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Creating Intentionally Inviting School Cultures

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study used Purkey and Novack's (1988) Invitational Education as a conceptual framework to understand how 30 educational leaders created intentionally inviting school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample consisted of 30 school leaders in Ohio's urban and suburban districts. Findings indicated that leaders altered their leadership styles to focus on people rather than programs and policies in order to be more inviting. Challenges pertained to insufficient funding to provide professional development for teachers and parents and the need for more mobile devices and connectivity. This study is significant because it expands the invitational education framework to show how leaders are intentionally inviting in times of crisis.

Keywords: Crisis, intentionally inviting, invitational leadership, leadership, PK-12, school culture

INTRODUCTION

The culture of an organization determines the way people are treated, how places are maintained, and how programs and policies are elaborated and implemented. School culture dictates the way things are done. An intentionally inviting school culture is created when leaders purposefully

create an environment in which students are comfortable and feel safe to learn, parents are invited to participate and be engaged in the school's life, and teachers feel supported. In educational organizations, the culture influences student learning as well as teacher retention and well-being (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019; Purkey & Novack, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). This qualitative study used Purkey and Novack's (1988) Invitational Education as a conceptual framework to understand how 30 educational leaders created intentionally inviting school cultures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This study is significant because if educational leaders understand how to create and maintain positive and inviting school cultures during times of crisis, then learning, teaching, and well-being could be less negatively impacted. This study expands the invitational education framework by showing how leaders were intentionally inviting in times of crisis. The first section of this paper presents the literature review. Subsequent sections focus on the conceptual framework, the methods, and the findings. The last two parts provide a discussion and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review is organized by themes. The first theme addresses school culture while the second presents typologies that help categorize the broad types of crisis. The third theme presents a succinct literature review on leadership in schools during crises.

School Culture

"You cannot not have a culture" (Lindsey et al., 2018, p.119). Culture defines our humanity and identity. Our cultures explain and express our worldview and our worldview is an expression of our beliefs and core values. Educators and students bring their cultures to school, and these diverse cultures, worldviews and core values affect their learning and relationships with peers (Khalifa et al., 2016; Lindsey et al., 2018). These individual cultures also influence the school culture positively or negatively. In turn, the school culture determines the ways people communicate and treat each other, how places are maintained, and how programs and policies are elaborated and implemented.

The culture of a school is what distinguished one school from another. When someone walks into a school for the first time, the person can sense whether it is a healthy place for children, and whether the leader cares about students and his/her teachers. Because culture is a predominant force, the culture of a school influences teacher and student retention, performance, and well-being (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019; Lindsey et al., 2018; Purkey & Novack, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015).

Types of Crisis

Several scholars wrote about the various types of crisis (Pepper et al., 2010; Smith & Riley, 2012). Smith and Riley (2012) contended that there are five types of crisis. They are: 1) short term crises that are sudden in arrival and swift in conclusion; 2) cathartic crises that are slow in the build-up, reach a critical point, and then can be swiftly resolved; 3) long term crises that develop slowly and then bubble along for a very long time without any clear resolution; 4) one-off crises that are unique and would not be expected to reoccur; and 5) infectious crises that occur and are seemingly resolved quickly, but leave behind significant other issues to be addressed, some of which may subsequently develop into their own crises. Based on this taxonomy, the COVID-19 pandemic would be considered infectious and long term because of the deleterious economic, social, psychological, emotional, and global impact of the virus. Pepper et al. (2010) employed a different typology to categorize types of crisis. According to these authors, the four groupings of crisis include: External-Unpredictable; Internal-Unpredictable; Internal-Predictable; and External-Predictable. Under this classification, COVID-19 would be external and unpredictable because it was external to schools and not anticipated by school leaders.

The unpredictability of the virus combined with the shortage of robust information, and the lack of preparedness for such a virus has impacted millions of individuals globally. COVID-19 has, however, disproportionally affected communities of color and those living in poverty (Gutiérrez & Grossman, 2020). In schools, these inequities were seen when institutions were not able to equitably serve students who did not have access to a mobile device or a computer, or had trouble securing a stable wi-fi connection. In addition, schools found it challenging to fully serve students with different abilities and English language learners.

In educational organizations, any situation that disrupts the education and training process and makes it inoperable is defined as a crisis (Mutch, 2015). What makes a crisis in the education sector different from other crises, and also makes it important, is that the crisis at school includes children the society is responsible for protecting. Crises in schools most often involve alcohol, drugs, weapons and violence, student discipline issues, student or staff deaths off campus, or inclement weather (Mutch, 2015). Often districts are challenged to be crisis-ready because they lack training, personnel, time, and financial resources to provide adequate crisis management trainings (Smith & Riley, 2012). As a long-term, unpredictable, and infectious crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging for school districts because remote learning became the mandated mode of instruction with very little notice. School leaders had to adapt and pivot their leadership styles in order to create inviting school cultures within the sudden remote learning environment.

Crisis Leadership in Schools

In times of crisis, leaders "frame the meaning of a crisis event, expressing appropriate concern and support, overseeing mitigation, coordinating support and facilitating timely, open communication" (Seeger et al., 2003, p. 241). During crisis, educational leaders need to ensure that students feel safe and have a clear sense of belonging so that they can learn (Boudreau, 2020). In other words, leaders need to address Maslow (1943) before Bloom (1956). Maslow (1943) introduced his Hierarchy of Needs, which explains that besides our basic physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter, human beings need to feel safe to be happy, learn, and succeed. The third tier of Maslow's pyramid has to do with the need to be included and connected; our human need to be social. These first three needs are crucial to learning. This study examined how principals created inviting school cultures within the first three needs of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs.

Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) provides a systematic way of describing how a learner's performance grows in complexity when mastering academic tasks. Bloom's taxonomy includes six levels: 1) knowledge; 2) comprehension; 3) application; 4) analysis; 5) synthesis, and 6) evaluation. Bloom (1956) defined each level as follows:

- **Knowledge** involves the recall of specifics and universals, of methods and processes, or of a pattern, structure, or setting.
- **Comprehension** refers to a type of understanding or apprehension such that the individual knows what is being communicated and can make use of the material or idea being communicated without necessarily relating it to other material or seeing its fullest implications.
- **Application** refers to the use of abstractions and concrete situations.
- **Analysis** represents the breakdown of a communication into its constituent elements or parts such that the relative hierarchy of ideas is made clear and/or the relations between ideas expressed are made explicit.
- **Synthesis** involves the putting together of elements and parts so as to form a whole.
- **Evaluation** engenders judgments about the value of material and methods for given purposes.

Although in non-crisis times, instructional leaders often encourage teachers to use Bloom's taxonomy, in conversation with leaders in this study, they explained being concerned with Maslow rather than Bloom because they realized that families were often challenged to provide the essentials to their children in the context of COVID-19 and remote learning. Leaders also

understood that they had to adapt, change, or pivot their leadership style in order to respond to the needs of their students, teachers, and families.

Smith and Riley (2012) affirmed that responding to a crisis involves five steps: 1) getting quality and reliable facts; 2) implementing the relevant contingency plan, or quickly adapting one to meet the crisis situation. The implementation of a rigorously pre-considered contingency plan means that key staff and other stakeholders immediately know what has to be done, and who has to do it; 3) making decisions swiftly before the level of damage escalates; 4) showing genuine concern for the welfare of others; 5) communicating clearly, openly and regularly to limit confusion, rumors, and misinformation. Additionally, Smith and Riley (2012) encouraged leaders to reflect post-crisis and ask questions such as: Could we have responded better? How? What contingency plans can we put in place to be better prepared?

Leadership in times of crisis is about dealing with events and emotions in ways that minimize personal and organizational harm. Smith and Riley (2012) identified key attributes that effective educational leaders possess during crisis. These dispositions include having excellent communication skills, being able to make quick decisions, thinking creatively, showing empathy, and being flexible, being intuitive, optimistic, and tenacious. Additional traits relate to the ability to synthesize information and adequately use known information gained from previous crises.

Effective leaders use the aforementioned dispositions to create positive and inviting school cultures. Using Purkey and Novack's (1988) invitational education as a conceptual framework, this study sought to understand how school leaders created intentionally inviting school cultures in a mandated remote learning environment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conceptual Framework: Invitational Education

According to Purkey and Novack (1988), creating an invitational education is key to student learning. An invitational education means that the school is intentionally inviting as opposed to being unintentionally inviting, inviting by chance, or disinviting (Table 1).

An intentionally inviting school culture is created when leaders purposefully create an environment in which students are comfortable and safe to learn, parents are invited to participate and be engaged in the school's life, and teachers feel supported. Purkey and Novack (1988) theorized that four main areas need to be intentionally inviting in a school. The four Ps describe the four areas as People, Places, Programs and Policies. During crises, it is crucial that school leaders focus on creating inviting school cultures in all four dimensions of the quadrant. However, Purkey and Novack (1988) posit that people should always be the priority because they affect all other dimensions.

Table 1: Invitational Education: The Four Quadrants

Intentionally Inviting School You are purposefully—on purpose-- welcoming to children, families, etc.	**Unintentionally Inviting** School You aren't purposefully welcoming to families and students—you are unaware. You are, *just by accident,* inviting.
Intentionally *Disinviting* School You are purposefully disinviting to others.	**Unintentionally Disinviting** School You are unaware that you/the school is disinviting. You are, *just by accident*, disinviting. (Perhaps you have just not thought about it before, you have habits that are disinviting to others—your blind side).

People. People-oriented schools are easy to identify. They are the schools where principals and teachers welcome students and each other, call students by name, know about their talents, likes and dislikes. They are the schools where there is a general atmosphere of warmth and respect. In a remote learning environment, principals played a pivotal role in creating positive relationships with their teachers, students, and families (Purkey & Novack, 1988).

Places. Places are visible, and as such can easily be made intentionally inviting. Purkey and Novack (1988) noted, "If hallways are littered, paint is peeling, restrooms are smelly, classrooms dusty, offices cluttered, and cafeteria grimy, one can assume that the school's policies, programs, and people are the same" (p. 21). Places are the most obvious element in any school and the easiest to change. They provide an opportunity for immediate improvement. For example, one can paint lockers or clean classrooms. In this study, the places were remote places.

Programs. Sometimes well-intentioned programs are harmful to individuals or groups because they focus on narrow goals and neglect the wider scope of

human needs. For example, some school programs group youngsters and give them a label, and the label becomes a stigma, which negates the positive purposes for which these programs were originally created. The invitational model requires educators to monitor programs that could detract from the goals for which they were designed. Leaders need to ask themselves whether programs welcome everyone or just some students; who is included and who is not? Many school programs can use parents or other volunteers as resources. Volunteers can tutor, type, file, or chaperone. Most communities have volunteers available; they only need to be invited.

Policies. Schools operate based on many policies. Such policies include discipline, dress code, personnel selection, bus routes, snow days, attendance, and visitation procedures. These formal or informal policies communicate a strong message to people in the school and the community about how things are to be done and where each person fits in. They also communicate values such as equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Although all 4Ps are critical to creating intentionally inviting school cultures, in times of crises the people dimension is paramount (Purkey & Novack, 1988). People develop best in inviting environments. As a result, this study focused on the first 2Ps of Purkey and Novack's (1988) Invitational Education framework: people and places. Specifically, this study examines how Ohio public-school principals created intentionally inviting school cultures during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. In Ohio, the quarantine started mid-March and schools were instructed to switch to online instruction on March 17, 2020.

RESEARCH METHOD

In the present qualitative study, the researcher sought to understand how 30 American school leaders created intentionally inviting school cultures while also leading emergency remote learning during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. As such, the objective of this study was to answer the following research questions: (1) What did leaders do to create and maintain an inviting school culture in a remote learning environment during the COVID-19 crisis? (2) What challenges did they encounter?

Sample and Data Collection

The researcher used convenience and snowball sampling for the present study (Bryman, 2012). The study participants were 30 educational leaders that she met at workshops, conferences, or meetings over a period of two years. The leaders the researcher initially contacted referred her later to some of their colleagues. These educational leaders worked in five school districts in Ohio. Two districts were in urban areas and three were suburban

districts. In 2018-2019, two of the districts had been affected by a tornado and a mass shooting. As Table 2 indicates, the sample, 18 women and 12 men, aging from mid-thirties to mid-sixties, included two preschool principals, 14 elementary principals, five middle school principals, six high school principals, and three superintendents.

Table 2: Sample

Name	Gender	Role	Level	District	Age
Chloe	F	Principal	Preschool	Urban	38
Martha	F	Principal	Preschool	Suburban	61
Elizabeth	F	Principal	Elementary	Urban	45
Bethany	F	Principal	Elementary	Urban	56
Karen	F	Principal	Elementary	Urban	35
Dorothy	F	Principal	Elementary	Urban	52
Caryn	F	Principal	Elementary	Urban	40
Elena	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	45
Caitlin	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	39
Katherine	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	38
Samantha	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	49
Carol	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	52
Alice	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	59
Mary	F	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	62
Susan	F	Principal	Middle	Suburban	54
Catherine	F	Principal	Middle	Urban	55
Dani	F	Principal	High	Urban	48
Michelle	F	Superintendent		Suburban	48
Marc	M	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	39
David	M	Principal	Elementary	Suburban	43
Paul	M	Principal	Middle	Suburban	55
Andrew	M	Principal	Middle	Suburban	35
Timothy	M	Principal	Middle	Urban	36
Jack	M	Principal	High	Urban	45
Bruce	M	Principal	High	Urban	39
Ken	M	Principal	High	Urban	49
Barry	M	Principal	High	Suburban	53
Jim	M	Principal	High	Suburban	60
Larry	M	Superintendent		Suburban	63
Elton	M	Superintendent		Urban	57

* Pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants

The researcher conducted 30 in-depth interviews to collect rich data. To maintain social distancing, the interviews took place in April and May 2020 using Zoom or Google Hangout. The interview protocol consisted of questions such as, “Can you tell me how you led in times of crisis and how you create and maintain an inviting school culture?” or “Tell me about the challenges you faced related to building an inviting school culture.” The

interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes each for a total of over 30 hours of interview data. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The in-depth interview of each participant allowed the investigator to understand whether the leaders were able to create or maintain inviting school cultures in remote learning environments and to comprehend the extent to which they were able to sustain these new practices over the spring semester.

Data Analysis

To preserve the confidentiality of the present study, schools, and participants, the researcher used pseudonyms during the transcription and coding process. Coding served as the base of the analysis since it is the interpretation of the data (Saldaña, 2009). Coding began immediately after interviewing and after writing preliminary field notes and journal notes. The researcher first listened to each of the recordings twice and pre-coded the data by highlighting memorable passages and quotes (Saldaña, 2009). Then, she read through the journals, field notes, and transcripts to make notes on them as if she were "conversing with the data" (Merriam, 1988, p. 179). The investigator then used thematic coding. Thematic coding is a method of analysing qualitative data. It is applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts, and involves recording or identifying passages of text or images that are linked by a common theme or idea (Gibbs, 2007). This allows the coder to index the text into categories and establish thematic ideas (Gibbs, 2007). Initially, the themes were two dimensions of Purkey and Novack's (1988) 4Ps, namely people and place. The researcher closely examined the data to identify common codes, topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that came up repeatedly and would fit under those themes (Bryman, 2012). Examples of codes were as follows: work-life balance, leadership styles, communication, and dispositions. Finally, this researcher used Purkey and Novack's (1988) people and place dimensions to extract quotes for each theme to describe how leaders made their school culture inviting.

Trustworthiness

To enhance the present study's internal validity, the researcher included four strategies into the design of the present study. First, the sample of 30 leaders in urban and suburban districts allowed her to gain a wide array of perspectives and understand the various strategies used by leaders (Patton, 2002). Second, she applied member checking (Mero-Jaffe, 2011). Following data analysis, she contacted the participants to share the results section of the present study with them. The participants confirmed that the findings reflected their own perspectives. Third, she created a data trail (Rodgers, 2008). This is a qualitative research practice where she copied the participants' quotes from the present study's transcript data and pasted them under each theme that emerged from the data analysis. Using qualitative software facilitated this task because the quotes were extracted during the data

analysis phase. This strategy helped ensure that sufficient transcript data supported the results that she reported in the present study. Following this process also ensured that she, as the researcher, was not sharing her viewpoint but, rather, the perspectives of the participants. Fourth, she used low-inference descriptors (Chenail, 2012). In this qualitative protocol, she used participants' quotes from various transcripts to ensure that their perspectives are reported accurately. The researcher believes that she employed a rigorous study design along with robust qualitative strategies in order to enhance the internal validity and trustworthiness of the present study's findings.

FINDINGS

The findings are organized by research question. As a reminder, the first research question sought to understand what the school leaders did to create and maintain an inviting school culture in a remote learning environment during COVID-19. Findings indicated that leaders adapted and pivoted their leadership styles and found new ways to support their teachers.

Adapting and Pivoting Leadership Styles

Principals set the tone for the culture at their schools. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, leaders shared that they altered their leadership style in the following ways: 1) They communicated more; 2) they learned to be more visible; 3) they managed stress expressed by all stakeholders; 4) they led with grace while also advocating for equity and being reflective.

Communication

All thirty leaders stated using a direct communication style because of the urgency to promptly react to the crisis. They communicated often and with transparency. They used various venues, including social media, website, newsletter, emails, calls, texts, and their districts' automatic calling systems. All leaders emphasized the need to constantly update stakeholders and making intentional efforts to check in with teachers, students, and parents daily. In her messages, Mary emphasized the need for "productivity" while Carol, Ken, Jack, and Caryn communicated the importance of care, patience, safety, and giving up perfection. Caitlin said: "Community is bigger than test scores and I want to be one of these leaders who model good listening, care, and grace because we must think of Maslow before Bloom." These principals also translated communications whenever possible for their English Learners population. Marc, Samantha, and David commented that they made sure they were reassuring and encouraging in their messages and in their online presence. In addition to communicating often, all leaders agreed that they purposefully listened more. Part of their communication strategy was to spend time listening to teachers, students, and parents to better support them. Carol

shared: "I listened more during COVID-19 than ever before because that is what was needed of me." As a result of all the listening, leaders saw a need to survey parents regularly and made surveying an integral part of their communication plan. In addition to communication, leaders increased their efforts to be more visible.

Visibility

Leaders made themselves visible using several strategies. Paul, Timothy, Barry, and Susan visited classrooms every day, conducted virtual classroom observations and evaluations, responded to calls and emails promptly, kept their schedules updated and conducted weekly mental checks on Zoom with teachers and stakeholders. At the preschool and elementary levels, Elena, Chloe and Martha read aloud to students, conducted online assemblies, or were secret guests in classes. These principals also purposefully taught classes to remain visible and accessible to students and teachers. In addition to focusing on communication and remaining visible, these leaders learned to manage their stress and the stress of others. They became what Andrew called "stress managers."

Becoming "Stress managers"

All leaders spoke about having to manage their own stress and the stress of teachers, parents, and students. They stated that they researched and attended workshops to learn more about social-emotional learning (SEL) tools for adults because teachers were feeling anxious and stressed about COVID-19 and the new and sudden online environment. Bruce summarized his action steps for learning:

> We quickly realized that our teachers needed a different kind of support because they were juggling their own children and their work, and they were very stressed. As a result, I researched SEL for adults and implemented some activities on Zoom to help teachers voice their stress. Such activities included venting sessions, yoga classes, and happy hours.

Mary, Susan, Marc, and Timothy had their school guidance counselors open their own google classroom to hold meetings with parents and families. After reflection, Timothy shared: "I would have liked the counselor to also focus more on teachers because they were also juggling their own children and their classroom." Another way Superintendent Michelle altered her leadership was by "leading with grace."

"Leading with grace"

Half of the leaders indicated that they led with grace. When asked what they meant by that, Catherine shared: "We cannot control the virus, but

we can control how we respond, and I chose to respond with grace. By that I mean being patient, compassionate, and humble." Understandings of leading with grace varied among participants. Katherine and Barry stated that, "leading with grace meant that they encouraged creativity rather than typical classroom assignments." Jim, Marc, and Samantha were among the few leaders who expressed the need to become more flexible with teachers because they also had family obligations at home and understood what teachers were going through. In her journal, the researcher wrote:

In half of the interviews, the leaders, both men and women were feeding their children or playing with them while we were talking. They mentioned that school meetings were held with children around because everyone was juggling schedules and responsibilities. Those leaders who were parents were challenged by the lack of time, freedom, and quiet. The leaders who did not have a family living with them - Karen, Catherine, and Elton reported enjoying the online learning because there were very few discipline issues and could then focus on supporting teaching and learning instead of discipline. In both cases, leaders recognized the need for grace and adjusted their leadership style to be more equitable with teachers and students during these unprecedented times.

Leading with an equity lens and planning for the future

Urban and suburban leaders who served underprivileged students were aware of the need to advocate for equity because COVID-19 affected a lot more those who lived in poverty. These leaders indicated that beyond instructional materials, families needed additional food, clothing, and medical items. To meet this need, Chloe formed a partnership with a company and received half a million dollars in food items that her community distributed weekly to families. Bruce, Paul, and Alice organized barbecues with donated items, drove food to homes, or arranged for district buses to drop off food, clothes, and medication. The principals' mantra became Maslow comes before Bloom because as Mary explained "instruction is important but staying healthy takes precedence." Leaders also realized that they needed to be more equitable in their communications, so they enlisted the help of interpreters and translating systems to make sure families stayed informed.

Finally, all leaders stated the "need to plan for the future." Michelle affirmed "everything is an emergency now, but we need to reflect and plan now in case there is a next time." Overall, leaders altered their leadership styles by communicating more frequently. They became more visible, managed stress of all stakeholders and led with grace while also being equity advocates and being reflective. Leaders also played a key role in supporting teachers' ability to be intentionally inviting during COVID-19.

Leaders Supporting Teachers

All leaders stated that they were able to best support their teachers because they had either gained their trust during the seven months preceding COVID-19 or had robust relationships with their teachers because they had been in their positions and had known each other for long periods of time. Susan expressed: "I wonder if supporting my teachers would be so easy if I had had new teachers and the crisis had happened in September." School leaders always support their teachers, however in the pandemic, leaders reported having to become awesomizers, model work-life balance, and foster collaboration and learning.

"**Being an "awesomizer."**

Leaders emphasized the importance of intentionally keeping morale high, particularly in the first few weeks of the crisis. David explained: "I cannot control COVID-19 but I can be an awesomizer." When prompted to speak about what an awesomizer was, David continued:

> I have a positive mindset and I repeatedly tell them that I am there to support them. I also encourage them, praise them often, share videoclips of students during our various meetings and sometimes dress in costumes just to make them laugh. Because there are less discipline issues, I can be an awesomizer.

Carol, Bethany, and Elena shared that they celebrated small wins with teachers by holding "Zoom happy hours, coffees, or lunches to talk about their day, their students, and whatever was on their minds. We used to go to happy hour on Fridays, so we are keeping the tradition alive just being more flexible and meeting virtually." Other strategies used by leaders included writing letters to teachers and checking in about the teachers' emotional health regularly. Being an awesomizer also meant understanding the need to find a balance between work and family responsibilities.

Work-life balance

Awesomizer leaders supported their teachers by purposefully modeling a sense of balance and calm. Jack with his two children on his lap said:

> Now that my home office is the main office of the school, I usually have my children during my staff meeting. Teachers see that I juggle family and work too. My wife is also a principal and we divide childcare. My teachers do the same or have full care of their children.

Jim, Susan, and Martha indicated that they told their teachers to stop working and "unplug because they were on the phone from 8am to 9pm." All leaders spoke about the importance of modeling physical and mental health. Karen

sent reminders via text message to her? teachers asking, "What are you grateful for today? Who are you connecting with today or checking in on? and How are you moving your body today?" In addition to being awesomzers and promoting work-life balance, leaders shared the need and urge to collaborate.

Fostering learning and collaboration

School leaders are chief learners. During COVID-19, they rapidly had to learn how to lead virtually and from home. They had to learn from other districts and leaders. Many of them joined Facebook groups and learned how to post reading aloud clips on YouTube, for example. All leaders spoke about conducting classroom virtual tours and giving regular feedback, as well as providing professional development on how to foster engagement in a remote learning environment. Leaders also learned to delegate, be a resource for their teachers, and to foster collaboration. Katherine illustrated this feeling when she said:

> The teachers know that I am a resource for them. They know to ask me for help and if I do not have the answer for them, I will do my best to find it. I also encouraged them to be in touch with each other. As a result, I saw more collaboration in the virtual model than when we were brick and mortar. They collaborated more on lesson planning during remote learning than ever before.

Paul reported: "I saw teachers spontaneously meet daily on Google Hangout to check in on their classes, students and share ideas." These findings revealed that leaders pivoted their leadership styles to communicate more, be more visible, manage stress expressed of all stakeholders, and led with grace while also advocate for equity. Findings also indicated that these leaders supported their teachers by being awesomizers, promoting work-life balance, and fostering learning and collaboration.

The second research question concerned the challenges these 30 leaders faced while leading during remote instruction and COVID-19. Findings indicated that the challenges were related to funding, technology, and logistics.

Challenges

The first challenge pertained to the lack of funding. Due to the lack of funding and despite the growing need for professional development for teachers who did not know how to use an online platform, leaders found creative ways to offer learning opportunities for their teachers. Bruce shared that he joined forces with other principals and offered joint online Zoom workshops on technology, for example. Leaders also had to manage parents'

frustrations with having to be teachers, pick up food at designated locations, while also working and maintaining a household. Chloe expressed: "Parents were frustrated because they did not have enough devices for all their children or did not know how to support their children and how the platform worked."

Similar to face-to-face teaching, online learning is an infrastructure that demands routines and procedures. Online learning has its own culture because principals and teachers do not see students daily. As a result, clear expectations are needed. At the outset of COVID-19, participants reported being overwhelmed with directives, information, and orders that would change hour by hour. Barry spoke about the confusion and chaos and shared: "To add to an already confusing and overwhelming time, all schools in our district did things differently, so none of our buildings had a uniform and consistent approach to follow, which delayed us in our ability to provide effective remote learning." Susan, Dani, and Jack shared that they needed an adaptation period during which they were able to "filter the information from the Ohio Department of Education and their districts." Alice shared the feeling of the group when she said: "This adaptation period lasted approximately three weeks. After that, we started to have a rhythm and we worked out some of the kinks."

In the first three weeks of remote instruction, leaders faced several challenges related to places. First, they had to ensure that everyone had access to a mobile device or a computer and could connect to WIFI. This proved to be difficult for schools that did not have one-to-one devices. While Mary, Jack, and Bruce stated that they had plenty of devices on hand and even extra ones in case of loss or repair. Carol, Samantha, and Caitlin contended with not being able to locate some students who did not log in and did not do their work. Realizing that mobile devices were not going to be delivered to all students and that some students were not being tracked, Alice shared that she "expected participation to be down during COVID-19." Although leaders tried to reach everyone, some students were not accounted for, as Larry explained: "Even when schools printed some packets for students without a device or WIFI, parents would not always pick up the packets at school because they worked, they may have been worried to come to school, or may not have had transportation."

Another difficulty involved families. Even when the family had computer(s) or a mobile device and WIFI, caregivers did not necessarily know how to use the devices, as exemplified by Dani: "I received many calls daily of parents who were asking for guidance and tutoring on how to operate and navigate the device so that they could assist their child(ren)."

Other difficulties included the lack of bandwidth in households with several children and parents having to use WIFI. Special education and English Learner instruction were also challenging. Leaders constantly spoke about challenges related to bringing the students with individual educational plans online and giving them the services they needed. In particular, Andrew

stated that "it was hard to motivate 8th graders on IEPs because they thought they were on holidays since the testing was suspended and they were easily disengaged." Lastly, leaders spoke about the importance of having uniform guidelines with Google classroom, so that all teachers could organize their materials a certain way on the platform to make it more user friendly and consistent for parents with multiple children. Specifically, David shared: "I have two children in my own school. One teacher organized his Google classroom by date and the other by assignment. It took me weeks to understand what was needed for whom and to get into a rhythm. As the principal, I saw that we needed to do better and have a consistent way of organizing our online classrooms."

Despite those challenges, leaders made their new environments intentionally inviting. First, they delivered packets and meals themselves to households that needed them. They also made curbside visits to greet the students and families. Mary, Chloe, Martha, and Marc spoke about going to houses once a week while modeling social distancing, but making sure students had what they needed to participate in the instruction. Second, leaders made sure that families who needed WIFI were aware of some of the complimentary options. Marc, Elena, Caryn, and Katherine made a list of possible places to get free WIFI such as McDonald's restaurants and invited parents to come to the school parking lot to access the internet. Samantha, Carol, and Paul organized study group dates when families would be invited to drive their students to the school parking lot to have group study sessions. Another way school leaders made the online environment inviting was by decorating their school buildings, making posters, and taking pictures of teachers. They then posted those pictures on their website, social media, newsletter, and ClassDojo. Susan shared:

> We were not prepared to switch so rapidly to remote learning and it is taking a toll on everyone. We can all do our part to make this new environment inviting so here, we chose to make videos of ourselves at school while also practicing social distancing. We then post all these videos in multiple languages on the website, on social media, in the newsletter, paper, and emails. We noticed that students really enjoyed seeing familiar places and faces, so we continued doing it, making an unfortunate situation fun for them.

Dani and her teachers created music recitals and posted them on their websites. One school even organized a talent show at the end of the year in which students displayed their talents in self-made videos that were shared in a virtual all-school meeting. Moreover, leaders also created what Timothy called "warm, loving videos" with positive messages, or welcome back messages after spring break for students and families. Finally, leaders made their online places inviting by encouraging teachers to be creative and make

online learning attractive with games and fun activities. Bruce explained: "Once I told the teachers to be creative and have fun, I saw teachers producing amazing activities and games, such as STEM Fun Fridays, where students attended an experiment the science teacher was doing, or art teachers sending videos of projects students could do for fun." Findings indicated that leaders faced challenges related to finances, logistics, and the adaptation to remote learning. Next the author discusses the findings in relation to Purkey and Novack's (1988) invitational education framework.

DISCUSSION

Culture eats strategy for breakfast (Drucker, 2011). In educational organizations, culture influences student learning as well as teacher retention and well-being because culture determines the way people are treated, how places are maintained, and how programs, and policies are elaborated and implemented (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Fullan & Quinn, 2016; Gruenert & Whitaker, 2019; Purkey & Novack, 1988; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015). Findings indicated that during the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic, creating an intentionally inviting school culture became a priority for leaders because of the level of stress, anxiety, and distress the pandemic brought to all stakeholders. Using Purkey and Novack's (1988) Invitational Education framework, findings showed that leaders chose to focus on people and place rather than policies and programs. These findings showed that leaders created intentionally inviting school cultures by focusing on communication, showing concerns for others, and providing mental health support to both their teachers and students. These findings align with some of the literature on crisis leadership (Cowen & Rossen, 2013; Smith & Riley, 2012). Examples of crisis leadership included when Paul, Timothy, Barry, and Susan set up virtual meetings with teachers regularly, attended classes or taught classes, and made efforts to be visible and transparent.

In this study, only Mary mentioned her crisis or contingency plan. This is because the leaders' crisis plans were made for crises such as chemical spills, tornadoes, or intruders. With COVID-19 being infectious and long-term (Smith & Riley, 2012), schools did not have a crisis plan ready for a pandemic. This finding confirms that leadership transcends crisis plans (Brock et al., 2001). Participants in this study altered their leadership styles due to COVID-19 and the sudden remote learning mandate. All leaders purposefully focused their efforts on the people they served and with whom they worked. This finding is in line with Purkey and Novack's (1988) invitational education framework. These leaders focused on people because doing so made the remote places, programs, and policies intentionally inviting and fostered student engagement and learning.

Invitational education is about being *intentionally* inviting in specific aspects of the schools: people, programs, places, and policies with a focus on people first. In times of crisis, invitational education is embodied by leaders who are communicative and visible. Leaders also manage stress of all stakeholders, they lead with grace while also being equity advocates, and being reflective. Additionally, they are awesomizers, promote collaboration and learning, and they model work-life balance. While educational institutions should always be intentionally, this study demonstrated that invitational education is particularly needed during crisis of any kind because crisis creates uncertainty and stress, as well as economic and emotional distress. COVID-19 has impacted the world and our schools in ways no one could have imagined. This study provides practical ways in which leaders created and maintained intentionally inviting cultures while suddenly switching their learning environments to remote learning.

The findings from the current study add to Purkey and Novack's (1988) 4Ps in that they provide a roadmap on how to create intentionally inviting school cultures during crisis regardless of whether districts are located in urban or suburban areas and who the leaders are. Specifically, this study provides ideas on how to create intentionally inviting school cultures by focusing on people and places, even remote places, and reminds all leaders of the importance of thinking and leading with Maslow in mind before focusing on Bloom's taxonomy. In other words, in times of crisis, leaders ought to remain flexible and pivot their leadership styles to remain or become people-focused first. For some leaders, this may not require an intentional effort because they always are people-driven and oriented. For others, they may have to reorganize, re-strategize, and learn how to become better people-minded persons. The 4Ps is a tool that can help frame the work of leaders. The model can remind leaders of the importance of intentional and inviting leadership in the midst of uninvited times. Purkey and Novack's (1988) framework can be used as a tool to reflect on the self and on the school as a system. Leaders could ask themselves daily: "In what ways was I intentionally inviting today in the areas of people, places, programs, and policies?" Similarly, leaders can provide professional development for teachers to help them use this tool to reflect on their practices and themselves. Lastly, the framework can be used to assess how the school as a system is intentionally inviting and determine areas of strengths and weaknesses. Next the researcher provides recommendations for practitioners, policy makers, and scholars.

Study Limitations

As with any empirical study, there are limitations to this research project. This study took place in one county in Ohio. The leaders were from five districts and none were located in rural areas. Despite these limitations, the researcher believes that the present study contributes to the body of

literature on leading in times of crisis. Within this context, the present study has the potential for setting the stage for further studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following seven recommendations are derived from the study findings and are directed at educational leaders who lead in times of crisis in an online or blended environment. First, leaders should focus on people in order to create inviting school cultures in times of crisis. Second, to be equitable and intentionally inviting in an online learning environment, leadership teams should ensure that every student has access to the desired learning materials. Leaders can provide and deliver academic packets while also planning ahead and purchasing additional devices to have on hand in case of damage or loss. Leaders should also purchase hotspots for WIFI or assist with data usage to families in need, along with information on bandwidth use.

Third, leaders need to provide individualized support for their teachers. Not all teachers are technology savvy and even when they are, engaging students in online environments requires a different skill set. Leaders should provide training on how to use online platforms and provide guidelines on how to organize online classrooms so that there is consistency with how information is presented across classrooms. This could be done through virtual forums, for example. Districts could also create within the Learning Management System (LMS) a virtual "sandbox" for teachers to play with the technology before using it with students. Leaders also need to train teachers on how to foster student engagement in a blended or strictly online environment. The following instructional tools are recommended: Seesaw, FlipGrid, and EdPuzzle. Additionally, for professional development on remote learning, MobileMind offers a plethora of training options. Leaders could hire virtual coaches or mentors to support teachers during their teaching. Moreover, to foster collaboration and peer learning, leaders could create virtual professional communities in which teachers discuss their student data and strategies and assess their efficacy. Lastly, for leaders who work with English learners and families, purchasing translating systems and services could be helpful.

Fourth, to be intentionally inviting to families, leaders could organize optional virtual forums and training sessions to teach parents how to use a mobile device and the chosen platform so that they can assist their child(ren). Technology teams could open a google classroom or set up video meetings throughout the day for parents. These teams could also have on-going trainings available, so parents can access them whenever and wherever they like. Finally, because social emotional learning should always be a focus in school and is particularly needed in times of crisis and in an online

environment, it is recommended that leaders work collaboratively with counselors to offer virtual workshops for teachers and parents and provide coping strategies for adults and students alike. The counselor could set up his/her google classroom or Zoom room so that parents and teachers could attend trainings and get one-on-one support. Trainings could cover topics such as how to motivate a child or how to promote perseverance and grit.

Fifth, policies and crisis plans should be adapted to be culturally responsive and equitable. For example, these policies and plans should address how educators will serve marginalized groups of students such as English learners and students with mild to severe disabilities in all environments: brick and mortar, remote learning, and blended learning. Policies should also address how students, parents, leaders, and teachers can receive social emotional help during times of crisis.

Sixth, for scholars, this study paves the way for many others. Qualitative studies could address similar questions in rural contexts, and in different states or countries. In addition, further studies could focus on other aspects of Purkey and Novack's (1988) 4Ps, such as programs and policies. Seventh, serving students on Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs) and English Learners was a challenge for all leaders in this study. As a result, crisis plan should include alternate ways to provide services to these students, assess them, and ensure their progress. For example, students could create videos to explain their thoughts and ideas instead of having to write a paper. Students could also teach one another in an online meeting so that teachers check for their understanding.

CONCLUSIONS

Using Purkey and Novack's (1988) 4Ps as a conceptual framework, this study sought to understand how 30 Ohio school leaders created and maintained inviting school cultures in the midst of the 2020 COVID-19 global pandemic. Findings indicated that leaders were able to create intentionally inviting school cultures by focusing on people first rather than concentrating on programs or policies. Specifically, these leaders purposefully altered their leadership styles to create intentionally inviting remote environments. Challenges pertained to insufficient funding to provide professional development for teachers and parents, the need for more mobile devices and connectivity, serving English learners and students on IEPs, as well as the lack of training for all stakeholders on social emotional learning. Based on the findings, the author proposes that invitational education is an effective framework to adopt in times of crisis. This study is significant because it expands the invitational education framework to show how leaders created invitational schools in time of crisis. If the educational leadership field understood how leaders create and maintain positive and inviting school cultures during times of crisis, learning, teaching, and well-being would be

less negatively impacted. The implications also invite educational stakeholders to reimagine how to make schools intentionally inviting in an increasingly technological world. This study is relevant for PK-12 leaders, but findings and recommendations could also be useful for leaders in higher education.

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