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Compassionate Leadership:

Nurturing Teacher and Student Voice in Urban Schools

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ABSTRACT

This investigation explored the use of Improvement Science (IS) and Networked Improvement Communities (NICs) with doctoral students enrolled in a CPED-influenced EdD program in a large urban region of the Western United States. The two NICs highlighted in this paper focus on using IS protocols to support educational leaders in cultivating compassionate leadership by nurturing teacher and student voice in their urban schools. Equitable schools require the dedicated and focused efforts of all in the school constellation. IS and NICs invite school leaders and their communities, as well as higher education faculty and their students, to engage together in meaningful ways with challenges in the real world of schools. Improvement Science projects that directly address anti-racism and equity can move us from caring about to caring authentically for our schools.

KEYWORDS

care ethics, Carnegie Project on the Educational Doctorate (CPED), doctoral education, EdD, educational leadership, improvement science, networked improvement communities, student voice, teacher voice

Dr. Ladera is sitting alone in her high school classroom in Los Angeles, monitoring 18 boxes on her video conferencing platform, each with a student working remotely, that make up her sixth period chemistry class roster. As the region moves beyond the isolation that the global pandemic imposed, she remains by herself, forced to commute each day in bumper-to-bumper traffic to a classroom that is empty. At the end of the day, Dr. Ladera attends a face-to-face faculty meeting with other teachers who likewise spent the day by themselves in their rooms, monitoring their charges remotely. Exhausted and demoralized (Ebersold et al., 2019; Webb, 2002), the teachers assemble and await the principal's arrival, but she is late. The vice principal, who steps in to lead the meeting, greets Dr. Ladera as Ms. Ladera, ignoring yet again Dr. Ladera's oft-repeated requests to be called by her proper title. The meeting is mercifully brief, and as Dr. Ladera walks to the parking lot, a fellow teacher stops her and asks if she has seen her email. Was she aware that their principal had resigned that very day, barely a week before the term ended? Dr. Ladera's only response was, "Good riddance."

In a different part of the greater Los Angeles region, Deshaun Peters, who is in seventh grade, talks with his counselor about concerns with one of his teachers. Dr. Wilson approached him first because she noted a pattern of absences; he did not feel the personal agency to reach out for help (Watts, 2018). An African American male enrolled in special education classes, Deshaun is unaware that he is one of a substantially disproportionate number of young Black men so identified (Ancy Annamma, 2018; Beratan, 2008; Blanchett, 2006; Gillborn, 2015). Dr. Wilson asks Deshaun to discuss with her the now-chronic absences in his world history class. He explains that when he gets frustrated, he runs out of the class, but that Mr. Matthews never goes after him or asks what is wrong. It's simply as if he does not exist and is not missed. He believes that if his teacher really did care about him, Mr. Matthews would try to find out what is wrong and redirect Deshaun's behavior to support him in being successful (Watts, 2018; Woodward, 2018).

Teacher and student voice should be commonplace in the daily life of America's schools, yet this is far from the case (Badal, 2018; Woodward, 2018). These two vignettes, unfortunately, represent actual educators and students in schools where I live. Both Dr. Ladera and Deshaun express what Nel Noddings (2013) discussed in her seminal work on caring: people can discern when they are cared for and the consequences to schooling for both teachers and students who do not experience a culture of care are dire. If the principal and other leadership are fostering a school community in which they are "the ones caring" and the teachers, students, and families discern being cared for, then the ethos is one of compassionate leadership where the voice and participation of all are encouraged, fostered, and welcomed (Noddings, 2013).

While these stories with a not-so-subtle underlying racist trope could demoralize us, I instead choose to see them as opportunities to address problems in the real world of schools using protocols for improvement that can effect actual change. Focusing in particular on the Carnegie Project for the Education Doctorate's (CPED) *Guiding Principles for Program Design* (n.d.) most relevant to the study and aligned with the EdD program in which I then taught, this article explores the efforts of two Networked Improvement Communities (NIC) (Bryk et al., 2011) to use Improvement Science (IS) (Bryk, 2020; Bryk et al., 2015) to examine teacher and student voice so as to engender communities of greater care (Noddings, 2013).

I first explore the equity focus for the students' projects, which was anti-racist teaching and leading, by examining relevant literature. Then, I set the backdrop for the study by discussing the CPED Guiding Principles and terminology such as NICs relevant to

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this study and the project. Third, I present details of the two selected NICs, and how they conducted their IS Projects.

EQUITY FOCUS: ANTI-RACIST TEACHING AND LEADING

Anti-racist teaching and leading require educators to address the fundamental issue of power in schools and schooling (Ayers et al., 2009). If power is viewed through the lens of caring, with an eye towards establishing compassionate leadership, then teacher and student voice become center stage in leaders' consideration (Miller, 2020; Noddings, 2013). While detailed analysis and discussion of the literature are beyond the scope of this article, I raise several considerations as they affect leaders who wish to authentically address anti-racist teaching and leading in their schools. First, somewhat self-evident, teachers and students are represented in schools by race and ethnicity differently. Second, there are two distinct themes in the literature for voice in schools: one for teacher voice and one for student voice. Third, moving from theory to praxis may vary depending on the disaggregated factors of a particular teacher and/or student population in a school. Each of these three major themes becomes interrelated as schools seek to address anti-racist teaching and leading. I discuss each briefly.

Teachers and Students: "Where is the Teacher Who Looks Like Me?"

One of the complexities of addressing anti-racist teaching and leading is to recognize that neither teachers nor students are homogenous groups, but rather complex ecosystems, varying from school to school across the vastness of our country. Evidence tells us that nationally, teachers and school leaders remain disproportionately White in comparison to the students in their schools (Hill, et al., 2016; Irwin et al, 2021). The national K-12 student population is projected to continue its trajectory to becoming even more diverse, with non-White students representing the majority of the student population by 2050 (Passel & Cohn, 2008).

While long-term solutions to disproportionate representation include cultivating more historically marginalized individuals as teachers and leaders, the short-term solution, which also affects the longer term, is to ensure culturally proficient teaching and leading for all. Equity for all ongoing professional development for teachers and leaders should be one focus not only in more culturally diverse educational settings, but in all schools. Furthermore, focusing on equity for all helps teachers and school leaders beyond what they should not be doing to directly address what they should be doing (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Khalifa, 2018).

Teacher Voice and Student Voice

Teacher and student voice appear as distinctly different themes in the educational literature, and each enjoys expanding interest and investigations in 21st century America. Both NICs that engaged in problems of practice related to teacher and student voice conducted their own reviews of relevant professional knowledge. I summarize here some of the key themes for each based on my review of the literature.

Teacher Voice

Teacher as leader is not a new concept in education (Harris & Muijs, 2002; York-Barr & Duke, 2004); rather, "the possibility and potential of teacher leadership remain a central issue within the international discourse about educational reform and change" (Harris & Jones, 2019, p. 123). Teachers are on the front line with their students and family communities, and it therefore stands to reason that they should be at the forefront of entrepreneurship needed in today's schools. Unfortunately, this is still not the case as many schools continue to perpetuate hierarchical leadership models that limit or disable teacher voice and therefore affect teacher agency (Hargreaves & Ainscow, 2015).

Three major themes have emerged from the teacher voice-teacher leadership literature: the teacher as influencer and not necessarily as formal leader, the teacher as enactor of initiatives and reforms beyond the classroom, and the teacher as expert in teaching and learning (Harris & Muijs, 2002). Each of these is based on actions that are taken with purpose among a community of colleagues in a collaborative fashion, which suggests a leadership model for schools that enrolls teacher voices in work that is broad-based and skillful (Lambert, 1998; 2002). Fundamental to actions, however, are theories that guide practices. Theories that support authentic and expanded teacher voice include constructivist leadership (Lambert et al., 2002) and distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006). These warrant further examination in schools that wish to foster greater teacher engagement.

Since York-Barr and Duke's review of literature on teacher voice and leadership in 2004, Wenner and Campbell (2017) have provided an expansion of our understanding. Their review provides deeper insight into a number of themes to consider when seeking to expand teacher voice. They disclose that one of the gaps in the literature is consideration of disaggregated voices in teacher leadership; in other words, what do we understand about equity in voice with racial and ethnic differentiation (Wenner & Campbell, 2017)? While they also indicated the need for large-scale empirical investigations, teacher voice is still a topic suitable for smaller investigations. The subject lends itself well to the local level by using IS to investigate teacher voice in diverse school settings.

Student Voice

A growing body of literature over several decades examines and conceptualizes the role of student voice in schools (Gonzalez et al., 2017). I present a synthesis of the ideas that provided the background for the problem of practice that the team selected. As educators continue to seek ways to dismantle systemic racism and give voice to those who have been historically underserved, disrupting the status quo of who has power in schools can be enacted by considering ways students participate in their schooling (Gonzalez et al., 2017). I offer the rationale for student voice, a definition, and a summary of what aspects of voice investigators engage in.

Three ideas form the rationale for student voice in schools: human dignity and human rights, developmentally-appropriate considerations, and social justice (Gonzalez et al., 2017). In effect, in order to provide equitable, inclusive education in a democratic society, fundamental human rights should afford children opportunities to have input into the educational project. Memorialized in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*, this framework provides justification and supports students' voices in

school governance and reform (United Nations, 1989). Student voice should not only be limited to older children; while developmental issues are relevant, younger children should likewise have a voice (Mascradi et al., 2021; Mayes et al., 2019; Quinn & Owen, 2016). For the purposes of this project, I define student voice as the "domain of inquiry that aims to document the ideas, perceptions, opinions, or perspectives of students within situated schooling contexts and for specific purposes" (Gonzalez et al., 2017, p. 453).

In the analysis that Gonzalez et al., (2017) conducted of students on student voice from 1990-2010, investigators identified three principal themes: engagement with school change or improvement, personal or group empowerment, and teaching and learning, meaning the school's curriculum and how children learn. School change or climate considerations invited students to talk about the purpose of school, what might support their success, and what might challenge them. Issues of personal or group empowerment examined how to "make schooling more democratic, disrupt power, and help students illuminate their lived learning experiences" (Gonzalez et al., p. 460). Finally, themes around teaching and learning invited consideration of how to enact content in classes and experiences that were student-centered.

Theory to Praxis with Teacher and Student Voice

It is essential to recognize that teacher and student voice are not monolithic groups and topics. Critical in understanding voice in education is an analysis of the literature that disaggregates considerations based on relevant factors for either teachers or students. Those may include, but are not limited to, race and ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, and other factors. With student voice, for example, data suggest that African American male students who are identified as special education face particularly daunting representation of their voices in schooling (Watts, 2018; West-Olatunji et al., 2006). Therefore, school leaders must be mindful that approaches for addressing teacher or student voice for one group may be insufficient or inappropriate for others.

As the scholarship on student voice has expanded, so have practical guidelines of how to enact the principles in schools. Kidd and Czerniawski (2011) provide not only theory, but praxis to ground educators' work. Practical ways to increase student voice are many. If students are taught IS protocols, they can apply them to their research projects. With community-based learning, children could address a problem of practice or advocacy in local organizations (Reilly & Sanders, 2019).

A BRIEF PRIMER ON NETWORKED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The concept of Networked Learning Communities that Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has put forth began with an essay in 2011 (Bryk et al.). This practitioner-oriented approach to research and development has its roots in the work of Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991; 1999), whose work on communities of practice, preceded NICs by over two decades. Their theoretical construct that learning is a social process underlies much of what followed from their work (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999).

Bryk and his colleagues (2011) originated their work with the private sector in Silicon Valley, where the Foundation is located, but it was their vision to transfer the concepts of NICs, along with those of IS, into higher education research and development (R&D). The goal overall was to establish an amalgam of research—the theoretical aspects—with practice—the "real world" aspects of R&D, resulting in the best of both worlds to address problems of practice in organizations (Bryk et al., 2011). This model, then, became the basis for my students' NICs from which their IS projects emerged.

CONTEXT OR BACKGROUND: THE COUNTRY OF "LA"

The vignettes at the beginning of this article are from two projects that emerged from a doctoral course on transformational leadership, and their goals were to empower educational leaders to address systemic inequities in PK-12 schools. I was an invited charter member of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching's Higher Education Network (HEN) and received instruction and coaching from Carnegie Fellows over the course of several years. Our "curriculum" over the first two years included learning the protocols for using IS via direct instruction from the Fellows, who had likewise been teaching IS to their master's and doctoral students, along with weekly activities we completed to practice the protocols.

The protocols we learned as HEN professors included detailed use of the Plan, Do, Study, Act model, most frequently associated with W. Edwards Deming (1986, 1993). The several approaches and tools used for IS application in higher education have now been documented widely by numerous scholars, with much of the leadership in this field emerging from scholars associated with CPED. (See, for example, Perry et al., 2020; Peterson & Carlile, 2022; Spaulding et al., 2021.) We professors also each conducted a study of our own, so we were applying each protocol and would experience IS. The study I conducted was addressing the very real problem of introducing IS into a doctoral program's course of study; thus, the findings would influence how and in what context I would teach the students.

I first taught IS to my EdD students as a part of an educational leadership theory course, during which they used the IS and NIC protocols with actual problems of practice in their schools. At the time the students completed their projects, they were engaged in their first year of doctoral studies; those profiled here have all now completed their EdD degrees. The IS project was a semester-long endeavor, which I introduced, along with then-Carnegie Senior Vice President, Paul LeMahieu, with whom I had been researching and working since 2001. The backdrop provided some of the theoretical grounding for IS and NICs, which then became a weekly component of their coursework.

I highlight the work of two of the five NICs that conducted IS projects in schools throughout the greater Los Angeles area in California, which I selected due to their significant alignment with the equity theme of this article. Overall, California educates the largest number of children in the United States. The region is home to the second largest PK-12 school system and the largest number of charter management organizations and Catholic schools in the country. Our region therefore serves as an incubator for entrepreneurship and innovation in its educational approaches. Our region also embodies many of the problems facing schooling across America today: issues of economic inequality and challenges with its racially- and ethnically diverse students and families. These many factors then converge to provide opportunities for authentic change. Both schools presented—one a middle school and one a high

school—each serve historically underserved students. I chose the two projects because they most closely addressed the themes of teacher and student voice, which are relevant to one aspect of equity in educational policies and practices. All names used for the schools and in the profiles are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the graduate students and the schools who participated in the projects.

César Chávez Learning Center: Teacher Voice

The first NIC highlighted included Nela Moreno, David Shapiro, and Roberto Lucario, along with the school's Leadership Team of five teachers and the principal. The NIC elected to work at Dr. Moreno's high school, César Chávez Learning Center, located in a large urban school district in Southern California. Dr. Moreno serves as the principal of this charter high school, grades 9-12, that is situated in the heart of a large city.

César Chávez Learning Center serves 461 students—95.4% Latinx, 32.5% who are English Language Learners. Of the students, 94.4% receive free or reduced lunch. Of the 25 teachers, 36% identify as Hispanic or Latinx, 36% White, 12% Filipino, 8% Black or African American, 4% Native American, and 4% Asian. The principal identifies as Latinx and holds a doctoral degree.

The school's priority is to provide a college preparatory curriculum that develops career readiness. The curriculum invites diverse perspectives and explores issues of human rights and social concerns, seeking to stimulate intellectual curiosity. The goal for graduates is to continue to educate, organize, and advocate as lifelong champions of dynamic social change.

Frederick Douglass Middle School: Student Voice

The second NIC included Kanika Hove, Melanie Lockley, and Paris Morehouse, along with the school's newly-constituted Advisory Community Circle and substantial contributions from all students. The NIC elected to work at Dr. Morehouse's middle school. Just like César Chávez Learning Center, Frederick Douglass Middle School is located in a large urban school district in Southern California. At the time of the project, Dr. Morehouse served as the assistant principal of this traditional, grades 6-8 school. She is now its principal.

Douglass Middle School serves 360 students and nearly 100% children of color: 78% Hispanic or Latinx and 18% Black or African American. Asian students make up 3% of the students and Whites 1%. It is a Title 1 school with 32% English Language Learners. Ninety percent of the students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Of the 18 full-time-equivalent teachers, 35.8% identify as White, 26.3% as Hispanic or Latinx, 22.1% as Asian or Filipino, and 15.8% as Black or African American. The principal identifies as African American and holds a doctoral degree.

The school's mission is "To reimagine public education in low-income communities of color to prepare conscious, critical thinkers who are equipped to graduate from college and create a more equitable and sustainable world." They are committed to five values that include justice, community, curiosity, sustainability, and leadership. The educators seek to enact justice by examining bias, racism and prejudice, providing culturally responsive curriculum, and achieving high levels of academic success for all children regardless of race and class. In their school community, they seek to demonstrate care, collaboration, and respect of the rights and voices of their stakeholders. Curiosity requires questioning, exploration, and innovation. To achieve sustainability, they endeavor to **"**think globally and act locally," adapt, and engage in systems thinking to create a sustainable future. Finally, to foster leadership the educators seek to listen, think critically, advocate, and shift public discourse by recognizing they "are [their] own superheroes."

PROBLEM OF PRACTICE: WHO'S GOT VOICE?

In this section, I describe how the two NICs selected their problems of practice. The project began with each cohort member in my class brainstorming three to five problems of practice they noted in their schools. We, then, co-constructed the NICs based on interests. Once the NICs were established, they determined the one problem of practice to commit to for a 13-week time frame.

César Chávez Learning Center

The first NIC selected to focus on listening and cultivating teacher voice. Many teachers may not have the experience of being heard by their direct administrators, and it may lead to a leadership model where not all stakeholders feel invested in the decision-making process. This leadership problem can exacerbate both real and perceived disenfranchisement of the stakeholders in the decision-making process. In addition, the presence of the administrators in weekly meetings may discourage the individual group members from speaking up, leading to their more passive role in school governance. Moving teachers and staff from passivity in school governance to active participation to support anti-racist leadership was the project goal.

Frederick Douglass Middle School

The second NIC elected to focus their project on students' voice in the culture and community of the school. Based on the results from an earlier student climate survey, the NIC identified fostering student voice as a principal opportunity. Students stated overwhelmingly that teachers and administrators made decisions that affected their education without benefit of consultation. Some examples students provided related to policies regarding discipline and extracurricular activities—how students might influence student disciplinary policies and practices and participate in greater opportunities for new activities on the campus.

TOOLS USED IN THE IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE PROCESS

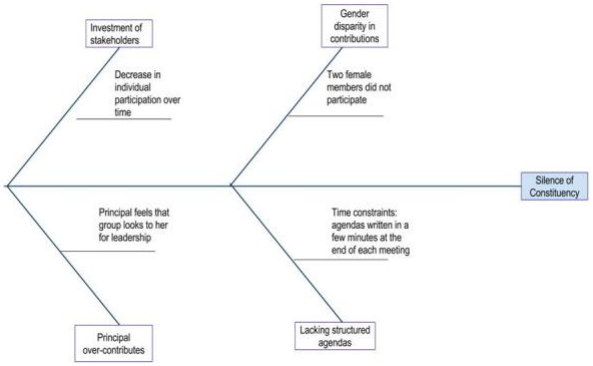
The NICs then began to draft the context for their settings and the problems of practice they would address. Following this, the NICs completed steps using these tools: designing, distributing, and analyzing pre- and post- surveys of relevant stakeholders, developing a theory of improvement that included identifying professional literature relevant to the problem (either teacher voice or student voice), conducting a fishbone analysis, establishing an implementation plan, along with do, study, act (PDSA) iterative cycles, and planning new actions for subsequent events and meetings based on the results of each PDSA cycle. At the end of the project, the NICs conducted self-assessments of what they had accomplished, addressing specifically for their summative class projects three items: What have you learned? What will you do next? What recommendations do you have for use of IS in schools?

The tools provide flexible structures in approaching IS projects and can be modified to accommodate the unique nature of the NIC and the problem to be addressed. Below, I present greater detail on some of the actions each NIC took at their schools. These provide an overall sense of how the NICs addressed issues of teacher and student voice using some of the IS tools.

César Chávez Learning Center

At César Chávez, all teachers serve on one of four school committees. The data the NIC gathered to determine the focus included observations and a pre-survey. The data indicated lack of participation from all members of the team (specifically from the two other female members), clock watchers, strained conversations that lacked flow, and members speaking over each other, with males dominating the conversations. Pre-surveys indicated that teachers felt they had less influence over decision-making. Based on the teachers' analysis, the IS project would focus on the Instructional Leadership Team and their engagement level, with the principal focusing on listening more than talking. The question they addressed was, What impact can the lead administrator's increased listening have on the engagement and/or productivity of the weekly ILT meeting?

Figure 1. Teacher Voice Fishbone Analysis



The fishbone analysis created a holistic visualization and summary of the key findings from the data gathering. Crow et al. (2019) describe in greater detail how to use fishbone analyses for IS projects. The fishbone then helped the team to set the steps of the PDSA cycles, which are described in the PDSA section.

Frederick Douglass Middle School

The NIC developed a pre- and post-survey to ascertain students' priorities for greater voice. Using Mitra's (2018) model, the survey invited student input (N = 199) in three major areas: listening, collaboration, and leadership. The survey presented specific ways in which the student could engage in the school and to what degree they wished to participate in decision-making—as listeners, collaborators, and/or leaders of initiatives and reforms.

The table below indicates the degree to which students indicated the greatest interest in providing their feedback to teachers and administrators. Findings of the survey disclosed three themes for student voice: in academics, in overall schoolwide policies, and in student activities.

This table depicts all findings from the survey. Students were highly interested in spirit weeks, school-wide events, and specialty class choices. It is significant to note that over 80% of students planned to be involved in the planning of spirit weeks and other school-wide events. Engaging in these types of activities allow students to become more well-rounded, more competitive for college, and more prepared for leadership within their careers.

Table 1. Student Voice Survey Results

	Highly Interested %	Somewhat Interested %	A Little Interested %	Not Interested %
Academics: Specialty Classes	41.2	32.2	16.1	10.6
Schoolwide Policies: Discipline	28.1	37.2	20.6	14.1
Schoolwide Policies: School Uniforms	28.6	34.2	14.1	23.1
Student Activities: Assemblies	35.7	38.7	13.1	12.6
Student Activities: Spirit Weeks	53.3	28.6	13.1	5.0
Student Activities: Schoolwide Events	46.2	34.2	10.6	9.0

Note. N = 199 students who took the survey.

Survey results then led to the NIC devising this plan of action:

1. What specifically are we trying to accomplish and what is the theory of improvement?
   a. We are trying to increase student voice by increasing the opportunities for students to give their input on school business.
   b. Improve the school climate by creating opportunities for student voice.
   c. Professional knowledge base is foundational to the theory of improvement (Mintrop, 2018).
2. What changes can we make that might lead to an improvement and why?
   a. Survey (pre- and post-) to understand what each student wants to contribute to. Add an advisory community circle with teacher to further the conversation and focus group.
   b. Implement one of the strategies from the triangulation (interview, survey, etc.)
3. How will we know that a change is an improvement?
   a. Pre and post evaluations
   b. Observation via lunch (participation)

This plan of action then led to two PDSA cycles with interventions. These are described in the next section.

PLAN-DO-STUDY-ACT CYCLES

I next describe the PDSA Cycles in which the two NICs engaged at Chávez Learning Center and Frederick Douglass Middle School. Described as the PDSA cycle that MIT professor W. E. Deming first published in 1993, the PDSA Cycle drives the attempted improvements. I elected to teach my doctoral students the classic, four-step model described by Byrk et al. (2015). The overall goal of

each project was to use this key principle of Improvement Science by engaging in "rapid iterative cycles of testing possible change ideas against data, revising, retesting, and refining" (Bryk, 2017, p. 1). Because students were learning how to use Improvement Science by engaging in a relevant problem of practice in their chosen school in a 13-week period, the NICs engaged in at least 2 PDSA cycles but had no time for more. Overall, the students reported that at least three cycles would have been ideal, but the learning curve of the protocols for the teams and the school community proved steep enough that two were sufficient for the first IS project. What follows is more detail about the PDSA cycles in which the César Chávez and Frederick Douglass NICs engaged.

César Chávez Learning Center

The NIC determined that its first PDSA cycle would consist of the principal inviting more teacher voice by speaking half as often as usual. This was carried out for two meetings, which were recorded. Notes were taken from the recordings. Little changed in the behavior of the stakeholders so a new plan was forged. The second cycle planned for the principal to shift her role to observer and not speak at all. She wrote notes and also recorded the meeting. These together would then become source material for an opening statement at the next meeting. Further, this listening leader approach derived in the second cycle became the norm for other stakeholder groups in the school.

In the second PDSA cycle, the principal removed herself from the lead at the meetings and served as recorder. In her notes, she looked for level of engagement and gender differences in participation. At their next NIC meeting they discussed the themes that had emerged from her observations. These included

- When other members of the Instructional Learning Team (ILT) speak more, that change alone makes for an increased probability that they will be able to contribute new ideas that may not have otherwise been shared.
- It is certainly possible that the ILT members who do not typically speak may be struggling to ideate and will not share information of value.
- The engagement of those voices is indeed the goal of this project regardless of their content.
- We can surmise that more ILT members speaking is indeed an improvement.

Finally, the NIC made recommendations for future work: a listening leadership model will continue to be implemented for the remainder of the school year, an agenda for future meetings will be derived from topics/themes brought up by all constituents, pre- and post-surveys will be conducted, and finally, the principal will apply the listening leadership model to the other three faculty-driven leadership committees. Overall, the NIC reported these observations at the conclusion of the IS project: listening leadership style leads to a more inclusive participation, context of the school site is important in creating relevant agenda, specific members of the group play key role in the communication style, and inequity issues such as gender should be addressed.

Frederick Douglass Middle School

The NIC's PDSA Cycle 1 planning phase including survey development and setting the timeline for the 13-week project. During the Do phase, the NIC distributed the survey to all students, analyzed findings, brainstormed, and considered possible solutions. During the next phase, Study, the NIC revisited the findings from the survey. Finally, for the Act phase, the NIC tried out various ways to address increasing student voice such as adding an Advisory Community Circle and implementing a more robust and inclusive Student Council Election. For the second cycle, the NIC now met with newly-formed student groups and discussed how to establish a PDSA cycle that would include the other items that the student survey indicated were priorities, such as engagement in providing leadership for specialty classes.

Overall, the NIC reported that one of the future issues to address was discussions with students about which areas of interest should involve consultation, collaboration, or direct leadership in decision-making. This aligned with Mitra's (2018) work which informed the original survey: it is not enough to simply ask where students would like more voice in their schooling. It is essential to determine *how* students will engage. Finally, the NIC was clear that to engage student voice meant engaging in more robust leadership development skillfulness for all students.

LESSONS LEARNED FOR INCREASING EQUITY IN SCHOOLS

In summarizing what we learned through these IS projects and our efforts to address anti-racist teaching and leading by re-visioning teacher and student voice, I present several insights. First, I offer overall considerations, and then I provide specific considerations for cultivating teacher and student voice in schools. I caution, however, that none of these suggestions is an easy fix for seemingly intractable problems in our schools. Applying the principles of IS to each suggestion in a thoughtful and systematic manner, however, can garner new pathways for your school community.

Cultivating Compassionate, Anti-Racist Schools

The broad theme of cultivating anti-racist schools emerged through individual reflection, small group discussion, and large group synthesis of the broader lessons learned by addressing problems of practice aimed at providing voices for all. To cultivate anti-racist schools, all educators can engage in at least three specific actions: model equity, cultivate empathy and care ethics, and teach IS to all. I next describe each of them in more detail.

Model Equity

Equity and anti-racist leadership in schools start with the leaders modeling behavior that allow for the voices of all (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Bryk, 2017). Faculty and student voice are critical to establishing equitable administrative structures that build on greater leadership participation and skillfulness (Lambert, 2015). While many terms have become political flashpoints, educators across the PK12 and higher education landscape are seeking to address anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion in ways that still support a pluralistic society, and there are ample resources existing which can become companion projects in schools. We all, regardless of race or ethnicity, gender, class, level of education, come hard-wired with hidden prejudices (Eberhardt, 2019). We can view this circumstance as a finger-pointing event or we can embrace it as an opportunity to apply strategies to understand our biases and grow and learn as a school community.

Cultivate Empathy and "Care Ethics"

Leaders must cultivate empathy through listening to faculty and students, and all within the school community should likewise address care ethics (Fernandez, 2016; Noddings, 2012a, 2013). Specific language of caring strategies that help to build trust in our schools include explicitly learning and practicing the attributes of attention, empathy, response, reciprocity, and receptivity (Noddings, 2012b). *La cultura cara*, as Shawn Ginwright calls it (2016), is a caring culture in which educators, children, and family communities as activists, "are learning, searching, and exploring new and bold pathways to transform matters of the heart" (p. 140).

Teach Improvement Science

Critical to a successful NIC is direct instruction in the IS protocols used to address the problems of practice (McKay, 2017). One of the critical lessons learned from teaching my doctoral students IS and expecting them to execute an authentic IS project in 13 weeks was acknowledging the steep learning curve for both their colleagues or students in the schools and themselves. Ideally, IS is taught in designated student classes, professional development settings, and family engagement settings either in a more concentrated timeframe with a lower-stakes project to practice the protocols or over a longer period of time, with ample attention to both the protocols and to the problem of practice.

Educators need to consider the value of committing to consistent protocols that are routinized in the life of the school community and seeking to engage all stakeholders, including with the families. Abundant resources exist to support schools as they embark on IS projects. I have provided a number of these in this article, and several books as excellent resources to explore many possibilities such as Crow et al., 2019; Mintrop, 2018; and Perry et al., 2020.

Cultivating Teacher Voice

César Chávez's NIC felt that they began to make progress with teacher voice during their 13-week endeavor, but they recognized that the principal's change in behavior was but one small part of the larger portrait to address levels of participation and skillfulness of all teachers in the work of school leadership. During our doctoral class, we were engaged in a second project where students were assessing the leadership capacity of their schools (Lambert et al., 2015). Dr. Moreno and the school's Leadership Team felt that this was a fertile area of inquiry moving forward. I describe here Lambert's work and two additional ways to cultivate teacher voice.

Leadership Capacity

Lambert et al. (2016) have taken constructivism and applied the concepts to leadership. Lambert has an extensive oeuvre on constructivist leadership, and this brief introduction cannot begin to do justice to her work, but it is one of the key theories and approaches to praxis to establishing anti-racist schools where all in the community experience their voices as valued. (See, for example, Lambert, 1998, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2005, 2006 and Lambert et al., 2002.) One of my students wrote, "When I think of constructivism in my current context, I am referring to educational theory that suggests learners are actively involved in constructing their own knowledge over time. Before being exposed to [Lambert et al.'s work (2016)], I did not imagine that the same concept could apply in leadership. Now that I have been introduced to the notion of Constructivist Leadership, I cannot imagine any other form being more effective or more inclusive." As a companion to our Improvement Science work, I have used Lambert et al.'s (2016) most recent handbook as a way for my students to gauge the leadership capacity of their schools.

Lambert (1998) asserts that leadership capacity involves several principles: broad-based, skillful participation of all in the work of school leadership, inquiry-based use of information to inform decisions and practice, defined roles and responsibilities for all in the school community that reflect broad involvement and collaboration, reflective practice and innovation as accepted norms, and high student achievement for all as an outcome. It is noteworthy that these principles mirror IS principles: voices of all are to be valued and cultivated at high levels of participation and skillfulness. Examining a school's leadership capacity and enacting protocols that encourage teacher, student, and family voice directly foster schools of justice and equity for all.

Leadership Development

Teacher as leader is not a new concept in education literature (York-Barr & Duke, 2004), but it remains underdeveloped as a routinized protocol and component of professional growth and little is still known about outcomes of teacher leadership efforts and their impact (Nguyen et al., 2020). Furthermore, studies suggest that while there is intersection between principal leadership and teacher leadership, there are differences that warrant attention (Harris & Jones, 2019). We know, for example, that teachers are the single most important factor in student achievement in the classroom (Leithwood et al., 2004), but that the school principal is overall most important for school change (Grissom et al., 2021). This, then, presents an opportunity for IS projects at the school level and for teacher professional development (Harris et al., 2017; Bond et al., 2020). Noteworthy is that leadership of all within the school requires attention to developing culturally responsive school leaders who understand the inextricable link between equity and achievement and how to enact organizations with that mindset (Khalifa, 2018; Khalifa et al., 2016).

Equity Audits

There is a growing body of literature and praxis on equity audits, which take several forms and are sometimes called equity curriculum audits or "visits." They lend themselves well to IS projects (Fabillar, 2018; Roegman et al., 2020). In one example, equity indicators include examination of achievement status of students, educational opportunities, socio-emotional supports, and climate and culture (Fabillar, 2018). Teachers can engage in data collection within those four indicators and then initiate PDSA cycles to address gaps. Roegman and her colleagues (2020) emphasize the fundamental importance of equity-minded leaders to guide equity visits. In other words, equity visits are not only something you do; they presuppose that those engaged in the work are likewise engaged in self-examination on equity-focused leadership.

Cultivating Student Voice

While the NIC at Frederick Douglass Middle School made a strong start in including student voice in the governance of the school, much more can be done. Policies, procedures, and protocols need to become a part of everyday schooling so that student voice is not merely decoration, but part of the fundamental fabric of education

(Charteris & Smardon, 2019a; Charteris & Smardon, 2019b). Some of their recommendations and mine include the following: addressing student leadership, enacting student-initiated and student-led research, and organizing students for policy advocacy.

Student Leadership

Coffey and Lavery (2018) assert that "student leadership can sometimes be little more than manipulation, decoration, or tokenism where teachers use student leaders in a contrived manner to promote their own agendas" (p. 189). To counteract this propensity requires educators to revisit the role of student leadership in the school. Conduct an equity audit to determine who has voice and in what contexts. Seek to expand leadership development for students and to engage with a broader range of voices (Woodward, 2018). We know, for example, that Black males thrive in classrooms with teachers who examine and modify their perceptions of Black male students and who engage in culturally relevant teaching that validates student voices (Woodward, 2018). If this is the case for classrooms, it is not a stretch to consider the relevance for overall voice in student leadership and for educators to seek ways to expand our understanding of their engagement in school (Kouzes & Posner, 2018).

Student-Initiated and Student-Led Research

A growing body of literature indicates that teaching the students how to conduct empirical investigations leads to increased engagement in school (Rubin et al., 2017; Brion-Meisels, G., & Alter, Z., 2018; Buttimer, 2019; and Spindel Bassett & Geron, 2020). Just as student leadership positively affects students' relationship to school by fostering greater school-wide collaboration and trust, increased attention on student growth and development, and greater support through teamwork (Pedersen, 2012), so can student engagement with research.

Student Organizing for Policy Advocacy

One of the most powerful ways to establish student voice in schools is when students see that the work they are doing can effect actual change in the lives of others (Conner & Rosen, 2016). A particularly effective way to enroll students in authentic work is to work with community organizations through community-based learning projects—sometimes also called service-learning (Reilly & Sanders, 2019; Sims, 2010). Not only do students have the opportunity to work in their communities, but to address real world issues that they face. Policy advocacy through storytelling is one such strategy to move from talk to action (Moyer et al., 2020). While the strategy can be used in a variety of contexts and with varying voices, Moyer and his colleagues describe the use of personal storytelling to enact policy changes regarding relevant topics such as suspension and expulsion. The students' personal narratives bring to life statistics, which lack the heart and soul of discipline policies that disproportionately affect students of color.

IN CONCLUSION: INSPIRATION FOR THE JOURNEY

> When students have more buy-in, they are more likely to hold themselves and their classmates accountable. Students' desires to be involved demonstrate tenacity and prowess. It is crucial that educators foster these desires so the students will not lose sight of their agency.
>
> Applying Improvement Science along with students is a great way to get students involved in the betterment of their campus. It allows them to increase their level of ownership over their campus community.
>
> The formal Improvement Science approach is a very useful method for educators, especially with a social justice focus, to tackle a particular goal or concern.

These quotes represent some of the take-aways from my doctoral students' experiences using IS in NICs to address challenging issues in their schools. Equitable schools require the dedicated and focused efforts of all in the school constellation (Delpit, 2019). If school leaders do not enact authentic means of ensuring teacher and student voice in the work of schools, then equity and justice are just talk. If we do not move past talk, in the words of James Baldwin, we face this chronic malady: "I can't believe what you say, because I see what you do." Rather than the authentic, the inauthentic abides. Improvement Science invites us to engage in meaningful ways with these challenges because the protocols invite all partners to have a seat at the table and a voice in identifying pressing problems of practice. Improvement Science embodies what it means to be a member of a learning organization through ways that are accessible and welcoming to all. Improvement Science projects that directly address anti-racism and equity can move us from caring about to caring for our schools authentically (Reilly, 2005; Noddings, 2013).

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