik (2020), "Self-identification has an impact on teachers' practices, and understanding how people identify can help teachers to adapt learning environments to meet their needs" (p. 107). If one aspect of an Indigenous ways of knowing is about relationality, of building relationships of trust with my students, it requires of me to be vulnerable with my stories of the ways that I self-identify and the manner in which negative stereotypes or misinterpretations have been traumatizing to my self-identity. So, in voicing my stories of self-identity, I am hoping to create spaces for my students to accurately represent who they thought they were and will become, in order that we can have helpful conversations. This is risky business and messy, but honest.

How might I move this further with self- identification? Going back to Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's concept of Two-Eyed Seeing has been a helpful way to reflect on my own teaching practices and course design. I wonder at times, if I need simultaneously a third-eye that has an Asian twist as well.

Sherry

There is an institutional story that continues to unfold alongside my own narrative and that of the faculty. I can only continue to be a voice through actions of reconciliation. The opportunity to learn alongside Elders and members of the community through invitation and informal gathering, continued activities with students, led by Indigenous people, land-based learning and assessments that reflected their own responsibilities in this work. Furthermore, I can step out as a leader for the rest of the University by taking on a greater responsibility that will lead to an authentic relationship with Indigenous communities as they assist us in the co-creation of a new story. I believe that I was called to this leadership role for many reasons and one of the most important was the opportunity for the work of decolonization to live authentically at Ambrose University as we continue to find our voices in the narrative that is still unfolding. I am grateful for the support of faculty who walk alongside me. This is difficult work but I choose, with humility and grace, to dig at my own roots so that something new can grow and thrive.

Christy

While I feel a sense of deep responsibility to decolonize my own teaching practice, I wrestle with my own readiness to lead this work in our teacher education program as a new faculty member. At the same time, I am compelled to move forward. I am hopeful about what is coming out of this work, as we are seeing our students incorporating Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing into their teaching and learning designs. I am very humbled by my Indigenous colleagues and their generosity in leading in this work and whose work with faculty and our

students has guided us to learn more about how we might braid together the strengths of Indigenous and Western knowledge. All these experiences have shifted my thinking about not just including Indigenous knowledge but also drawing on Indigenous ways of knowing as pedagogical possibilities. I am only at the beginning of this journey but am hopeful that reimagining a better world and thinking of other pedagogical possibilities will make a way for all to flourish. I am so grateful for not being alone on this journey and am thankful for my colleagues and the opportunity to build relationships with others engaged in this work.

Josh

I have come to think of my role as creating the conditions for students, colleagues, and myself to listen to and share stories about who we are in relation to one another. I am noticing that in these conditions we come to tell new stories, new stories about Canada, about Indigenous People, about the Land, about teaching, about learning, about children, new stories about ourselves. I think of this as a collective (re)storying (Crawford et al., 2022). I reflect often on what responsibilities I hold in creating space for this deeply personal and relational storywork. How can I do this work in good ways? Yesterday in response to that question a Tsuu T'ina Elder told me “I can tell by how you are asking that question that you already know what to do, my role” he said, “is just to help you remember”. Perhaps in asking these questions of ourselves, listening intently to the answers of others, and sitting together to think deeply about our responsibilities we are engaging in a collective remembering.

Conclusion

This work is in its beginning stages; we know that our efforts to create an ethical space to include Indigenous Perspectives in our faculty need to be ongoing and we recognize that we must precipitate substantive and transformative change. Reflecting on our journey we believe

that Métissage provides us with a process to lead this work moving forward. We feel that the collaborative process of reflecting on, storying, listening, and acting has supported us to become more aware of and be more attentive to our positionalities and responsibilities in this work as individuals and collectively. Furthermore, this process has supported us to engage in new ways of working, new ways of being in relation to each other and our work. We believe that in engaging in new ways of being we are becoming something new, and through this we are engaging in a process of transformation of our faculty and of ourselves. Rosile et al. (2018) put forward qualities of leadership within an Indigenous world view as collectivist, relational, dynamic, and heterarchic. We believe that these qualities were present in our journey and we aspire to explore how we can further enact these qualities in learning, teaching, scholarship, and research in our faculty. We close in humble gratitude for one another and for this journey and to you for allowing us to share it with you.

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Learning and Leading Through COVID-19: Surprising Findings from a Year of Disrupted Field Experience

Theodora Kapoyannis, Astrid Kendrick, & Patricia Danyluk

Abstract

When the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the closure of Kindergarten-Grade 12 schools in Alberta, the authors, who are the Directors of Field Experience, at this local university saw this disruption as both a challenge and an opportunity (Danyluk, 2022). Over 400 preservice teachers were scheduled to begin their in-school practicum two days after the announcement of school closures. While most Bachelor of Education programs in Canada halted or postponed their field experience programs, the authors decided to move forward with an online practicum course. This chapter describes how we used collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to restructure field experience in response to the pandemic and the impact it had on student and field instructor learning. A community of practice was initiated by the Directors of Field Experience to support the instructors in the implementation of the online course and to come together as a community of learners in support of one another during this complex time. Survey and anecdotal data will be shared to illuminate the positive influence the pivot to the online field course had on students and instructors as well as the challenges we encountered as we navigated these uncharted waters as educational leaders.

***Keywords*:** leadership, preservice teachers, online learning, practicum, pandemic

Introduction

The closure of Kindergarten–Grade 12 schools in response to the emergence of the novel coronavirus in 2020, halting face-to-face (F-2-F) instruction, was keenly felt in Canadian Bachelor of Education (BEd) experiential, practicum-based courses, as they rely on field experiences to prepare preservice teachers for their professional work in classrooms (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). In March 2020, many teacher education programs were able to shift to online practica, whereas others decided to wait until schools reopened to continue in a traditional manner (Morin & Peters, 2022; Morrison et al., 2022). Depending on the number of weeks of practicum already completed, the decision to postpone was potentially risky for preservice teachers because they might not have had enough practicum weeks to receive certification in their jurisdiction, thereby jeopardizing their ability to acquire a teaching position the following school year.

As members of the leadership team responsible for developing the pandemic response in our teacher education program, and we quickly realized we would need to find alternatives to a traditional practicum (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). Leadership through times of crisis and uncertainty requires a strong commitment to collaboration and humility that places the needs of students above individual interests. The purpose of this book chapter is to discuss how we used collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to respond quickly and thoughtfully to a real crisis in teacher education through the restructuring of field experience to ensure that preservice teachers' educational progress would not be negatively impacted by the pandemic measures while ensuring that they were adequately prepared to graduate and teach in turbulent and uncertain K–12 classrooms.

The Challenge and the Opportunity: Pivoting in March 2020

In March 2020, our large, urban education faculty in Alberta had over 400 final-year preservice teachers already in schools completing their last field experience course and over 400 first-year preservice teachers about to begin their second practicum course (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). In our university program, we have four field experience courses that, cumulatively, meet the provincially mandated practical instructional hours for teacher certification. Fortunately, because of the program structure, our final-year students had completed enough mandated hours to graduate, so when the local school districts told us that our students were no longer able to work with their partner teachers, these preservice teachers were still able to be fully certified.

Our first-year students, however, had completed only a short, two-week observation in schools during the fall 2019 school term, and they faced the real possibility that they might not graduate on time if school closures were extended. Some BEd programs in Canada halted or postponed their field experience programs assuming that the school closures would be temporary and that schools would reopen to preservice teachers after the initially announced 2-week closures (Morrison et al., 2022). Our leadership team decided to design an online practicum course to ensure that our preservice teachers completed their mandatory course requirements rather than waiting to see what the provincial government decided about F-2-F instruction. This decision turned out to be crucial, as the schools in Alberta remained online until the end of June, 2020, and the school districts vehemently stated that preservice teachers would not be included in their online teaching that term. Had we not created an online field experience course, our first-year education students would have had a full year delay to their practicum courses.

The resulting four-week “pandemic practicum” (Burns et al., 2020) was thoughtfully designed with an experiential focus, prioritizing differentiation, incorporating Indigenous

perspectives, and building awareness of wellness, areas, and topics that previous preservice teachers had described as challenging during their F-2-F practica (Danyluk et al., 2021). Adding to the complexity of the course implementation was that 26 field experience instructors had already accepted sessional contracts to teach the F-2-F field experience course, and their levels of knowledge about and experience with the theories and practices used for effective online pedagogy varied widely (Danyluk, 2022). As we developed the online practicum course, we realized that in addition to creating a course, we needed to act as instructional leaders (Robinson, 2011) for the field instructors to ensure a successful implementation of the course. We initiated a community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) to support the instructors to come together as a community of learners to support one another and our preservice teachers during that complex time.

In this chapter, we examine the leadership decisions that were made using findings from a two-year study framed using Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) collaborative professionalism for educational leaders. Drawing from data collected through student surveys and interviews as well as discussions with students in our job roles, we describe how we drew upon the findings to make programmatic changes and leadership decisions as preservice teachers returned to in-person practica the following year. We also elaborate on one of the surprising findings: a large gap in preservice teacher training with regard to digital instruction. In an earlier article, we defined digital instructional literacy as having the motivation, confidence, and competence to instruct students in a blended or online environment (Burns et al., 2020). Although preservice and in-service teachers are largely using technology as tools to instruct their in-person courses, little training is provided into how to design and deliver online instruction that promote K–12 student success. This gap inspired inquiry into the concept of digital instructional literacy, preservice teacher experiences

within the online practicum, and their transition to in-person placements for their third and final practicum.

Literature Review

Leadership Practicum Decisions at Canadian Universities

The field experience practicum is the most valued experiential aspect of most teacher education programs and something preservice teachers describe as the most important part of their preservice program (Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2007; Flores, 2016; Kitchen & Petrarca, 2016; White & Forgasz, 2016) that they look forward to with great anticipation. Although virtual or online practica in the United States has received some attention, up until the pandemic there had been very little research that focused on Canadian experiences (Compton et al., 2010; Kennedy & Archambault, 2011). In their examination of virtual field experiences for in-service teachers, Jackson and Jones (2019) found that authenticity and a sense of community were two components essential to positive perceptions of a virtual field experience. A sense of community in the course was enhanced by peer feedback and group problem-solving was present when students reflected on their facilitation and had time to make improvements (Jackson & Jones, 2019).

When schools across Canada closed in March 2020, education programs scrambled to find alternatives for the F-2-F practicum. In designing alternative practica, all practicum leaders were facing the same problem: How do you provide students with practice teaching experiences in the absence of K–12 students and the usual school environment? In the period following lockdowns and school closures, most programs were forced to implement emergency remote teaching (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). During this intense work period, faculty redesigned courses and learned how to teach online. Both students and faculty found themselves reorganizing domestic

spaces and routines in order to work from home (Kidd & Murray, 2020). Learning from home brought new concerns including equity issues around access to technology and intrusion into private spaces (Kidd & Murray, 2020), which for some students necessitated logging in from their bedrooms.

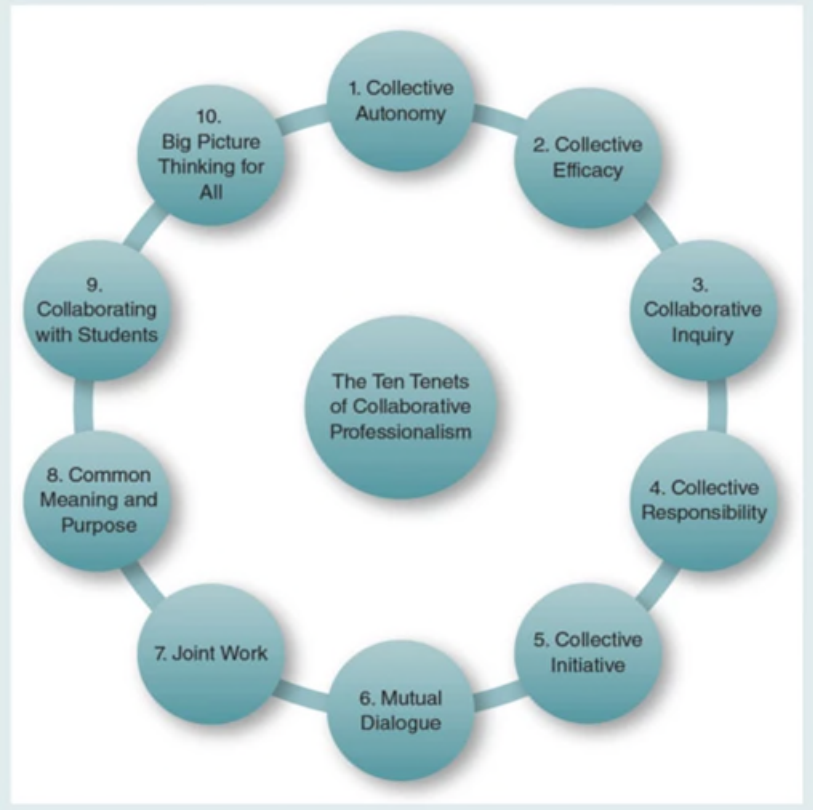
In designing alternatives to the traditional in-school practicum, BEd programs across Canada had to take into consideration the impact of alternative practica design on teaching certification in their province. When school closures began, Western University already had self-directed experiential learning options through its Alternative Field Experience (AFE; Ott et al., 2022). The AFE program permits preservice teachers to propose learning opportunities that can range from literacy coaching online to developing curriculum for a community organization. St. Mary's University in Calgary developed a series of online modules for its preservice teachers focused on meeting competency standards. Each module was designed using case studies incorporating reflection and reflexivity to replicate in-school experiences (Hill et al., 2022). Similarly, the University of Alberta created an Introduction to Field Experience course that began in March 2020 (Baril et al., 2022). The University of Manitoba made the decision to delay its practicum until November with hope that students would be back in schools (Morin & Peters, 2022). In the interim, it provided online courses focusing on preparation for the practicum and health and wellness. Ontario Tech found that once schools had reopened, many mentor teachers were willing to continue to host practicum students in their class; however, others were not comfortable in doing so (Morrison et al., 2022). For those students, they created several alternatives including spring/summer practica and working in the virtual Maker Lab, where preservice teachers provided workshops for in-service teachers and K–12 students.

From Emergency Design to Digital Instructional Literacy Through Collaborative Professionalism

Our leadership response can be framed according to the 10 tenets of collaborative professionalism (see Figure 1). Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) defined this model of working together as follows:

> Collaborative professionalism is about how teachers and other educators transform teaching and learning together who work with all students to develop fulfilling lives of meaning, purpose, and success. It is organized in an evidence-informed, but not data-driven, way through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry. (p. 4)

Figure 1
Collaborative Professionalism



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Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) suggested that to understand the influence of using collaborative professionalism, a design analysis should include attention to the four B's: before, betwixt, beyond, and beside (p. 121). To demonstrate how collaborative professionalism can look in practice, the remainder of this chapter presents how, as a leadership team, we not only responded to the immediate crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic but also used what was learned through a two-year research project to transform field experience in one university program.

Before: The Situation Before the Collaboration

Before refers to understanding the nature of the situation before the collaboration (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Prior to the discovery of the novel coronavirus in Alberta, we mainly worked independently of one another. Patricia Danyluk was completing her term as the community-based field experience director and preparing for a year's research leave. Astrid Kendrick was a sessional instructor who had just been hired to transition into the field director role. Theodora Kapoyannis was entering her second year as the on-campus field experience director. Because the two pathways (community-based and on-campus) ran concurrently, but had different students, timelines, and priorities, interactions between us were largely transactional, with minimal collaboration except on areas of programmatic overlap.

Therefore, our journey to collaborative professionalism has a beginning date: March 13, 2020, as this date marked the day that we received notice that our preservice teachers may not be able to begin their field experience as planned the following Monday. We learned that all schools in Alberta were being directed by the provincial government to go online for at least two weeks and F-2-F practicum placements were subsequently cancelled by all school districts (Burns et al., 2020). Additionally, school districts made it clear that in-service teachers would not be mentoring preservice teachers as the former were also learning how to teach in digital environments.

Before the emergency remote design of the pandemic practicum, our faculty of education did not have, and had not even considered offering, any online practicum placements. All student practicum placements were F-2-F, and minimal attention was paid to teaching and learning through digital tools in any comprehensive manner. Across Canada, online teaching and learning were largely driven by just-in-time professional learning, with individual instructors being responsible for learning and integrating digital technologies into their classes (Hodges et al., 2020). Teacher education programs in Canada reevaluated and re-envisioned their programs to focus on key ideas and how to best communicate them in the online environment (Fitzgerald et al., 2022).

Being cognizant that one of the most consistent concerns expressed by online educators was the difficulty of establishing a sense of community in an online environment (Goedegebuure & Meek, 2021; Wilkens et al., 2014), we designed the four-week pandemic practicum to balance content delivery through a combination of daily synchronous classes through Zoom with multimodal asynchronous content including written articles, podcasts, webinars, and social media posts (Burns et al., 2020; Danyluk, 2022). Further, we knew that preservice teachers and faculty alike were experiencing high levels of uncertainty and stress, so the first week of the course focused on evidence-based information to promote workplace and educator wellness. Knowing that a core element of F-2-F field experience was creating, reflecting on, and receiving feedback about lesson plans, we focused the second week on lesson planning, small group instruction, and peer feedback. To align with one of the requirements of Alberta Education's (2020) *Teaching Quality Standard* and our commitment to reconciliation and Indigenization, the third week of the course focused on Indigenous perspectives and resources, and preservice teachers were tasked with integrating Indigenous knowledge into their lesson design. This part of the course introduced a mandatory Indigenous education course all students would take in their final year of the program.

In the final week of the course, preservice teachers were tasked with exploring ways to incorporate differentiated instruction into their lesson plans and delivery.

As we developed and implemented the pandemic practicum and interacted with the instructors, school partners, and preservice teachers, we realized that we had an ideal opportunity to understand the longer-term influence of introducing online instruction and well-being on preservice teachers through field experience. Initially, we designed a mixed methods study in April of 2020 to investigate the influence of the pandemic practicum on the preservice teachers' instructional practices and perceptions of online learning. Upon analyzing the qualitative and quantitative data from this survey (Danyluk et al., 2021), we realized that a larger mixed methods research project was needed to understand the gaps created during the pandemic period of March 2020–January 2022 for preservice teachers' emerging teaching practice and to explore the mental and emotional influence of learning to teach through the pandemic on preservice teachers.

Methodology

Following Creswell's (2012) suggestions for mixed methods research, we used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods in our study to address our research questions and inform our next steps within the field experience program as we responded to the COVID-19 challenges posed to online and F-2-F practicum courses. Using mixed methods for this study enabled us to gain a wider scope of insights (American Psychological Association, 2020) into the experiences of students involved in online teaching and learning during COVID-19. As is common in mixed methods with an explanatory sequential design, we had three phases of data collection and analysis that consisted of two quantitative surveys to find out the scope of our research problem, followed by qualitative interviews that provided us with the nuanced experiences of participants who encountered the research problem (Ivankova et al., 2006). We

administered two separate online surveys over two school years, with follow-up qualitative individual interviews, to investigate the students' perceptions and experiences during the online practicum as well as to gain more insight into the central phenomenon of digital instructional literacy. The purpose of this study was to inquire into the following research questions:

1. In what ways did the pandemic practicum online field experience course impact preservice teachers' practice during their final two field courses (Field Experience III and Field Experience IV)?
2. How did the students experience the transition from F-2-F to online learning during Field Experience III and Field Experience IV due to COVID-19?
3. What do preservice teachers perceive as the essential digital instructional literacy competencies needed in order to teach K–12 students online?

Data analysis was completed during each phase of this research study, and the findings from each phase informed the questions and actions taken in the next phase. A combination of descriptive statistics, namely, simple percentages of responses (Trochim, 2022), and thematic analysis was used to summarize the data of the open-ended responses from the two surveys. Information gathered from the Phase 1 survey informed the Phase 2 survey, and those data in turn provided a basis for the individual interview questions and future programmatic decisions. The data were triangulated through examination of surveys, interviews, and community of practice discussions.

Phase 1 of this study ran from April 2020 to September 2020, immediately following the completion of the pandemic practicum. We collected quantitative and qualitative data through an online, Likert-style survey consisting of 16 questions related to the experiences of the preservice teachers with completing their field experience course online (see Appendix A). To recruit

participants, we sent a direct email containing an anonymous survey link from the field experience office to students who had completed the pandemic practicum. This survey inquired into the experiences of the preservice teachers during the online practicum, solicited their perceptions of online teaching and learning, and helped to inform future design decisions by the leadership team as students moved back to F-2-F experiences for their third practicum. The Phase 1 survey was completed by 228 of 435 preservice teachers enrolled in the pandemic practicum, representing a 52% response rate.

In the second phase, a quantitative survey consisting of 12 Likert-style and open-ended questions was distributed by the field experience office between January 14 and February 25, 2021, after the preservice teachers had received their final credit for Field Experience III, which ran from September 2020 to December 2021. The second set of survey questions was designed to explore the extent to which the preservice teachers had used the skills and competencies gained in the online Field Experience II course. The survey (see Appendix B) also asked questions related to the preservice teachers' experiences with moving from F-2-F to online learning environments during Field Experience III and provided a framework for a thematic analysis related to the research questions. This survey was completed by 179 of the target population of 435 preservice teachers, representing a response rate of 41%.

The third phase of the study consisted of semistructured, qualitative interviews with 10 preservice teachers who had participated in the pandemic practicum, completed Field Experience III between September and December 2020, and volunteered to be interviewed about their experiences. The interview questions (see Appendix C) were distributed to all 435 preservice teachers in their final year of their Bachelor of Education program (Winter, 2021). We transcribed the interview data using Trint software (https://trint.com/) and coded them using constant

comparison thematic analysis (Merriam, 2009). The interviews provided further insight into the experiences of the students during their Field Experience III practicum to elaborate on the digital instructional literacy competencies required to instruct K–12 students in blended or online environments, the challenges students faced as they transitioned from F-2-F to online teaching, and the impact that transition had on their occupational well-being.

Phase 1: Student Perceptions and Leadership Implications

Upon analysis, several key findings emerged from the Phase 1 survey. First, the survey respondents indicated that in response to the question, "What was your initial response to discovering that Field II was transformed into an online course," a majority indicated displeasure, with 27.4% selecting *unhappy* and 36.3% selecting *very unhappy*, representing 63.7% of total responses. By the end of the course, 81% of the respondents indicated that their perceptions on online teaching had shifted towards being more positive (Danyluk et al., 2021; Danyluk, 2022). Yet, despite a shift to a more positive view, our analysis of the qualitative, open-ended responses found a clear undertone of anger, with many respondents indicating they did not understand (a) why their practicum had been moved online and (b) why they could not work with their partner teachers and students online. An illustrative response of this anger was expressed by a survey respondent who noted, "[Field experience] needs to be in a classroom, period. You can't produce competent teachers in practicums online".

From the results of the survey, we learned that preservice teachers in the online course appreciated learning how to teach online and enjoyed receiving feedback from peers. The survey also indicated that preservice teachers wished they had been given more lesson planning assignments that more closely replicated the real classroom where they would be designing lessons every day. As field experience directors, we were required to develop an online practicum

alternative, one that included no option for interacting with Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, under a very short timeline. In response to the question, “Do you think this course prepared you for your future in teaching?”, 125 respondents (55%) referred to the lack of interaction with children and youth as being a limiting factor for the usefulness of the pandemic practicum. As a result, we determined that all future course practicum course designs, regardless of whether they were F-2-F or online, had to include opportunities for the preservice teachers to engage directly with K–12 students and partner teachers.

Betwixt: Alongside the Collaboration

In an examination of the impacts of COVID-19 on work placements of postsecondary students in Canada, Wall (2020) found that 40% of education students had their placement canceled or delayed due to the pandemic. A survey by Environics Institute for Survey Research et al. (2021) reported that the pandemic had the greatest impact on Canadians aged 18–24. One in three students in this age group changed their plans for postsecondary education, with one in four postponing or stopping postsecondary studies. Further, the pandemic negatively impacted mental health among youth, with women in this age group reporting the greatest decline in their mental health (Environics Institute for Survey Research et al., 2021).

To address the ongoing disruptions to field experience due to the pandemic, we relied on two other tenets of collaborative professionalism, collective autonomy and joint work, to ensure that we could be responsive to the needs of the preservice teachers (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018). Collective autonomy refers to reducing the amount of management from a top-down authority while increasing team interdependence. Several key managerial elements were quickly set in place as we began our field experience redesign. First, we had strong relational trust (Robinson, 2011) with our direct supervisor, the associate dean, who relied on our collective

expertise to choose learning objectives, design the 4-week course, train the field instructors, select authentic assessments of learning, and then proceed with using the knowledge we had gained from developing the pandemic practicum to ensure a useful and responsive field experience program in subsequent terms. Rather than delegating responsibilities and working apart, we worked together as a team to ensure that our knowledge was applied interdependently to the course and programmatic design.

Further, our joint work depended on a shared responsibility to first design a field experience course that would be acceptable for certification while adhering to public health orders (Burns et al., 2020) and then to ensure that our preservice teachers could continue in their program with the needed supports in the following field experience courses. Aligning to these expectations and responsibilities required constant and open dialogue—more than simply working together to create one course, we were required to think through and design for the longer-term consequences to our preservice teachers' professional growth knowing they had completed an online practicum that did not involve children or youth. Further, we needed to align our work with the pandemic practicum and subsequent field experience instructors, who needed to be able to support and assess the preservice teachers who had an atypical Field Experience II course. As a result, we commenced Phase 2 of our study in September 2020 to understand the experiences of the preservice teachers who completed the emergency online practicum through their next F-2-F field experience and to explore the professional needs of the field instructors who would guide them through a highly disrupted and uncertain Field Experience III and IV.

Phase 2: Uncertainty in the Field and Leadership Implications

In August and September of 2020, the provincial government and school districts enacted heightened public COVID-19 health measures, including mandatory isolation periods, masking,

and social distancing requirements. As a leadership team, we were expected to prepare our field instructors and preservice teachers to comply with the districts' public health measures, even as these measures changed rapidly, particularly in late October 2020, which was the beginning of a new wave of COVID-19 infections. Once again, we were faced with a rapidly changing landscape within practicum experience that needed to be addressed quickly.

From November to December 2020, the preservice teachers were expected to complete their third practicum (Field Experience III) within their education program. Normally, the objective of this practicum is to teach 50%–75% of their partner teacher's instructional load by the end of the 6 weeks. It is the preservice teachers' first real immersion into nearly full-time classroom teaching.

As previously noted, Phase 1 survey analysis indicated that the preservice teachers who had completed the pandemic practicum were nervous about entering their third practicum having lacked an opportunity to work directly with K–12 students. Many expressed concerns about the teaching expectations that were required and were worried about their physical health and capacity to respond effectively in the school environment. Anecdotally, they also expressed concerns about making sudden transitions from F-2-F to online teaching due to students and teachers needing to isolate as close contacts or from testing positive for COVID-19.

Listening to student voice is a fundamental aspect of collaborative professionalism, so we needed to ensure that we heard from as many students as possible to make responsive decisions. Surveys provide data from a single point in time, so we also sought input from students through conversations with them as directors, as a leadership collective cannot claim to hear student voice once and for all (Cook-Sather, 2006). Although anecdotal and informal, these discussions provided us with ongoing information about student experiences. These anecdotes combined with analysis

of the survey data prompted the leadership team to make preemptive modifications to the Field Experience III course outline in early October 2020, and to extend the community of practice with the field instructors to ensure that the preservice teachers and their instructors felt supported throughout the practicum. These modifications provided students with more time to observe in their classrooms, cultivate relationships with their students and partner teachers, and prepare for their lesson planning and delivery expectations.

Because the concerns about increased stress and distress were mainly anecdotal, we designed the Phase 2 survey to include questions about the sources of stress for preservice teachers and how they currently dealt with stress and distress at the workplace. Analysis of the Phase 2 survey data indicated a high level of uncertainty and stress that preservice teachers were feeling with minimal strategies on how to support their own occupational well-being. In response to the question, "To what degree did you feel stressed during Field Experience III?", 22.5% of respondents selected *far* above *average* and 36.2% selected *moderately above average*, representing 58.7% of the 139 respondents who completed this question. Further, in response to the question, "What do you do to cope with stress?", 35 of the 124 open-ended responses, or 28%, indicated that the respondents had no self-care strategies in place to deal with stress. Of the remaining responses, all the respondents chose self-directed or individual strategies, such as walking a dog or talking to a friend, that could not be used during the workday to relieve stress.

It also became clear that as educational leaders, we needed to expand our joint work by being flexible and adaptive in working with our school partners as we navigated the implications of COVID-19. With entire classes moving online and high staff absenteeism due to COVID-19 infection or isolation measures, we had to be flexible and open to doing things differently than what had worked in the past for field experience. This flexibility included online or hybrid teaching

plans if preservice teachers were absent from their practica, or online instruction when their classes moved online due to COVID-19. Field instructors, for the first time in our institutional history, observed their student teachers through online observations and provided feedback through Zoom or phone calls rather than F-2-F conferences. The leadership team continued to have consistent check-ins with the field instructors through our community of practice meetings to ensure they were feeling supported by providing space to share stories, empathize, and collaborate as we progressed through the practicum.

Beyond: What Comes Next?

To fully understand the impact of the online field experience course, we had to collaborate with students (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), giving them voice to our next instructional decisions through their responses to the April and December 2020 surveys. A key finding from both Phase 1 and Phase 2 was that students were struggling with workplace-related stressors that emerged during pandemic teaching. As a result, we began Phase 3 of our research study, which focused on analyzing the interviews with participants who had been students throughout the entire research period, to understand the influence of pandemic and online teaching on their occupational well-being and emerging pedagogic practice.

This third phase, beginning in January 2021, captured the final arc related to the longer-term consequences of the pandemic practicum. Our collaborative professionalism shifted to what Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) labelled as "big picture thinking for all" (p. 118). How could we use what we had learned to build the digital instructional literacy (Danyluk et al., 2021) to ensure that preservice teachers would be adequately prepared for schools that relied more heavily on online instruction? How could we mitigate the lasting mental and emotional effects of a three-year pandemic?

Phase 3: Reflection and Leadership Implications

The analysis of the interview data revealed insight into the impact of the online field course and the many unexpected changes to instruction experienced throughout online and F-2-F instruction from the perspective of preservice teachers who completed their degree program during the tumultuous COVID-19 pandemic period. As noted, the interview participants were recruited through opportunistic sampling (Creswell, 2012) and were interviewed and recorded with a research assistant via the Zoom platform. The research assistant anonymized and transcribed the interview data using the online platform Trint and provided the transcripts to us, the three researchers, who individually and manually analyzed the data.

Data were analyzed using constant comparison thematic analysis (Creswell, 2012). We individually coded four random interview transcripts sent to us from our research assistant, and then met to determine whether we had found common codes in our initial analysis. After agreeing on several key themes, each of us independently coded the remaining six interviews and met again to determine if our codes held up through the remaining interviews. We determined that the interview data revealed four common themes as the participants reflected on their experiences with their disrupted field experience:

1. In retrospect, the participants were generally positive about their online instructional field experiences and appreciated that their degree progress had not been impeded by the pandemic.
2. Participants felt that online instruction was more difficult than they had expected prior to the pandemic and expressed a greater appreciation for online instructors.
3. Participants provided examples of specific content and online tools that they believed were necessary to build the online instructional literacy of preservice teachers to

ensure that online instruction was well taught within a post-secondary education program.

4. Participants experienced extremely high levels of stress throughout their practicum experiences and used limited measures to reduce this stress. They expressed an emerging appreciation that mental and emotional well-being were an explicit priority within their education program.

The information provided by the participants in Phase 3 has been important to ensuring that the lessons learned through the pandemic practicum and disruption of field experience are carefully embedded into preservice teacher education as we move out of the acute phase of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the research study itself, we needed to use the data we collected to react and respond quickly by changing instructional form, norms, and personnel capacity. As we reflect on this work, now is the time to look at how this information can inform our programming.

One significant outcome of this study, and our learning about the limited amount of preparation that preservice teachers have to learn the fundamentals of online instruction, has been the introduction of online practicum placements as one option for our Field Experience II students. Online schools and classrooms have been a part of the educational landscape for many years (Kentnor, 2015). Bachelor of Education programs have shied away from including online practicum placements, although they have been used in graduate education programs (Compton et al., 2010; Kennedy & Archambault, 2011). In the winter term of 2022, we added a pilot group of four students who were completing their four-week teaching practicum completely online with a well-regarded public school district. Prior to this study, no student in our program had ever completed their practicum in a digital environment. By including online instruction as a part of our

program, we can ensure that online instructional capacity is built through an evidence-based manner.

Of primary concern throughout this study was the intense stress and distress of preservice teachers during their field experience courses, and the lack of effective interventions they were using to manage this stress. Beginning in March 2021, we embedded instruction in the importance of positive workplace well-being and self-care planning into the field experience courses to address this problem. Further, by having preservice teachers focus on their self-care during practicum, investigate ways to recognize workplace stressors, build their resilience, and access the many supports available to them, our field experience programming is addressing the gap in knowledge about developing the workplace well-being of educators (Kendrick, 2021), an important big-picture outcome of the research study.

Beside: The Role of the System

As leaders within an educational institution that prepares preservice teachers to become professionals, we are responsible to ensure that the lessons learned from this research study are applied in meaningful ways to our current and future programming. We can use mutual dialogue (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to have the difficult and honest conversations about the impact of the pandemic on the preservice teacher practicum, our responsibility to meet the future learning needs of children and youth in schools, and the possible designs for preservice teacher education as we complete and share our research data analysis.

During the research study period, leadership teams in higher education realized that developing courses for online delivery takes time, effort, and planning (Openo, 2020). In order to move beyond emergency remote learning, educators must address issues of interactivity, authenticity, and support, according to Openo (2020). Good online education is problem-centered

and dialogue-oriented through online discussions with peers, and promoting authenticity in online learning requires that faculty choose to care for students, recognizing the fine line between teaching and counselling (Cranton & Carusetta, 2004).

Although 2020–2022 was a chaotic period of panic and anxiety (la Velle et al., 2020), it was also one of great creativity and innovation in online learning. As leaders, we recognize the importance of examining the adaptations that were made during this time to inform future practice (Hodges et al., 2020). This reflection has never been truer than now, as we emerge into a new reality forged by the pandemic, when faculty who are already coping with their own sense of isolation need to demonstrate care for students and colleagues, and can find opportunities to share coping strategies.

Conclusions and Leadership Implications

> "Collective efficacy is about the belief that, together, we can make a difference to the students we teach, no matter what" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 111).

The radical change needed to convert the highly traditional teacher education field experience to respond to the pandemic required a flexible and open mindset from the leadership team. Although the easy answer could have been to simply cancel or postpone the March 2020 field experience practicum, we decided that we could design an adapted field experience course because in the long term, our focus needed to remain on doing what was best for the preservice teachers in our program. Having the foresight to collect data as we moved through the changes that we made was crucial as we are now in the position to use what we have learned to better serve the teachers of tomorrow. Understanding each of our own strengths was a key way to address a problem of practice through our collective leadership while ensuring that our individual strengths were honoured and present in the solution we created.

As individuals, each of us brought different strengths to our initial course design and leadership decisions, including expertise in online and digital pedagogies, Indigenization of the resources related to lesson planning, differentiation and inclusion with Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, and teacher and student well-being and wellness. Applying our knowledge collectively and collaboratively ensured that the ongoing program design was not only responsive to student needs, but also evidence based, current, and pedagogically sound. The decisions that we made ultimately came from pooling these individual strengths in a manner that best met the needs of the preservice teachers in the field experience program.

Based on these insights and our research findings, we draw four conclusions for educational leaders to consider: introduce Indigenous resources and lesson planning, prioritize preservice teacher well-being, form communities of practice, and—the surprise—build digital instructional literacy.

Introduce Indigenous Resources and Lesson Planning

As a leadership collaborative, we had detailed knowledge of findings from BEd graduate exit surveys that indicated that, even upon graduation, students felt a lack of confidence with finding and using Indigenous resources. Given our institutional knowledge, we decided it was important to introduce students to resources they could use to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their lesson planning. Recognizing that students have a mandatory course on Indigenous Education in the final semester of their program, we were careful not to overlap with the later course but also realized that the preservice teachers would not have the necessary foundational knowledge to fully evaluate the resources they found. Instead, students worked in small groups to share resources and consider how they might be incorporated into their lesson planning. Fifty percent of the preservice students responded to the Phase 1 survey and of those, 50% reported that

the exposure to the Indigenous resources had increased their foundational knowledge of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit people. Thirteen percent of respondents expressed frustration at the limited lesson planning requirements in the course. Although we had decreased the lesson planning requirements in an attempt to lessen stress, respondents in the first survey indicated they would have preferred the course more closely replicate lesson planning requirements in an F-2-F course where they would have had to submit daily lesson plans.

Prioritize Preservice Teacher Well-Being

The ongoing dialogue afforded to us through the research study gave us the space to understand the changing needs of the preservice teachers over the two years of educational disruption from 2020–2022. From the first pandemic practicum survey responses, the data clearly showed us that the respondents were not okay, and that thoughtful intervention should be taken to ensure that we supported the students in our program. Fortunately, an individual on the leadership team had deep knowledge of compassion fatigue and burnout, recognized the preconditions, and realized that without intervention, emotional and mental health distress were possible for the preservice teachers.

The qualitative responses from the Phase 1 survey were highly reactive and angry, with the preservice teachers unable to understand why they were taking their treasured field experience course in a digital format without children. During the Phase 2 data analysis, we found that the research participants expressed a better understanding of the initial decision while still expressing frustrations with the limits an online practicum placed on their ability to teach in-person. The participants in the Phase 2 survey reflected more on their worries about being effective teachers in an uncertain and stressful time, as their classrooms were in constant flux between online and F-2-F instruction because of the COVID-19 protective protocols in schools in late 2020. They

expressed feeling a lack of support and being unable to effectively manage their stress, express their concerns, or feel competent as emerging professionals. Upon analyzing the responses from the second survey in February 2021, we recognized that immediate intervention was required to protect the health and well-being of the students in our program.

As a result, in March 2021, we embedded self-care and wellness planning into the field experience courses with the direct intent of not only providing more information about how to manage stress, but also knowing what to do to relieve stress and seek help when preservice teachers became overwhelmed at their workplace. We promoted daily self-care as a cornerstone of the field experience program with students, partner teachers, and their field instructors through their coursework and class activities.

The final series of interviews revealed that the participants, speaking about their field experience in hindsight, had begun to understand why the programmatic decisions were made and were more reflexive in their understanding of their practicum experiences. We, as a leadership team, realized that although future preservice teachers may not experience the whirlwind that started with the discovery of the coronavirus in early 2020, protecting the emotional and mental well-being of preservice teachers through instruction and practice in self-care and workplace well-being needed to become a permanent fixture within field experience programming.

Form Communities of Practice

Forming communities of practice (Wenger et al., 2002) has proven to be invaluable. An individual on the team had a strong background in creating communities of practice and saw the potential for developing one with the field instructors. The community of practice that we formed with our field experience instructors was critical in supporting our students with the challenges of

the pandemic. Time to reflect, address issues and concerns, and collaborate as a collective was essential in supporting our preservice teachers and instructors as the practica progressed. The three authors also met weekly to share updates and determine next steps. We presently continue to meet on a consistent basis with timely professional learning opportunities and space for instructors to express their perspectives and collaborate on relevant topics and priorities. The instructors have expressed gratitude for the opportunity and look forward to the discussion and sharing. Based on our individual strengths and experiences, we have been able to support one another, the field instructors, and our preservice teachers.

The Surprise: Build Digital Instructional Literacy

Although we expected students to be comfortable with teaching online, we learned through analyzing the research data that both the preservice teachers and the field instructors exhibited a wide variety of online instructional competence. We assumed that our younger students, sometimes called D-Gen (digital generation) or "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001, p. 1), who have been using computers extensively in their lifetimes, would be comfortable with online instruction. However, in the analysis of our data, few participants expressed confidence with teaching online. The interview participants, in reflecting on their pandemic practicum experience of having multiple opportunities to teach one another in small groups and to use the tools embedded in online learning platforms, realized that having direct instruction and practice with digital pedagogy during their field experience coursework was beneficial. Even more surprising given our Phase 1 data, during the interviews, participants suggested that learning how to use these digital tools without having K–12 students present was, in hindsight, helpful. When they were teaching during Field Experience III and Field Experience IV, they found that struggling with the unpredictability of internet connections and trying to figure out different online instructional strategies and tools while

also trying to deal with young students was difficult, and it required a much different skill set than F-2-F instruction.

Surprising to the leadership team was that preservice teacher education needed to incorporate the foundations of digital instructional literacy, defined as the confidence, competence, and motivation to teach in digital and virtual environments (Burns et al., 2020) as a new component of teacher education. Online pedagogy has been a part of distance learning for many years, yet it has always sat at the periphery of education rather than being positioned as a critical component of what makes an effective teacher.

The research survey data and follow-up interviews indicated a distinct variance in digital instructional literacy competencies in preservice teachers and highlighted the need to further explore ways to support preservice teachers with the foundational elements of online pedagogy that they will need in K–12 classrooms. Although a full-scale movement to online learning will likely never replace F-2-F schooling as it did so suddenly in March 2020, we anticipate that digital and online instruction will take a larger role in education. The gap in preservice teachers' and field instructors' digital instructional literacy is a concept that will need further exploration within the field experience courses and more broadly within Bachelor of Education programs to ensure that future teachers have the skills and competencies required to be effective in online environments.

Leading in a time of uncertainty and crisis requires collaborative professionalism. More than simply working together on a project, we learned that true collaboration required us to use our collective knowledge and expertise, along with data and a commitment to listening to student voice, to ensure that our field experience programming was not only reactive, but creative and forward-thinking as we navigated a difficult period. We learned that as a collective force, we could

lead effectively, and that by reflecting on the context before, beside, betwixt, and beyond, our innovation has the capacity to truly change teacher education.

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Appendix A: Phase 1 Survey Questions

1. Were you enrolled in the adapted online EDUC 465 course in Winter 2020?
    - Yes
    - No
2. How much did you enjoy this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - A great deal
    - A lot
    - A moderate amount
    - A little
    - None at all
3. How useful did you find this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Extremely useful
    - Moderately useful
    - Slightly useful
    - Moderately useless
    - Extremely useless
4. How practical did you find this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Extremely practical
    - Very practical
    - Moderately practical
    - Slightly practical
    - Not practical at all
5. I used a variety of instructional strategies in my lesson delivery. [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
6. I feel more comfortable using Indigenous resources. [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
7. I learned about differentiated instruction. I integrated differentiated instruction into lesson planning. [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Agree
    - Neither agree nor disagree
    - Disagree
8. Did your perception of online learning change through participation in this course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Definitely yes
    - Probably yes
    - Might or might not
    - Possibly not
    - Definitely not
9. If yes, how did your perception change? If no, why didn't your perception change? [Qualtrics Text Box]

10. What was your initial response to discovering that Field [Experience] II was transformed into an online course? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Extremely happy
    - Moderately happy
    - Slightly happy
    - Neither happy nor unhappy
    - Slightly unhappy
    - Moderately unhappy
    - Extremely unhappy
11. Do you think this course prepared you for your future teaching? If so, please elaborate. [Qualtrics text box]
12. What was your greatest learning during this course? [Qualtrics text box]
13. What skills did you develop during this course? [Qualtrics text box]
14. Which Teaching Quality Standard (TQS) competency do you feel you have improved on during this course? [Qualtrics check box]
    - Fostering Effective Relationships
    - Engaging in Career Long Learning
    - Demonstrating a Professional Body of Knowledge
    - Establishing Inclusive Relationships
    - Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit
    - Adjusting to Legal Frameworks and Policies
15. What improvements would you suggest for this course if it runs again in the future (other than being in a physical K–12 classroom)? [Qualtrics text box]
16. Which skills will you need to develop to be successful in Field [Experience] III? [Qualtrics text box]

Appendix B: Phase 2 Survey

1. Did you take Field II experience online in March 2020?
    - Yes
    - No

   If yes, then proceed to Question 2.
   If no, skip to Question 7.
2. Did you teach online during your Field Experience III (November–December 2020)?
    - Yes
    - No

   If yes, to then proceed to Question 3.
   If no, skip to Question 7.
3. Did your participation in the online Field Experience II (EDUC 465) course help you to adapt to online teaching in Field experience III?
    - Yes
    - No
4. What skills, knowledge, or competencies do you wish you had learned or practiced in your online Field Experience II (EDUC 465)? [Qualtrics text box]
5. What knowledge or competency did you apply from your Field Experience II course to your Field Experience III? [Qualtrics text box]
6. Has your perception of online teaching changed now that you are in the classroom?
    - Yes
    - No
    - Please explain [Qualtrics text box]
7. What was your overall feeling during your Field Experience III? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Extremely positive
    - Moderately positive
    - Slightly positive
    - Neither positive nor negative
    - Slightly negative
    - Moderately negative
    - Extremely negative
8. What was the main source of these feelings? [Qualtrics text box]
9. To what degree did you feel stressed during Field Experience III? [Qualtrics Likert scale]
    - Far above average
    - Moderately above average
    - Slightly above average
    - Average
    - Slightly below average
    - Moderately below average
    - Far below average
10. Which of the following symptoms of stress did your experience? [Checkbox]
    - Physical changes (such as sleeplessness, change of appetite, tension headache)
    - Emotional changes (such as increased irritability, reduced patience)
    - Mood changes (such as lack of motivation)

- Behavioural changes (such as increased substance use)
- Intellectual changes (such as brain fog, lack of creativity)
- None of the above

11. What do you do to cope with stress? [Qualtrics text box]
12. Which of the following supports and resources did you access during Field Experience III? [Qualtrics checkbox]
    - University of Calgary campus mental health resources
    - Alberta Health Services
    - Religious or spiritual support networks
    - Family
    - Friends
    - Other [Qualtrics text box]
    - None

Appendix C: Guiding Questions for Individual Interviews

1. Did you take Field Experience II online in March 2020?
    - Yes
    - No
2. What was your experience like during your Field Experience II online course?
3. Did you teach online during your Field Experience III/IV? Can you elaborate on these online experiences?
4. Did your participation in the online Field Experience II (EDUC 465) course help you to adapt to online teaching in Field Experience III/IV? In what ways did the Field Experience II online course help you to adapt to online teaching in Field Experience III/IV?
5. What skills, knowledge, or competencies do you wish you had learned or practiced in your online Field Experience II (EDUC 465) to support you in your practicums?
6. Has your perception of online teaching changed now that you have completed your education program?
7. What do you think preservice teachers should know and practice in their education program to support them in teaching online and/or in blended learning environments?
8. Where and when in the BEd program do you think this learning should occur (e.g., course work, professional learning opportunities, optional courses, workshops, conferences)?
9. What was your overall emotional experience during Field Experience III and IV?
    - What was the main source of these feelings?
    - What types of supports and resources did you access during Field Experience III/IV to help cope with your feelings?
    - What other supports and or resources would have been supportive during Field Experience III and IV?
10. What do you think is the future of online teaching and learning in K–12 settings?

Biographies

Dr. Theodora Kapoyannis – is the Director of Field Experience (On-Campus pathway) in the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary where she oversees the placement of 1100 preservice teachers and collaborates with over 50 Field Experience Instructors. Before taking on this role, Dr. Kapoyannis was a K-12 teacher for 17 years and served in several specialist and consulting roles. She worked closely with school leaders to support staff professional learning opportunities and further school development plans. Dr. Kapoyannis completed her PhD at the University of Calgary in 2018 where she specialized in Languages and Diversity. Her current research areas include field experience with a focus on teacher well-being, adult learning, multilingualism, and digital instructional literacy.

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Dr. Astrid Kendrick – Before taking on her current role of Director, Field Experience (Community-Based Pathway), at the Werklund School of Education, Dr. Astrid Kendrick was a K-12 classroom teacher for nineteen years specializing in Physical Education and English/Language Arts. Her current research focus is on compassion fatigue, burnout, and emotional labor in Alberta educational workers, and she is a co-producer of the podcast series, *Ed Students in Conversation*. As the co-chair of the Health Promoting Schools Collaborative for the southern Alberta region, she has been working closely with health champions from across Alberta's health and education sectors to support and promote workplace well-being. She is also a member of the Advisory Circle for the Women in Leadership Committee of the Alberta Teachers Association that promotes gender equity in educational leadership.

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Developing Education Leaders Through Creative Approaches

Susannah Quinsee & Pam Parker

Abstract

There has been a considerable interest in how to develop effective leaders for higher education but there has been limited research in this area (Stefani, 2015). Quinsee and Parker (2017) discussed the lack of leadership development and support available for those in these roles and that this is an area that needed to be explored further. The changing nature of higher education with increased marketisation, higher student demand, rising workloads, and a changing student demographics, have all created challenges for university leaders. Over the past two years Covid-19 pandemic increased the range of challenges leaders had to manage and this for many has meant drawing on a wide range of skills and being creative in approaches to problem-solving (Kennie & Middlehurst, 2021). Effective leadership for the 21st century requires innovative approaches to lead organisations (Basadur, 2004). Creating opportunities for leadership development that are engaging and exploring different ways of supporting emerging leaders is therefore an area of increased interest. The importance of playful learning in creating a safe and supportive learning environment and supporting individuals to build resilience from learning from failure as well as success cannot be underestimated (Whitton & Moseley, 2019). This paper explores how different approaches to leadership development and support have been explored at City St George's, University London many of them according with Moseley's principles around playful leadership (Moseley, 2021).

***Keywords*:** playful leadership, leadership development, higher education, creative leadership

Introduction and Literature Review

Developing effective educational leaders in UK higher education is an area that has undergone more development in the last ten to fifteen years (Bolden et. al., 2014; Gibb et. al. 2013; Jones et al., 2012). In 2015, Stefani noticed the lack of research in this area although more work has happened over the last seven years in relation to leadership development programmes. Significant research has shown the benefit and importance of leadership development (Coll & Weiss, 2016; Debowski, 2015; Jarrett, 2021), although it is a mixed picture in relation to the impact of programmes in higher education (Dopson et al., 2018). The Leadership Foundation now part of AdvanceHE offers support for leadership development through thought leadership, development programmes and other work. However, despite the increasing availability of leadership development programmes, a significant number of staff still enter leadership positions without experiencing any formal support or development in leadership (Quinsee & Parker, 2017). This is particularly true in relation to education, where development programmes may be more generic or aimed at specific roles in relation to those leadership roles, such as heads of department. In relation to education or learning and teaching, there is less availability of tailored leadership programmes.

Developing effective leaders in higher education is even more significant in relation to the environment in which we now find ourselves. The global events since 2000 with the Covid-19 pandemic, move to more online forms of learning and teaching, the Black Lives Matter movement and increasing challenges to wellbeing of both staff and students are presenting University leaders with complex challenges like never before (Altmann & Ebersberger, 2013; Debowski, 2015; Coll & Weiss, 2016; Dopson et al., 2018). These events have already been layered on top of a number of challenges particularly facing UK higher education institutions such as Brexit, increasing marketisation of higher education, rising student demands, political debates about the values of

universities and changing social demographics. Many of the leadership models from the past do not work in this increasing complex and disruptive, and volatile environment. Universities are not necessarily known for rapid response in relation to change – for example taking eighteen months to design a new degree programme – yet the environment universities now find themselves operating in requires new modes of thinking and working, increasing flexible approaches and leadership resilience (Kremer et. al., 2019; Kennie & Middlehurst, 2021).

Early development of future leaders through internal development programmes could be regarded as a core responsibility of institutions to ensure future success for students and staff (McInnis et. al., 2012; Peters & Ryan, 2015; Coll & Weiss, 2016; Jarrett, 2021). Previous research undertaken demonstrated that the majority of educational leaders in our organisation had received little if any formal leadership development, yet overwhelmingly they felt that this would have been useful in their educational leadership roles (Quinsee & Parker, 2017). Dopson et al. (2018) found, more research is needed on the longer-term impact of leadership development, particularly in relation to the difference or otherwise of the higher education setting.

The variety of leadership development and complexity of the higher education environment seems to be a perfect storm in relation to leadership capacity to lead organisations in relation to educational delivery and adaptation. Without adequate focus and understanding of leadership capabilities and unprepared leaders, higher education institutions at the very least face considerable pain, and at the worst, may fail (Kennie & Middlehurst, 2021). Additionally, even where leadership development may exist, it may not necessarily meet the demands of the changing environment. However, taking novel and creative approaches can provide one solution for addressing this potential disconnect between the volatility of the environment surrounding higher education and the development of leadership skills within it. This paper looks at how creative approaches can be

deployed to engage educational leaders in innovative ways that enable a greater engagement with the challenging environment and meet the need for leadership development that is relevant and timely. The article gives three case studies of where creative and playful methodologies has been used to both develop leaders within a higher educational setting as well as enabling leaders to meet challenges that they are current facing within an organisation to develop novel approaches. In conclusion, the paper considers how these techniques could be deployed more widely to enable a more creative approach to leadership which is playful and enables leadership development to be ongoing and continually to meet the demands of the changing global environment.

Before considering the examples in more detail, the paper makes a case for playful leadership and how this can build resilience and well as collaboration in educational leaders to engender greater effective leadership practice and development.

What Do We Mean By "Play"?

Play can be a slippery concept to define, yet as Huizinga (1949) states, play is a fundamental part of existence (Whitton & Moseley, 2019). Play gives a freedom of expression, social connection, safety, meaning and fun to our everyday lives (Huizinga, 1949; Rosen, 2019; Whitton & Moseley, 2019). The concept of play engenders voluntary participation in activities that are demarcated from the "normal". This separation of play from other activities, its intrinsic "limitedness" means that when playing, one is in a space that can be termed as "beautiful" in terms of its enchanting appeal (Huizinga, 1949). The idea of play as all encompassing in the moment connects with Csikszentmihalyi's theory of flow which is "a state in which people are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter" (1990, p. 4). Indeed, Csikszentmihalyi and Bennet (1971) regard play as a unifying experience, where one moment flows into another. For them, play

is grounded in possibilities. Rosen (2019) encapsulates how play equally enables us to fail and to see how success might come from unexpected angles; “through this play, we create art”.

Play, then, is a fluid and free activity, that requires willing participation and the creation of safe environment that supports experimentation and undefined outcomes that is all encompassing for the participants. Constructing a playful opportunity, would require the creation of a bounded, yet, safe space, that enabled participants to willingly experiment and think freely. Although the activity may not fit with the notions of play as completely voluntary, as imagined by Huizinga, there would need to be opportunities for participants to exercise their free will in terms of the levels of engagement.

The notion of play in relation to adult learning is not without controversy. “Play” can be misunderstood as infantilising or trivialising participation (Whitton & Moseley, 2019). The very freeform, or one could even argue, pointlessness of play, can lead participants to reject play as wasting valuable work time, or in public sector settings “wasting tax-payers money”. As Whitton and Moseley (2019) clearly articulate the primary difference for adults who play is that they are making a conscious choice to engage in playful activities, unlike children whose play is instinctive. When playful activities for adults are well designed and structured, remaining true to those values of play as outlined above, or in other words, placing learning at the heart of the activity is key to successful engagement (Hutchinson & Lawrence, 2011).

Yet there are key arguments that make a case for why play should be a core part of enabling adults to think differently and there is a considerable case for using creative approaches to problem solving and leadership (Kark, 2011, Whitton & Moseley, 2019).

The ability of play or playful opportunities to engender creativity and free thinking has an appeal for leadership development. Leaders need to take risks, imagine alternative futures or

possibilities, take up different viewpoints and be comfortable seeking creative solutions. They also need to be able to fail and learn from their experiences; both positive and negative. Never has this been more so than the challenges facing those leaders in higher education, as we have seen.

It should be noted here that we are discussing play as opposed to games. Whilst games and gamification can be key to engaging adults in playful activities, our design of playful interludes and encouragement of playful practice in relation to leadership development is particularly around encourage that freedom and safety associated with the inherent values of play, rather than the specific rules and structures of games, although these too can have a significant role in leadership development. For the purposes of this article we are considering "play" in that broader form that potentially encompasses games, but is intrinsically about creative thinking and experimentation.

Kark (2011) argues that in leadership development, when the play is designed by the organisation means that the dichotomy between work and play becomes more of a continuum. So, play is undertaken both for pleasure and with the goal of growing and developing leaders (Kark, 2011). The role of play in creating safe spaces for experimentation which promotes development as well as creating identities is highlighted by Kark. This conceptualisation of the significance of play remains true to those characteristics of play as outlined by Huizinga. Where this becomes particularly significant is how Kark positions play as vital for "enhancing leaders' ability to be creative and promote ongoing innovations and organizational change" (Kark, 2011, p. 517).

By incorporating elements of play into leadership development programmes, then, there is the opportunity to support the creation of leaders who value and actively promote playful practices, or in other words, develop a playful leadership approach. There is relatively little research on what playful leadership encompasses although there is some literature that attempts to define some core attributes of playful leadership. Poulsen (2015) identifies two significant aspects of playful

leadership. First, enabling playful opportunities and secondly encouraging problem solving approaches through a playful mindset that supports free thinking and creativity. A playful leadership approach can also be identified with authenticity as a leader (Ibarra, 2015). Significantly, Ibarra identifies the adoption of playful practices by leaders as a way of articulating expectations and dealing with discomfort as a leader. Playful leadership then is a facilitative approach that engenders honesty and free expression. Through experimentation, leaders are able to inspire others to work with them and achieve shared goals.

More recently, a helpful framework articulating the facets of playful leadership has been developed by Moseley (2021). The framework has seven practices of playful leaders: social, dialogical, open, giving agency, goals, feedback loop and engagement/fun. These are outlined below by Moseley in the following ways:

- "Social" implies a connected and collaborative approach to leadership where the outcomes impacts on people;
- "Dialogical" means that playful leadership is a facilitative approach which gives people voices;
- "Open" playful leadership generates shared understanding and shared ownership; the playful leader is honest about why they are doing certain things;
- "Giving agency" – people involved are encouraged to try things for themselves with their own skills and abilities; acceptance that things may go wrong and we learn from that;
- "Goal" – this relates to visionary leadership, setting out the expectations for people;
- "Feedback loop" – as indicated above, the ability to encourage people to try and learn through failure; and
- "Engagement and fun" – encourage longevity of approach, how to retain interest and challenge.

This framework, particularly the first four principles, is based on Freire's approach around community building and beliefs that acknowledges the experiences that people bring to a particular

process. For leadership development this is a particularly compelling approach as it recognises the intrinsic skills, knowledge and values that people bring to their own development. What is also helpful about this framework is that it ties into collaborative approaches to leadership, such as that developed by Kouzes and Posner (1995, 2017) model whereby leadership is positioned as an activity of engagement with others as opposed to a solo, "hero" leader approach.

This paper has established a case for using play in leadership development and a framework through which to design or support both the creation of playful leadership opportunities or engender playful approaches in developing leaders. Three case studies are now presented that illustrate how this has worked in practice and the impact on participants.

Playful Leadership Development in Practice

Case Study 1: Developing educational leaders using Lego Serious Play

The Masters in Academic Practice is a programme designed and delivered for practicing staff in the University. It has various exit routes depending on the level of qualification that the staff member wishes to achieve. The programme is open to any staff members who are actively engaged in learning, teaching and assessment. These may be those staff in traditional academic roles and also staff who are undertaking support learning and teaching, such as working in academic support, the library or careers. As part of achieving the full Master's qualification, staff have the option to undertake a module entitled "developing your leadership and reflective practice". The objectives of this module are to:

- Appreciate a range of techniques to reflect on one's own practice and development;
- Explore current education issues that impact on the institution and individual roles;
- Examine individual's roles within departments, schools and institution and identify how to develop effective leadership for a range of internal and external contexts; and

- Provide tools and methods for understanding organisational culture and how this impacts on your leadership and reflective practice.

Participants on the module are encouraged to develop their leadership philosophy, explore their personal values and how this relates to the organisation around them, and understand what personal development they need to grow as leaders through undertaking a series of activities around knowing themselves, challenging their perceptions of leadership and exploring different leadership models. Exploring personal values and how this translates into leadership practice and development is a core part of the module. In order to develop this reflective practice and explore personal attitudes to leadership in a deep but also accessible way, the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY methodology has been used as part of the programme to consider leadership in relation to the settings around the participants.

The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY methodology came out of a collaboration between business school professors and the LEGO® company around in the 1990s, finally, after a number of iterations coming to fruition around 2010 (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014). It was born out of a recognition that organisations can struggle with engaging people in strategy and strategic thinking due to using techniques that unimaginative and stifle creativity. Ironically, at the very point where creativity is most needed – strategy development – leaders and organisations fall back on engagement styles and mitigation that is formulaic and disengaging. Kristiansen and Rasmussen (2014) draw on Huizinga's notion of play to define the characteristics of serious play which are explorative and imaginative. The LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY then "is a thinking, communication and problem-solving approach for topics that are real for the participants" (Kristiansen & Rasmussen, 2014, p. 43).

The Lego Serious Play methodology was chosen to engender this type of playful practice as it by nature collaborative as well as reflective. Mapping this to Moseley's attributes of playful

leadership, it can be seen to meet all of the seven attributes – the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY method is social – everyone must share their models; it is naturally dialogic as sharing the models, participants engage in a shared dialogue around leadership. The inclusive nature of the method requires everyone to build-share-reflect which meets the attribute of openness. Although questions are set by the facilitator, in this case the model leader, the participant has agency as they can interpret the questions as they wish. All models are "their" models to own, interpret and describe as they wish. Feedback is received from the facilitator and from comments or questions from other participants. Everyone must engage in the activity and "playing" with LEGO® is inherently fun.

The participants are supported through a series of questions and asked to build a range of models to meet these. Initially the session begins with a skills building activity to ensure that everyone is "on the same" page. This is critical part of the methodology and vital to ensure inclusive practice as well as engagement. It does not matter whether the participants have used LEGO® before or not, by the end of the skills building activity the objective is that everyone is confident in using LEGO® to build models and make meaning. After this session, the questions become deeper and potentially more challenging. Often there is a shift in attention and engagement here as participants are drawn more deeply into their models and build connections both literally and figuratively. In relation to the leadership module a series of questions are posed that draw out reflections on the participants leadership practice, so building a model of their leadership identity at the current time, then going on to build a model of the dominant leadership practice in their area. This then highlights the gap, potentially, between their leadership identity and the leadership that is practice around them. Or it may pull out the synergies between the environment in which they are operating and the leadership that they espouse. The objective here is to ensure participants reflect on how their leadership identity is connected to and operates within a wider environment.

Finally, the participants are asked to build a model that outlines how the dominate leadership practices around them impact on their leadership philosophy and approach.

Using the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY method for this activity enables deeper engagement as the participants can build models that can be interpreted in numerous ways. It also enables participants to make connections between their values and the environment they are working in in a very tangible way. By guiding the participants through a series of questions about their values and leadership environment, they are able to spot connections and disparities that might have otherwise been missing. Participants are also able to engage in emotionally deep and potentially challenging situations in a less emotive fashion. Holding the bricks in a tangible way enables to the bricks to hold some of the emotion and the participant takes more of the role of an observer reflecting on those connections without having to interpret them. The "fun" element of the activity and feedback from other participants also supports the engagement aspects as participants are asked to reflect on their model or whether certain aspects of the models denote specific things. This can promote deeper reflection or just the observation "it's that colour because I liked it". Participants can choose the level of meaning that they wish to divulge whilst at the same time being required to share their reflections.

This activity has been run with over twenty participants over two iterations; one in person and one online. With the in person activity a longer, full day session was planned which resulted in a landscape being built of factors or "agents" that could impact on the participants leadership practice. The framing of the questions was slightly different between the two sessions with the in-person session considering different forms of leadership identity; so, the current leadership identity of the participants, to their perceived identity by others and their aspirational identity in order to demonstrate the gap, if there was one, between their different identities and how to bridge this.

Then the landscaping activity was added to demonstrate factors that might impact either positively or negatively or in an unknown way on the participant's practice. After feedback from the participants and given the changed circumstances due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the second session which was run online was shorter and more focused on engagement with the leadership culture in the environment around them. The online environment required a shorter session due to the challenges of engaging remotely for significant periods of time. The landscaping activity was also more challenging online so the focus was kept to the cultural dimension.

Using LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY in this way enabled participants to engage more deeply with their leadership practice and make greater connections with the wider environment, which may have been hidden. It also had the added benefits of enabling participants to bond as a cohort and introduce some elements of "fun" into their practice, which were beneficial for their engagement and leadership reflection.

Case Study 2: Cultivating wellbeing in leadership with LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY

During various lockdowns and throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, wellbeing and mental health have been paramount. Leaders in university settings have struggled with disconnection, fatigue and other mental health related issues experienced both by staff and students, whilst many have also faced challenges in their own wellbeing. Those leaders who have attempted to lead with compassion and show a concern for wellbeing and mental health have often experienced greater engagement from staff (Denney, 2020).

Whilst addressing the wellbeing of others, many institutional leaders have put their own wellbeing lower down the list of priorities or found themselves exhausted by the many demands of responding to their own staff. It was with this in mind that a series of sessions was designed to support a small group of senior educational leaders to enable them to prioritise their own mental

health and wellbeing and think about what they needed to support themselves. Three online LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY sessions were devised with the objective of sustaining wellbeing and positive mental health during lockdown. The first session looked at resilience through reflecting on the challenges of the previous year and planning for the following six months. Three months later, the second session explored work-life balance from a leadership perspective and how to achieve happiness. This session used Seligman's approach/PERMA model in *Flourish* as a foundation for exploring balance between different aspects of the participants life (Seligman, 2011). The PERMA model encompasses five foundational blocks of wellbeing – positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). These were explored through questions posed in the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY session. In the final session, six months later, the theme was transition and exploring what needed to be rebuilt or reset during a transitional time, both professionally and personally, as the year drew to a close.

The group was small with four participants all of whom were new to LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY in the first session so that session focused on skills building and then moved to exploring resilience through building models focused on core identities, what had impacted on this and then moving to think about aspirational identity and achievements over the following six months. The models also asked participants to explore what they needed in terms of support to reach their aspirational identity. In the second workshop, a reconnection challenge launched the session which then went on to explore what a positive work-life balance looked like and what it felt like when this was achieved. Then the participants were asked to build a model about their current perceptions on their work-life balance and what was impacting on this, as well as the impact of this on their leadership practice. Finally, participants were asked to consider what they wanted their balance to be and to build models or agents of what could impact upon this. The purpose here

was to enable the participants to do some landscaping and future planning in terms of what things may impact on them and what they could do to manage this. In a situation where many things were out of control, exploring possible options enabled participants to gain more control and agency in terms of the process.

The final session looked at transition and picked up on similar themes from the last two. Participants were asked to build models that looked at what they wished to “reset” or “rebuild” in their lives. The core part of this model was identified using the “red brick” technique to enable participants to reflect on what was a core aspect of this activity. What was their main focus as leaders in terms of challenges that they were facing or opportunities that they had and where they could make a difference. Lastly, using the part of the model identified using the “red brick” participants were asked to build a model that represented them achieving their reset in three months’ time, with that key aspect at the core. Discussion was had about what might impact on this, both positively and negatively.

These three workshops gave senior leaders the opportunity to take some time out to reflect on where they were and what they needed to sustain their own positive mental health and wellbeing. Exploring this from three different angles, relating to different responses and times of the year, gave leaders the chance to reflect in a structured and enjoyable manner on the challenges they were facing where they had made achievements and what they needed to do going forward. Structuring in this thinking and reflection time forced participants to take time out which was a more positive way of committing to their wellbeing as leaders. Feedback on this technique in these sessions was positive:

> I hadn't realised how enjoyable the sessions would be. It was so nice to chat to my colleagues about how I was feeling, rather than deal with business matters and rush to

> the next meeting. Or indeed how much I needed to stop and reflect on what I had achieved, how I was feeling about what I was and wasn't achieving and how I needed to take some care for me and think about the future on a personal level, not just professionally.
>
> The simplicity of the actions yet knowing they are under-pinned by a clever theory. That motivates me to engage in what we were doing and in turn get the most out of the session. I enjoyed the whole session and it was effective.
>
> The fun aspect. It is so easy to forget how much fun playing can be, and how it can help your mind to think/reflect and to stop being in the now all the time.

These three case studies using approaches to playful leadership to support and develop leaders overcome and manage challenges have enabled a creative approach to be applied with positive results.

Case Study 3: Using games to support staff with developing learning activities for students or staff

The last module of our Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice has a range of colleagues on who are in developing leadership roles. They are often programme leaders or moving into this role or where they provide support and co-ordination for colleagues around learning and teaching or lead other education initiatives. Frequently these colleagues are faced with challenges in terms of having to implement new learning and teaching activities for students or staff development sessions for colleagues. This often makes colleagues anxious and leads to traditional approaches to the problems which work but are not very engaging. It was therefore felt that this last module which focused on Professional and Personal Development Planning and preparing colleagues for taking on leadership roles was an ideal place to introduce participants to play and a games-based approach to developing activities thus using more creative approaches to these challenges. The module itself is the last module in the Postgraduate Certificate part of the MA

Academic Practice Programme and so is undertaken by all completing this. One of the module's aims is:

- Examine new ideas within individual practice and demonstrate enhanced professional practice

The module content is focused on enhancing your academic identity, enhancing your teaching through reflection and peer review, developing teaching excellence, teaching recognition and continuing professional development. Adding playful learning to this seemed to be appropriate as participants were continuing on a leadership development journey.

The module has between 30 – 40 applicants undertaking it each year and throughout the module they are placed in teams to undertake activities. The module has three taught days which can be provided both in person and online and then uses asynchronous activities between these days some of which are individual and some are team based. For colleagues to engage in this activity fully they needed some time to reflect following being introduced to the concept of playfulness. They have an introduction to playful learning on the afternoon of day two and then in their teams they are given their challenges. These are provided in each team's online forum. The teams are then encouraged to work together on the forum and through meetings to develop a game to meet their challenge and this then has to be presented to the whole group on day three. In the forum each team is also given some constraints to work within. Examples of the challenges and constraints used are in Table 1.

This team activity has led to a range of approaches to the challenges and include quizzes, campus tours for students, board game, card games and online games. The feedback from participants has been that this has helped them consider new approaches to their practice and made them realise that there is room for creativity in their role.

Table 1
Challenges and Constraints

Challenges	Constraint
You need to support core mathematics skills for first year science undergrads. You have several hour-long sessions with the students all online.	Your players have low attention spans and must be kept occupied at all times.
You have been invited to present your experiences of online learning at a departmental meeting and you need to engage staff as well as inspire them.	The institution's ethos frowns upon overt competition.
You want to bring students and staff together online to revise the BA Actuarial Science curriculum. You have 3 hours to run the game.	You know that some of the participants have limited internet connections.
New students need to learn about key student services online. The University has a £1000 fund for induction.	Your game must work with 20 players
Your Programme needs to fit better around staff workload/timetables, but they are different for each person. Could a game help staff or the programme to manage time better?	Your game must occupy at least 30 minutes of time.
International students studying for postgraduate courses need help in learning and using academic language online. You have a small development budget of £100.	Your participants do not always meet at the same time and are in multiple locations/time zones.

Although taking a more games-based approach to playful learning, this example still enables the development of a playful mindset and is consistent with the framework for playful leadership as developed by Moseley (2021). By doing this activity in teams, it fits with the social and dialogical principles of the framework. Participants need to work together to create the most appropriate playful opportunity for the scenario. This social and dialogical working has often resulted in changes to original ideas and negotiation over the goals. Participants have commented that through dialogue and conversation they have often radically changed their games design. This activity is also open. Participants must share ideas and free that they are in a safe space to make suggestions as well as owning the outcomes. Often participants then go on to adapt their chosen game or playful activity in their own learning and teaching practice, fitting with the principle of giving agency. By structuring the playful opportunity through the design of a game, there is a clear goal and outcome for the participants. The vision is that they can use play to problem solve and engender new ways of engaging staff or students, depending on which scenario they choose and also gain ideas from colleagues. Even the activity itself is playful in design with participants being given additional information about the scenario that may constrain it or provide new opportunities over the course of the activity. Feedback is embedded both within the structure of the activity and also in the presentation when participants present their game to the rest of the group and everyone votes on the most viable or exciting contribution. Finally, this definitely fits with the principle about engagement and fun. Participants comment positively that they have enjoyed the activity and engaged in a more active way. Some have experimented with games in the past and many comment that they are more confident to do this in the future. The shared construction of the game enables experimentation and the co-constructed nature of the activity enables participants to trial new ideas in a safe environment.

Conclusion

These three case studies have demonstrated how play can support with the development of educational leaders in higher education. In each example, the inclusion of playful practice has enabled the creation of a safe space where developing leaders can explore challenging concepts and creatively problem solve. This might be through collaboration or thinking differently in relation to their own practice. By introducing play in this way, the participants are encouraged to use playful leadership in their own leadership practice as they can see first-hand the benefits of this approach for their own learning.

Moseley's (2021) framework for playful leadership has been used a useful lens with each case study to demonstrate how the playful opportunity concords with a wider perception around the qualities of playful leadership. This is significant in leadership development as it is about positioning new approaches and models to developing leaders to demonstrate the qualities that may be required of educational leaders in the future as they face more uncertainty.

Although the groups for these activities were relatively small scale and limited to activities in one institution, the feedback from participants was unanimous in terms of the engagement and inspiration experienced from using these approaches. A further area of research would be to take these practices and explore with larger groups over a longer period of time or in other institutions to ascertain the longer-term impact of such interludes. One of the benefits of these activities for the participants was the novelty and uniqueness of the approach, if using such activities more regularly and widely one would need to be mindful of innovation "fatigue". There is a need to keep these activities fresh and different, a possible challenge for all playful leaders.

This article has reflected on the benefits of a playful leadership approach which is one that is potentially empowering new leaders who face considerable challenges in the higher education

landscape. We plan to embed these activities further through a broader educational leaders' development programme grounded on the principles of playful leadership practice. Those principles of play – freedom of expression, creative problem solving, collaboration, safety – are core to those principles required for successful leadership development, and we would argue, the future practice of our leaders. Leaders in higher education need to be creative and collaborative. So, let's play!

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Professor Susannah Quinsee – Susannah is Vice-President (Digital and Student Experience) at City St George's, University of London. As Vice-President she leads on institutional projects and strategy to support education and students including around digital transformation and student attainment. Susannah is a Visiting Professor for Library and Learning Services at the University of Northampton. She is National Teaching Fellow (2011), a SEDA Senior Fellow and AdvanceHE HEA Principal Fellow and was a Learning and Teaching Excellence Ambassador for AdvanceHE. Susannah is a LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY facilitator and tries to bring as much LEGO® into her life as possible. She blogs on a (fairly) regular basis (www.sqhq.co.uk), particularly if it is about Lego and rekindling her love of women's poetry, which she studied for her PhD. She has four children, including twins and is passionate about inclusivity in higher education. Susannah is continually reflecting on how to achieve a "happy" balance in all aspects of her life and how to lead with compassion and fun.

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Professor Pam Parker – Pam is Interim Director of the Learning Enhancement and Development directorate at City St George's, University of London. In this role she focuses on developing, supporting, advising and sharing good practice with colleagues to enhance the learning, teaching and assessment activities provided for students. Having initially trained as a registered nurse and then taught nursing for 16 years Pam brings to her role experience of mentoring and supporting individuals through a range of situations using collaboration, compassion, and empathy. Pam is a National Teaching Fellow (2017), a SEDA Senior Fellow and an AdvanceHE Principal Fellow. Pam co-chairs SEDA's Conference and Events Committee, is an AdvanceHE accreditor and a reviewer for a range of international journals.

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