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FLOURISH: USING FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY TO CAPTURE KEY
STAKEHOLDER PERCEPTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE IN
AN ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION HIGH SCHOOL

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Doctor of Education

by

Michael L. Paynter

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING A SCHOOL CULTURE AND CLIMATE WHERE STUDENTS CAN
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This study is a qualitative action research project that involved focus groups of key stakeholders at an alternative education high school including: students, teaching staff, classified staff, supervisors, families, and collaborative partners. A semi-structured interview guide was used to discover their perceptions of a school culture and climate where students FLOURISH. The word FLOURISH is used in this research to describe the optimal experience of thriving and growing as well as an acronym that contains the elements that a literature review found to be important for such environments serving the most vulnerable student populations. This type of research is especially important in light of the recent transformation to educational planning and finance in California called LCFF (Local Control Funding Formula) and its creation of the Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPs) with their mandate for stakeholder input. Finally, and most importantly, emerging research shows schools that improve their culture and climate can counter the "school to prison pipeline" effect so often experienced by vulnerable youth in the alternative education system. Both systematic analysis and a constructivist approach were used in coding and memoing to track the presence of existing themes from the literature review and to capture new ones emerging from the transcripts. Leadership, systems, equity and implementation implications were explored as secondary questions.

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"School Culture and Climate" is the current catchphrase for describing all the elements that comprise the feeling, atmosphere, actions, interactions, environment, motivations, and intentions of an educational setting (Gruenert, 2008; Van Houtte, 2005). A school culture and climate can be anywhere along a spectrum ranging from harmful and detrimental, such as in Valenzuela's (2010) "subtractive schooling" where rules and norms actually take away from a student's sense of identity and worthiness all the way to what I am calling one that allows students to "flourish". Flourish is a term, meaning to thrive, grow and prosper, that captures the essence of the result of positive and supportive measures designed to bring out the best in students, no matter their background, histories or challenges.

Used as an acronym, "FLOURISH" can also outline the core facets that research literature finds as important components for a thriving, healthy, and just environment that attends to the most vulnerable student populations keeping them engaged, connected, and successful in school. Namely, a school culture and climate setting that is Flexible (Brown & Barila, 2012, Search Institute, 2015) Learning oriented (Payton et al., 2000), Organizationally minded (Senge et al., 2012), Understanding (McInerney & McKlindon, 2014), Restorative (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013), Interested in growth (Kegan & Lahey, 2009), Student-centered (Robinson, 2011) and Humble (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). The 8 domains can also be operationalized as shown in the listing below with further references.

1. Flexible – The school fosters resiliency. Staff practices thoughtfully respond to risk factors and build protective factors/assets in students. (Brown & Barila, 2012; Garmezy, 1993; Rutter, 1987, 1993, 2012; Scales, Benson, Roehlkepartain, Sesma, & van Dulmen, 2006; Search Institute, 2015).

2. Learning Oriented – The staff and school prioritize Non-Cognitive Outcomes (NCOs) in their outcomes measurements. Policies and curriculum are in place that integrate social-emotional learning and growth into academic and other school efforts. (Duckworth, 2007; Elias et al., 1997; Farrington et al., 2012; Meyer & Strambler, 2016; Payton et al., 2000; Zins et al, 2007).

3. Organizationally Minded – The school views each student and staff holistically. Systems thinking and tools are employed to create policies and practices for the students, staff and physical environment. (Diamond & Lee, 2011; Meadows, 2008; Noggle, Steiner, Minami, & Khalsa, 2012; Penedo & Dahn, 2005; Senge et al., 2012).

4. Understanding – The school and staff are adept at sensitively responding to the effects of trauma, histories of adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and stressors that may underlie student's behavior. (Benckendorf, 2012; Ogden, 2003; Fallot & Harris, 2008; Fisher, 2001; McInerney & McKlindon, 2014; Perry, 2006, 2014; Walkley & Cox, 2013).

5. Restorative – The school aims to repair and reintegrate students when harm has occurred or rules broken. Policies and practices are in place that both staff and students understand and can depend upon to restore their relationship to the school and people therein when breaks manifest. (Drewery & Winslade, 2003; González, 2012, 2015; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011; McCluskey et al, 2008; Schiff, 2013; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; Wachtel, 2013).

6. Interested in Growth – The school values making mistakes, being vulnerable and taking healthy risks. Pedagogical practices are in place that promote finding the balance between disengagement and overwhelm. (Conger, Williams, Little, Masyn, & Shebloski, 2009; Dalgard, Mykletun, Rognerud, Johansen, & Zahl, 2007; Dweck, 2012; Kegan & Lahey, 2009; Scott, 2009; Steele, 1988; Vygotsky, 1987).

7. Student-Centered – The school has a rigorous, differentiated, equitable and inclusive pedagogy using practices such as Project Based Learning (PBL). Staff value and include student voice, input and learning interests. (Freire, 2000; Nave, 2015; Robinson, 2011; Senge et al., 2012; Wolfe, Steinberg, & Hoffman, 2013).

8. Humble – The school and staff value curiosity and inclusion regarding culture, gender, equity, systems and power. Policies, practices and curriculum exist that support the respectful learning and understanding of differences. (Dorado, 2015;

McGhee Banks & Banks, 1995; Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002).

While I have combined the terms school culture and school climate, there is much written on the difference between the two (Hoy, 1990; Macneil, Prater & Busch, 2009; Roach & Kratochwill, 2004). A theme emerges from these authors that speaks to school culture comprising more the assumptions and observable actions, whereas school climate is made up of the perceptions and "feel" of the total environment. In other words, school culture may be the unseen rules and norms that are slowly revealed to folks as they learn the environment. School climate is the feeling a person has from being in the environment, which may be created by the cultural rules and actions that exist in a given school setting (Gruenert, 2008; Houtte, 2005). Roach & Kratochwill (2004) outline methodologies aligned with each concept, noting more psychometric, survey oriented metrics for climate and more ethnographic, sociological evaluative tools for culture. Van Houtte (2005) claims that culture is also more malleable, and for that reason a better target for change and intervention. Gruenert (2008) goes even further and states that culture determines climate.

Add to this research, numerous organizations offering a mixture of labels with the words "school culture and climate", using one or the other or both words, to purport their definition, standards and/or overview of the concepts (Greater Good Science Center, 2016; Kickboard for Schools, 2016; National School Climate Center, 2016), and the definitions can get murky. For this research project the definitions used by Van Houtte (2005) are adopted, particularly that culture is defined as the set of shared meanings, shared beliefs, and shared assumptions of the members of the organization. Drawing

from Anderson (1982), she then states that climate includes the total environmental quality within a given organization. This research is interested in both concepts and often combines the two since it is focused on stakeholder perceptions that include both of them. However, any discussion regarding change strategies or systems implications will keep the distinction in mind.

Research links positive school climates with improved academic outcomes such as fewer suspensions, increased graduation rates and attendance, and reduced school violence (Ohlson, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). This is crucial information of serving education's most vulnerable students, such as those involved in foster care, the juvenile justice system, experiencing homelessness or parent incarceration, and/or ones struggling with academic failure, mental health issues, substance use/abuse, and more. These are the most at-risk students for early school leaving and likely participants of the justice system (Baglivio et al., 2014; Bridgeland, Dilulio, Morrison, Civic, & Peter, 2006). These are also the students, because of their multiple risk factors and need for a flexible and accommodating school setting, that the alternative education system typically serves in the school continuum of education placements (Foley & Pang, 2006; Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998).

The "school to prison pipeline" is a conceptual metaphor that describes a trajectory leading to incarceration through multiple government systems such as probation, law enforcement and the district attorney's office, initiated from discipline events in schools such as referrals, suspensions and expulsions (Boyd, 2009; González, 2012). Often there are equity or racial differences involved with the discipline enforcement and hence

subsequent over-representation of African American and Latino students as a percentage in this "pipeline" (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, & Peterson, 2002; Skiba et al., 2011). Additionally, youth with abuse and difficult histories may have added risk of becoming adjudicated as adults (Jung, Herrenkohl, Klika, Lee, & Brown, 2015). Taken together, there is urgency to discover key elements of a school setting that will serve the most vulnerable populations, regardless of experience or ethnicity, in a way that keeps them from a path of incarceration and further government system involvement; In other words, a "positive" school culture and climate may stop the "school to prison pipeline" while the youth are still on the school side of the "pipe".

This study was conducted to investigate the factors that key stakeholders perceived to be key ingredients of a school culture and climate where students can flourish and to document specific experiences and descriptions of this culture and climate in the hope that the information can be used to counter the "school to prison pipeline" (González, 2012; Skiba, 2004) and lead towards greater academic and life success for alternative education students, those the most at risk for negative academic and social outcomes (Quinn, Poirier, Faller, Gable, & Tonelson, 2006).

How to Begin to FLOURISH

There is research about many of the FLOURISH domain areas interfacing with various institutional systems. For example, the "U" domain area, which represents the understanding of, and best responses to, trauma, has emerged in various research projects about teaching trauma informed care in teacher professional development (Grant, 2014; Stonebloom, 2016), implementing trauma informed systems in child welfare departments

and educational settings (Wakely & Cox, 2013; Walker, 2009; West, Day, Somers, & Baroni, 2014), using Trauma Informed Care with students or youth in systems of care, child welfare and schools (Cohen et al., 2009; Fallot & Harris, 2008; Ko et al., 2008), and studying Trauma Informed Care in, or for, the school setting itself (DeGregorio & McLean, 2013).

Similar research examples of how each domain area has been studied is reviewed in Chapter Two (e.g., Social-Emotional Learning (Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg, & Walberg, 2007)), Restorative Practices (Drewery & Winslade, 2003; McCluskey et al., 2008), Resilience and Protective Factors (Masten 2001; Roehlkepartain, Hong & Scales, 2005; Rutter, 1987), and more. This researcher, however, could not find anything specifically written using all the components of FLOURISH in a school culture and climate taken together. Further, few studies explore feedback from the different stakeholders in a particular educational environment, namely the unique perspectives of teachers, school staff, students, administrators, community members and families at one school setting. This feedback is crucial in California, where a new accountability and finance system has been enacted (LCFF – Local Control Funding Formula), mandating documentation of such involvement to the creation of plans for each school district (LCAPS – Local Control Accountability Plans) (Affeldt, Villagara, & Gupta, 2006; CDE, 2016). While each layer of inquiry is helpful, a paucity of research exists looking at all the domains of a school culture and climate as captured by the perceptions of all the connected stakeholders. Hence the impetus for this research project is to understand the perceptions of all vested stakeholders, examine the effects of the new California laws,

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and most importantly to explore how to best support vulnerable student populations in alternative education to stay engaged in school and out of the school to prison pipeline.

The word transformative, mentioned above, brings in the last layer of the research context and draws from two systems thinkers. First is Donella Meadows (2008), who wrote a seminal systems theory book entitled, "Thinking in Systems", where she outlines, among many things, the top ways to change a system. Parked at the head of this list is shifting the goals of the system and/or transcending the existing paradigm. It is the hope of this research to draw forth data that will start this process by identifying key elements or ingredients, fitting into the FLOURISHing definition and/or emerging frameworks that have the potential to create a transformative school culture and climate, one where growth and change and support for students is the norm.

The second systems resource or framework is from Kegan and Lahey (2016), who propose creating Deliberately Developmental (DDOs). In their structure and research, prioritizing the personal and professional growth of the employees is paramount to any specific business or non-profit endeavor that the particular work/service entity is created to produce. It is the researcher's hope that such a priority also emerges from focus group, survey, and artifact data gathered at a particular alternative education high school in central California.

This research will consider both the domain specific ingredients and elements of a school culture and climate where students can FLOURISH as well as the process by which stakeholders engage, interact and either support or resist those elements. This developmental organizational view brings into the picture the idea that the staff, if not all

stakeholders, need a context to flourish and grow if the goal of the organization is to succeed (Kegan & Lahey, 2009).   Therefore, the semi-structured questioning route process includes space for all factors that affect the school culture and climate, including the treatment, experiences and feelings of the stakeholders regarding their own support, safety, and challenges operating at the site. Additionally, the process and atmosphere of the focus groups will mirror the values of a DDO and thus the researcher will set norms that include: the equalizing of power, equity of voice and building of relationships that can hold vulnerability, discomfort and challenge in a safe, and empowering a constructive way to elicit the best chance for the focus groups to share complete and honest perceptions. Research suggests this type of honest, transparent, and open structure will lead to greater chances of clear communication, success of group efforts, and even personal growth by the stakeholders involved (Gerzon, 2006; Hallowell, 2011; Kegan & Lahey, 2009, 2016).

Additionally, the Alternative Education Department, which oversees the high school studied in this research has a rich theoretical unpinning from two key sources: Character Education and the International Center for Leadership in Education (ICLE). The first is originally based on the idea of the importance of moral and performance character education, or the pursuit of excellence and ethics as described by Likona and Davidson (2005). An institute was even created called The Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, referring to Respect and Responsibility following the traditional "reading, writing, and arithmetic" as the first 3 Rs. These ideas laid the groundwork for the Expected School Wide Learning Results (ESLRs) that the larger school system adopted, namely that the Alternative

Education School System would create students that are "Literate, Ethical and Empowered". Literate and ethical matched the smart and good of Likona & Davison's work, and empowered was drawn from the concept of being "ready" for career, life, and post-secondary learning.

The "ready" concept was also taken from the second influence on the ESLRs; Bill Daggett (2005), founder of ICLE. Daggett described a model of learning that coupled academic progression with application and adaptability progression, leading a student to be both intellectually prepared for next steps, but also functionally "ready" to apply, use, and adapt that same information and knowledge to increasingly challenging contexts. Daggett also coined the 3 Rs of Rigor, Relevance, and Relationship as key qualities of successful schools.

The researcher, based on literature review and direct experience as an administrator within the alternative education system for 17 years hypothesized that most of the key experiences and/or essential ingredients that emerged from the focus group discussions would be able to be placed in one of the domains under the definition of FLOURISH. However, the words used and framing of the domains may be different than current research understandings, and certainly could include surprising and new categories of experiences or essential ingredients. It may also be that some areas thought to be of importance, such as the eight domains listed in this paper, or other typical school culture and climate initiatives, will not be indicated in the research findings. Secondly, given that typically within school settings there exists an intrinsic power structure that places more value on the perspectives of principals and staff than on those of students, families

and community members, the themes that emerge from stakeholder focus groups have direct implications for leadership and equity.

Research Questions

Given the background, rationale, population and setting discussed in this project, the central research questions are listed below:

Central research questions

1. What are the essential ingredients that create a school culture and climate where students can flourish according to the various stakeholders of a public alternative education high school?

2. Are there key experiences that operationalize these essential ingredients?

3. What factors (actions, attitudes, polices and/or practices,) support these key experiences and essential ingredients?

4. What factors (actions, attitudes, polices and/or practices,) inhibit (or prevent) these key experiences and essential ingredients?

Secondary questions - (Implications)

a. What are the leadership implications in the findings, especially related to creating a Deliberately Developmental Organization and/or systems level response?

b. What are the equity or social justice implications that emerge from the findings, especially involving disrupting the school to prison pipeline?

c. How are the primary themes captured by the perceptions of the focus groups represented in the myriad prevention and intervention programs offered to the educational system in the form of school culture and climate initiatives, including the FLOURISH definition offered in this research? Is anything different or missing?

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Alternative Education

The term Alternative Education began in the United States during the 1960s. Initially, it referred to educational endeavors that were truly counter to the traditional, comprehensive system. These were schools with philosophical ties to the "free school movement" of Neill (1960) that gave students much more say in a democratic decision making process, and to "freedom schools" which were geared towards a conscious unschooling of Black Americans through the use of their history and social movements (Quinn et al., 2006). With the passage of Title 1 and other federal mandates, from President Johnson's war on poverty with efforts to amend discrepancies in achievement between poorer, and/or ethnic minority, students and their wealthier, and/or whiter counterparts, took hold, a new Alternative Education context took shape in parts of the country (Raywid, 1981). Over the course of several decades, more and more states enacted policies and procedures through their boards of education to serve students "pushed-out" by various factors from racism to poverty to failing grades. Nearly every state and the District of Columbia now has some form of "alternative" to their standard offering, ensuring students involved with the juvenile justice system, facing expulsion, or experiencing significant school failure academically or behaviorally have a place to be educated (Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

Alternative Education settings in the positive frame often offer small classroom and school settings, low teacher to student ratio, differentiated instruction, supplemental vocational education, and less stressful demands regarding transitions, homework, and

rigid behavior policies. The National Center on Educational Statistics, over a decade ago,

reported there are more than 10,000 of these schools serving more than a half million

students (Foley & Pang, 2006). At their best, these schools offer a second chance at

school success and learning. Because the population that shows up at these institutions

are some of the highest risk students for teen pregnancy, drug use and abuse, gang

involvement, school dropout and eventual incarceration, it is imperative that the schools

find every way to connect to and keep engaged all youth who move through this system.

Hence, there is an urgency and need for research on the school culture and climate at a

representative high school.

The School to Prison Pipeline

The ACLU (2015) defines the school-to-prison-pipeline as "policies and practices

that push our nation's school children, especially our most at-risk children, out of the

classrooms and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems" (p. 1). They go on to say

it starts with inadequate school settings such as a lack of qualified teachers and supplies,

as well as overburdened staffing ratios, and gets exacerbated by zero-tolerance discipline

policies coupled with an over representation of suspensions and expulsions of ethnic

minority students. It also includes policies that quickly or aggressively enact

involvement with law enforcement that can lead to court appearances and incarceration.

Additionally, students can be pushed-out of traditional settings, making it more likely

they will be disengaged with school and drop out (Boyd, 2009; González, 2012).

Zero Tolerance policies have been proven to be ineffective for most of the reasons

they were enacted, namely to be preventative of school violence and a consistent

punishment for infractions committed (Skiba, 2004). Furthermore, they have been utilized disproportionately with ethnic minority students, particularly African American and Latino/a youth, and have crowded out more restorative practices, which may prevent youth from having to exit their original school (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Skiba et al., 2011; Skiba et al., 2002).

The "school to prison pipeline" fuels a sense of urgency to discover key elements of a school culture and climate that will serve the most vulnerable populations, regardless of experience or ethnicity, in a way that keeps them from a path of further involvement in government delinquency and incarceration systems. Literature from a variety of fields offers a number of possible domains that may contribute to the creation of just such a school setting. They can be captured in the previously established acronym FLOURISH.

Each domain is discussed further in sections that follow. While one of the domains, Understanding, will speak to specific trauma informed practices in the schools, it is worth first describing this area in more general terms given the pervasive and profound existence of trauma in the lives of so many Alternative Education Students, as shown in research on juvenile delinquents (Baglivio et al., 2014), foster youth (DeGregorio & McLean, 2013), and those exposed to violence (Ozer & Weinstein, 2004), among others (Layne, 2008). Therefore both the ACE Study (Felitti et al, 1998) and the roots of trauma informed care (Najavits, 2002; Perry, 2006, 2014; Perry & Hambrick) will be added to "the school to prison pipeline" (Skiba, 2014) as pillars for understanding and motivating the change needed in school culture and climate in Alternative Education secondary school settings.

ACE Study

The landmark research project known as The ACE Study (Adverse Childhood Experiences) found a striking correlation between significant negative and impactful experiences in childhood and later adult increased risk for poorer medical, behavioral and psychological outcomes (Felitti et al, 1998). Dr. Felitti (1998), lead researcher for the study, noted that these poorer outcomes ranged from mild impairments in social, cognitive, and emotional functioning all the way up to early death. There was also a relationship found between the number of adverse childhood experiences one had and the level of risk for later negative outcomes. Study participants reporting between four and eight ACEs had the worst probability for smoking, drinking, drug use, obesity, heart disease, attempted suicides, and more (Brown, 2012).

Alternative Education often has large populations of students who have experienced adverse childhood experiences such as physical, emotional or sexual abuse, parent neglect or abandonment, witnessing domestic violence, or having a family member incarcerated, as well as those who may suffer from a mental illness and/or drug or alcohol addiction (Aron, 2006; Foley & Pang, 2006).

Neuroscience and Education

There is an increasing body of work about the impact of trauma on brain development and how this may impede later functioning (Diseth, 2005; DeGregorio & McLean, 2013; Perry & Dobson, 2014). Using a different lens than attachment, but still putting high importance on the early interactions with primary caregivers, trauma neuroscience theory postulates there is a biological adaptation that occurs when inadequate, unreliable or even

harmful interactions become too common. The exact amount of neglect, poverty, stress,

or abuse that triggers this change is not precisely known, but there are high correlations

between those children drawn into the child welfare system (hence meeting their

minimum criteria for abuse or neglect) and traumatic brain alterations (Berkowitz et al.,

2008). Other estimations are as high as 25% of youth in child serving systems such as

schools, daycare, and mental health clinics have been exposed to a traumatic event. This

is often much higher in urban areas and in poverty stricken neighborhoods, nearing 80%

(Berkowitz et al., 2008).

Even the term trauma carries some debate. The newest way to speak about the term

involves using a "big T" and a "little t". In "big T" trauma, the more historical definition

of seeing, experiencing, or being exposed to a life-threatening event is used. Most

commonly, this was known as one of the criteria for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder). This disorder has a complex and lengthy diagnostic criteria, which includes:

the exposure to threatened death, serious injury or sexual violence intrusive symptoms

such as involuntary dreams, memories or reactions; negative alterations in cognition;

avoidance of stimuli; marked alterations in reactivity; dissociative symptoms and more

(American Psychiatric Association, 2013). By its very name, it is insinuated there was

something that occurred, which now is in the past and yet symptoms disrupting the

present are still happening. While this is incredibly important and sadly too often the case

with children, the other, "little t" trauma definition is even more prevalent (van der Kolk,

2014).

"Little t" trauma has also been called complex trauma, developmental trauma disorder, traumatic stress, or toxic stress (McInerney & McKlindon, 2015; Perry, 2006; van der Kolk, 2014). Here there may not have been a single extreme incident that can be pinpointed, such as a traumatic event. Instead there is pervasive and ongoing stress in the environment, such as poverty, which may produce food insecurity, familial discord, broken families, and increased maladaptive coping mechanisms such as drug use and domestic violence. In these settings, whether the pattern is set from a lack of resources materially, psychologically or emotionally, the result can be the same, namely an altered response system, brain based, that aims to protect itself. This can result in a child being stuck in a near constant fight, flight, or freeze state, further causing stress and disruption in their body and life, creating a cycle of ongoing traumatic stress and response (Perry, 2008). Perry (2008) describes the process via brain development and cortical structures, noting that the early years of a child's life, if exposed to chronic threats, can create organizational structures for brain functioning that over-sensitize the child's stress response, creating a template for automatic responses which lean too heavily on brainstem driven functions like dissociation and hyper-vigilance.

This template is ever present in a child's (or later adult's) relationship and coping orientation and skill sets. While they manifest in all areas of living, of particular interest in this research endeavor is how and when they arise in the school setting. Most of the research and literature over the past 20 years has looked at children in extreme systems such as child protective services, juvenile delinquency court and substance and mental health treatment facilities that have high rates of complex trauma (Finkelhor, Turner,

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Hamby, & Ormrod, 2011), not nearly as much has been explored in mainstream (comprehensive) or alternative (court and community) education settings regarding these rates or how to respond.

Generating stakeholder perceptions on factors that impact school culture and climate may increase the chances of successfully creating policies, practices and systems that support students to flourish, both academically and as well rounded socially-emotionally intelligent youth. Taken as a group, and if implemented well, the literature review domains which make up the acronym FLOURISH may act as an antidote to the ACEs, traumatic life histories and the school to prison pipeline and the survival functioning that often accompanies each.

Equity Issues

There are numerous influencing factors at play in the relationships between staff and students at any given school site. Some of those factors can been viewed as larger equity disparities that may exist in, and/or be generated by, bigger societal structures. Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Anyon (1981) each wrote about a reproduction model of education in the context of larger economic and social systems that use schools to mirror the different strata existing outside their walls. Bowles and Gintis (1976) noted,

> "Schools foster legitimate inequality through the ostensibly meritocratic manner by which they reward and promote students…they create and reinforce patterns of social class, racial and sexual identification among students which allow them to relate 'properly' to their eventual standing in the hierarchy of authority and status in the production process" (p. 11).

Anyon (1981), researching and ultimately reinforcing this notion, studied four distinct schools in New Jersey representing varied socio-economic status (SES) families and

neighborhoods. She noted important differences in the power relationships, the way curriculum was taught, the physical environment that surrounds the students from bookshelves to trees, and found particular ways in which their initial differences from birth are sustained and solidified during the schooling process.

Valenzuela (2010) wrote about an equity disparity in high school with certain minority youth and called it "subtractive schooling" wherein the student is slowly un-empowered by removing the pieces of identity that give them meaning, roots, and a sense of belonging. It is a process that does not see them as unique and valuable, but rather attempts to force them to assimilate into a psycho-social-cultural structure that may not fit, be comfortable, or even desired by the student.

The School Culture and Climate Domains: FLOURISH

1. Flexibility –building assets, resilience and protective factors. The Search Institute in San Jose California has done tremendous work on developing a catalog of developmental assets that indicate increased resilience for youth (Search Institute, 2015). They provide a model of 40 developmental assets in eight categories, specifically: Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, and Positive Identity. These assets are made up of behaviors, skills, relationships, and experiences. The more assets one has, the more protective factors they possess, and hence the more resilient they may be better able to weather the storms of setbacks and hardships. The Search Institute's language for flourishing and thriving is "successful and contributing", meaning with enough developmental assets, youth may grow into those types of young adults.

The Search Institute's research over the last 20 years has come alongside, and/or perhaps stemmed from earlier work on resilience. This key concept has many attributes and definitions. Stewart, Reid, and Mangham (1997) summarized the common themes of resilience as: 1) being a balance between stress and the ability to cope (Rutter 1987, 1993) and 2) being dynamic (i.e., just because one was resilient in the past, increased risk factors in the present may still overwhelm them in the future). However, resilience in the past does strengthen the capability going forward (Garmezy, 1993). 3) Being developmental (i.e., changing over time with different attributes at different phases and ages of life (Werner, 1993)). 4) As important during times of transition, whether those are natural life cycle events or sudden changes due to outside circumstances (Luthar & Ziglar, 1991).

Using this foundation, the Search Institute has done some of its own studies, longitudinal and academic setting focused. They found a correlation between number of protective factors, or developmental assets, and GPA, indicating the more protective factors one had, the higher their GPA (Scales et al., 2006). With this finding, the questions then become how to increase assets and how to support the schools' systems to be a central player in this effort. Including all the key stakeholders in building such an effort may be a crucial element. Therefore, this research is looking towards both their inclusion and the variables they describe as most important, which is likely to encompass some version of building up assets or protective factors in youth, strengthening their resilience, especially important in an Alternative Education population which have higher

than typical risk factors and lower than typical protective factors given their life experiences (Guerin & Denti, 1999).

2. Learning Oriented - social-emotional learning. There is a growing movement pertaining to social-emotional learning and non-cognitive skills, from defining these for outcome measurements (Farrington et al., 2012) to enhancing them for increased academic support and outcomes. These are represented in work such as the RULER method from the Yale School of Medicine (Meyer & Strambler, 2016), and researchers' efforts at exploring specific traits such as "grit" and their correlative educational effects (Duckworth, Peterson, Mathews, & Kelly, 2007). The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL) created the largest umbrella for these ideas. This venture, now more than 20 years old, originating from the University of Chicago, Illinois, centers around five key areas of growth: self-management, self-awareness, responsible decision-making, social awareness, and relationship skills (CASEL GUIDE, 2015). Expanding out from this core, CASEL outlines 17 sub-skills and attitudes, along with 11 program features of any program intending to develop said skills and attitudes (Payton et al., 2000).

CASEL has done a lot of work to tie social and emotional learning (SEL) to academic success and show overall positive outcomes from well-done implementations of SEL programs.

> "There is general agreement that it is important for schools to foster children's social-emotional development, but all too often educators think about this focus in a fragmented manner, either as an important end in itself or as a contributor to enhancing children's health (e.g., drug prevention), safety (e.g., violence prevention), or citizenship (e.g., service learning). Although social and emotional learning (SEL) plays important roles in influencing these nonacademic outcomes,

SEL also has a critical role in improving children's academic performance and lifelong learning" (Zins et al., 2007, p. 191).

The issue of needing to respond to emotional and social functioning was brought to the forefront by a history of high profile school violence over the last 25 years. Unfortunately, the effort was first led by zero tolerance policies for youth that exhibited symptoms of behavioral disturbance (Skiba, 2004, 2014; Suarez, 2010). As noted earlier, this response also had the effect of disproportionally targeting African American and Latino/a students and beginning a journey into the "school to prison pipeline" (Hilberth & Slate, 2014; Skiba et al., 2002; Skiba et al., 2011).

As a counterbalance to the zero tolerance practices, SEL is a prevention orientation that still attends to the social-emotional issues originally inspiring concern, but in a more inclusive and therapeutic way, changing tragic outcomes by transforming some of the root causes of devastating actions before they manifest. Zero tolerance is purely reactionary, and ultimately ineffective as shown by numerous studies that have looked at overly punitive systems and the cost of school performance and engagement (Fabelo et al., 2011; Nishioka, 2013).

Like protective factors and developmental assets, social-emotional learning seems to be a key ingredient in creating a school culture and climate where students can flourish. This research is interested in how much the primary stakeholders of a secondary alternative education high school agree with this assessment. This larger window of understanding stakeholder views is still a weak area in the literature; namely what do the folks on the ground, attempting to create this type of environment perceive as the key

pieces of the puzzle. This is important given they are the ones given the mission and directions to operationalize the research from the academic world.

3. Organizationally Minded – systems thinking and the physical reality. This domain refers to the holistic and tangible realm that the students and staff exist within. Physically it includes the actual building, its state of repair and aesthetic, the amount and type of light it has inside, the bell schedule, how much space and time there is to exercise and play, the temperature, the availability of food and water, the layout of common spaces for communal activities, and the layout of classroom or study settings for smaller or individual work. Organizationally, it also refers to policies, procedures, paperwork, systems and other factors that may affect student functioning. Senge and colleagues (2012) see "schools that learn" as ones that bridge the varied systems, personal and professional, physical and mental, individual and community. By connecting the dots, people find a shared mission and realize commonalities more than differences. Specifically, this approach includes five learning disciplines: systems thinking, personal mastery, working with mental models, and building a shared vision. The theory is that if these five disciplines are achieved, as an organization, continuous improvement can occur, ultimately creating an institution that is vital and creative in pursuit of a shared purpose (Senge et al., 2012).

This is not dissimilar to the work of other system's theorists who believe in seeing the big picture and understanding that change can occur globally with discrete actions locally (Meadows, 2008; Reckmeyer, 2015). It can be easy to get lost in one aspect of a school's functioning, but in order to ensure the best chance at a school culture and climate where

students can flourish, knowing and practicing thoughtful ways of how all the pieces fit together is important.

Schools by definition are an institution, so they must from the start push against the inertia of drab colors, sterile surfaces, and regimented schedules. Anything they can do to bring nature, softness, and personalization to the very real needs of the students may go a long way to enhance the climate and culture, especially if some of the other domains are not fully robust. Researchers are seeing the mental and physical health benefits of how you move and what is around you, particularly in the area of exercise (Penedo & Dahn, 2005) and "green" experiences (Pretty, Peacock, Sellens, & Griffin, 2005).

Including the somatic level of perception and effect on students and staff can be a powerful addition to the routines and systems at school sites. Yoga has been shown to have a positive impact on student's psychosocial well-being (Noggle et al., 2012), and martial arts and other movement activities have been shown to increase students' executive functioning (Diamond & Lee, 2011). Movement, sunlight, nature, and food may not make or break a student's day, but taken as a component of an already overloaded bio-psycho-social system, they could be crucial elements to maintaining engagement or learning. They also may send a message about what is important, both as students see a reflection of themselves in the building, as well as see the way that time is used within it. All in all, systems understanding and a holistic view of a school setting and its inhabitants is likely a key component to a school culture and climate where students can flourish and thrive.

4. Understanding – trauma informed care and practices: The brain and

"trauma." A key concept/word used in trauma informed care and practices is

"regulation". It is a state of physical and mental balance open and available to input and

interaction (Bodgen, 2003). It is, therefore, important for schools to notice when a

student and their nervous systems seems to be moving out of a regulated and

interpersonally connected state to one of "hyper-arousal" or "hypo-arousal" where their

bodies and mind move to a "fight or flight" state (hyper) or a "freeze" and dissociated

state (hypo). One primary goal of trauma informed care is to be very attentive to this

movement and help the student stay regulated and even learn skills and techniques to

expand their sensitivity, which would allow more capacity to experience "triggering"

events in their environment without slipping into survival strategies of fight, flight, or

freeze (Corrigan, Fisher, & Nutt, 2011).

"Bad behavior" as perceived by school personnel may represent these survival

strategies. Often the survival strategies can appear to others as maladjusted socialization

or even intentional harm and destruction when in the hyper-aroused spectrum, and can

appear disengaged, unmotivated, or uncaring while in the hypo-aroused state. In schools,

this interpretation frequently leads to entry into their standard discipline protocols such as

referrals, suspension, and expulsion. These in turn can often lead to school changes into

alternative education settings, involvement with law enforcement, dropping out of school

or worse yet, incarceration, homelessness, substance use and abuse, and increased mental

health symptoms (West et al., 2014).

The movement from a connected, stable and regulated state into a dysregulated and disconnected one often happens in front of adults in the school system, whether they be a teacher, aide, custodian, principal, collaborative agency staff, or community and parent volunteers. If in that "critical moment" staff engage them in an aware and skillful manner, optimizing the chance for the student to stay regulated or practice skills to return to regulation, it is hypothesized that countless discipline and disengagement experiences could be avoided in the school context.

Trauma informed schools. Creating trauma informed schools has become a popular topic in the endeavor of making the connection between neuroscience and education. Many authors are writing about developing core competencies in addressing the increased sensitivity needed to attend to youth who may have an over-sensitized stress response. Fallot & Harris (2008) talk about the administrative level of change that needs to occur to allow practitioners in all types of agencies to employ safe and sensitive interactions around paperwork, intakes, HR policies, and more. This builds a culture of trauma sensitivity that hopefully will translate to the students.

More directly, writers and researchers are looking at how understanding overt behaviors through the lens of survival brain reactions may inform interventions in the classroom and school community. Walkley and Cox (2013) reported on programs that emphasize interchanges that are calm, attuned, present, predictable, and where the adult is able to stay regulated even in the presence of a child who is not.

The neuro-scientific framework, with its logical and scientific explanation of why empathy and attentiveness are crucial to helping some students succeed from a trauma

informed lens, assists a school personnel audience that perhaps would not otherwise believe the approach was valid, determining it to be too soft or permissive (Walkley & Cox, 2013), a belief that may inhibit successful implementation of school culture and climate initiatives using these theories.

NMT and NME. One such neuro-scientific model of explaining trauma induced classroom behavior and intervention comes from Bruce Perry and the Child Trauma Academy (Perry, 2014; Perry & Hambrick, 2008). NMT or The Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics, which later spawned The Neurosequential Model of Education (NME), both generate a complex mapping tool that, via observation and detailed interviewing, can represent a child in a number of developmental stages with color coded boxes matched to their level of maturation. This means, a graphical presentation of where exactly a student is functioning compared to normative age scales can be created to add a visual cue to a school staff member who may see a 16 year old boy, but forget inside resides a six year old emotional capacity.

While this tool of mapping a snapshot of developmental markers in important areas such as relational, cognitive, sensory integration, and self regulation skills is valuable, even more impactful to classroom experiences is the "state" tracking that is the other half of the NME work. This state tracking monitors unique and historical triggers and patterns, and whether a student may be operating in their brain stem (fight or flight or freeze), their limbic system (relationships and emotions), or their pre-frontal cortex (executive and higher cognitive functioning). This could shift instantly from one to the other in response to external events, which might be tones of voice, sounds, colors,

objects, body postures, directions, facial expressions, etc. (Fisher, 2001; Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006). Hence the work of noticing and responding sensitively to a student's current state of brain functioning can be the difference of keeping a student engaged or escalating further disconnection from the educational system.

An astute adult working with such a student is able to notice and assist the child when behavior changes indicating a state shift may have occurred. A key tenet of NME is both having the adult present stay regulated (i.e., not become reactionary to surface actions) as well as eventually teach the child to also learn self-regulation. In order for this later aspect to take place, there are six core concepts that can be utilized to maintain and create an optimal learning environment for the teaching of self-regulation and any topic in school. These concepts are known as the 6 Rs: Stated as

> "Core elements of positive developmental and therapeutic experiences, (i.e. 'trauma informed' and developmentally respectful are Relational (safe), Relevant (developmentally-matched), Repetitive (patterned), Rewarding (pleasurable), Rhythmic (resonant with biology) and Respectful (child, family, culture))" (Perry, 2014, p. 3).

This research project is interested to see what the stakeholder perceptions are in this area of trauma informed care and practices related to creating a school culture and climate where students can flourish and thrive. Do they value and prioritize schools spotting this phenomenon, responding in a way that is psychological helpful, and assisting students to be part of transforming their operational styles at such a core level?

5. Restorative – deeper justice through restorative practices. "Restorative practices is a social science that studies how to build social capital and achieve social discipline through participatory learning and decision-making" (Wachtel, 2013, p. 1).

The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) makes a point to differentiate the term from restorative justice, which they see as a reactive subset of the larger effort (IIRP, 2016). In restorative justice, a crime or harm has already occurred and the need is to heal or restore the broken element in the relationship, family, school, or community. Restorative practices aim to prevent harm at its origin, using a continuum of tools from how to frame questions, supportive affective statements and a secure environment, all the way to conflict resolution, restorative circles, and conferences which maintain and/or repair rifts, broken rules, or laws.

Some schools have started using classroom meetings in this spirit as a way to build social-emotional learning skills and provide a safer and more communicative environment (Drewery & Winslade, 2003; Kaveney & Drewery, 2011). Other studies found that this model or framework was most useful and effective when part of a larger systems approach that emphasized retaining students and restoring relationships as the role and purpose of discipline and behavior remediation (McCluskey et al., 2008).

While CASEL (Zins et al., 2007), described earlier, offers a framework for increasing competencies, restorative practices offer tangible tools which help achieve many of the targets represented as indicators of social-emotional effective functioning. Having both a big picture orientation and having specific implementation devices is key to keeping an intelligent grasp on the larger goals and the immediate need at hand at the same time. Both of these skills fuel a school culture and climate of students flourishing and counter the "school to prison pipeline" (Thorsborne & Blood, 2013; González, 2012, 2015; Schiff, 2013).

6. Interest in Growth – rigor, optimal stress and growth mindset. Although

this domain is listed as one of the last areas by its acronym placement, it could be

understood as the first needed. A key part of the definition of this domain is a

willingness to learn and change. Without an interest in growing, learning, and/or

changing there will likely be less movement or improvement in the activity or

functioning of a person. Asking for and being open to help is a key stance for making

change whether in alcohol recovery (Jakobsson, Hensing, & Spak, 2005), men seeking

help for mental health services (Addis & Mahalik, 2003) or minority families and

adolescents going to counseling (McMiller & Weisz, 1996). Prioritizing willingness and

interest to grow is found to be important in organizational change as well (Kegan &

Lahey, 2009). Many business and management consultants and writers include in their

lists some form of this axiom: "work with the willing". They place high value on asking

questions, innovation, and/or continuous improvement and working with those already

motivated, interested and practicing these attributes can make implementing new

endeavors easier (Fullen, 2008; Gerzon, 2006; Kirtman & Fullen, 2016).

Ideally, school personnel are supported by their environment and administration when

creating aspects of a flourishing school culture and climate, whether they are early

adopters of change or more fearful of it. If an experience is threatening to the person's

identity, then their psychological defenses will rally to restore their self-concept through

rationalization, explanation, and/or action (Steele, 1988), creating resistance to the

change endeavor attempted. Conversely, nurturing a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006)

that is ok with making mistakes and learning from them without triggering the psyche's

defense systems can help move along change initiatives. In other words, the second part of the definition of this domain speaks to ways of engaging, or keeping, the school staff's willingness "online" and growing, which is key to the operationalization of many of the concepts in this research.

This domain encapsulates a feeling of empowerment that students (and staff) feel when they perform an activity or task with some level of confidence and success. More generally, it is a feeling of having some control and ability to navigate the world and one's environment (Conger et al., 2009). They generate a sense of mastery that further builds their motivation and esteem, enabling even more risks and attempts at harder endeavors. Some researchers have found links between low levels of education and senses of mastery and later psychological distress (Dalgard et al., 2007). They noted that a sense of mastery could mediate between level of education and psychological distress, making it an important facet to work on as early as possible in a person's life. This gives even more cause to keep kids in school and out of the "school to prison pipeline".

Similarly, rigor, what one author (Scott, 2009) calls "optimal stress", can be a critical ingredient for the overall health of an individual. In the psychological sense, this can mean finding the "stretch" zone where the risk of the unknown is not overwhelming and yet not too easy either. It is the space where one can be fully present, yet grappling with new information or experiences. "Your body requires occasional periods of heightened stimulation or arousal to stay in peak performing condition" (Scott, 2009, p. 19). To thrive, people need a healthy and conducive environment where they can struggle a little and feel their growing edges. In academics, this optimal stress space may be called the

"zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1987). Here the learner is situated between their current understanding and the best next level of comprehension. Too far a jump and they disconnect, too close a reach and they are not challenged and therefore do not fully engage.

This area is vital as a next level of functioning for alternative education systems. Too often, these particular schools systems "under request" their students for fear of losing them altogether. This makes sense, given the student's life circumstances and precarious educational histories, but also leaves some crucial psychological, social, and academic development on the table each time it happens. An ideal school culture and climate where students can flourish figures out how to achieve safety, connection, and social-emotional learning as well as academic, psychological, and personal rigor that is optimized and differentiated for each individual.

7. Student Centered – equity and pedagogy. "Student-Centered" teaching is espoused by numerous researchers such as Robinson (2011), Nave (2015), Senge et al. (2012), Wolfe et al. (2013), all whom describe a participatory, often project based, differentiated and dynamic flow of information and learning occurring in a setting of support, care and thoughtfulness, with planning and decisions orbiting the student's best interest and needs. They speak of prioritizing motivation and engagement, strong relationships, appropriate challenge, personal choice and clear/timely assessments, and support (Wolfe et al., 2013). This is contrary to the "banking model", Freire (2000) derisively described so many years ago, where the teachers were the "sage on the stage"

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and children were blank slates or containers to be filled, passively, with a transfer of information from one destination to another.

The teaching method for the student-centered school culture and climate can certainly be similar to restorative practices, using strengths based language and questions, at times sitting in a circle, using a talking piece or sharing processes that honor each voice and give room for individual pace, comfort and style of the student and staff member. Leaders of a school setting can operate under these guidelines as well (Robinson, 2011), ensuring that staff have clear goals, sufficient resources and training, as well as a comfortable and safe environment. Taken together, the principles of "student-centered" learning can create a school culture and climate where both students and staff flourish in their roles.

8. Humility – cultural and otherwise. "Cultural Humility" is a term used to connote openness to learning and growing in the area of racial, ethnic, and cultural differences. It does not assume that everyone must know in advance the varied customs and nuances of each person, but instead that they are willing to admit ignorance and bring an open mind to new information in this arena (Dorado, 2015). This term, perhaps crafted in the 1990s, stemmed from a notion of being culturally competent, especially in the contexts of the mental and physical health clinical practice. One study noted, "(c)ultural competence…is best defined not by a discrete endpoint but as a commitment and active engagement in a lifelong process that individuals enter into on an ongoing basis… perhaps better described as cultural humility" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998, p. 118). This continuous habit and expectation of dealing with varied differences in a

thoughtful manner between stakeholders at a school site is an important part of creating school cultures and climates where students can flourish.

Humility can also cover the concept of equity. Pertinent to schools is a "pedagogy of equity" (McGhee Banks & Banks, 1995), where there is both care and resources given to students on an individual basis relative to their needs, as well as thoughtfulness and attention given to the structures, policies, and decisions that may have led to any inequity in the first place. Equity is contrasted with the term "equality" in the context of distribution of resources, giving more weight to need and circumstance than "fairness" as defined by equivalent portioning. A "pedagogy of equity" also brings a "critical" lens to the school itself and the larger world, scrutinizing the way it operates and its subsequent results.

Humility is bringing an open mind to the educational environment, one that is willing to investigate and reflect upon differences and the underlying causes and/or responses that go along with them, creating a school culture and climate where students can hopefully become empowered and increase their sense of worth. This particular "critical" lens is an important domain, especially at the research school site given the disproportionality of white teachers to Latino/a students. It is also important to see how this dynamic may impact stakeholder perceptions around the key elements needed for a school culture and climate where students can flourish and to infuse this type of reflection around any practices that may exist which continue the over representation of students of color in discipline experiences and the school to prison pipeline.

Taken All Together

These eight domains, making up the FLOURISHing school culture and climate, are informed categories generated by the researcher based on the literature review which point to essential elements needed for students to remain engaged and successful in their alternative education setting. The unique contribution of this project will come from the actual stakeholders of a particular alternative education high school in central California. This case based and ground up approach is the crucial element of the study, allowing a phenomenological expression of the priorities and key ingredients stakeholders feel are essential to a flourishing school culture and climate.

The results will represent directly sourced information, which will hopefully lead to increased willingness and effort to manifest the findings through an increased sense of ownership. It is also timely in the era of California's Local Control Accountability Plans (CDE, 2016). With this new mandate, each school district is asked to co-create at best, discern feedback at worst, the various components of school functioning (Fullen, 2015). This research and focus group protocol will act as a surrogate for this function. Hopefully, in the research process, key ingredients for a school culture and climate where students can flourish will emerge from the stakeholders, identifying the building blocks of an environment that can respond sensitively to the unique needs of each student, whether it be previous trauma, need for rigor, cultural understanding, social-emotional learning experiences, restorative response, or other issues which are identified. These factors, in turn, it is surmised, would inhibit the "school to prison pipeline", helping to keep students engaged in school and academically successful.

Chapter 3 – Methodology

The Lenses Worn – Positionality and Theoretical Orientations

Several theoretical frameworks were used to support the research and orient the reader to the positionality of the researcher. These include Systems Thinking (Meadows, 2008; Reckmeyer, 2015), Deliberately Developmental Organizations (Kegan & Lahey, 2016), Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Laker, 2015), Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; White, Suchowierska, & Campbell, 2004) as well as the specific methodology of using Focus Groups and the Classic Analysis Strategy to evoke and analyze data (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Finally, critical (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988) and constructivist (Creswell 2013) lenses were layered in to complete the outline and view utilized in this project.

Constructivist Theory

The professional experiences of the researcher being an educator, therapist and school administrator have drawn him to adopt, in part, a constructivist (Creswell, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Mills, Bonner & Francis, 2006) theoretical orientation to research.

The researcher adopts a constructivist approach because this approach acknowledges the researcher as necessarily a part of the equation. The questions asked, people chosen to include in the focus groups, and the very interactions brought in the form of words, emotions and body language, all influence and affect the results. This is contrasted with positivism (Schrag, 1992), which allows for an objective stance to record empirical data, unperturbed or altered by the passive viewing of the researcher. Creswell (2013) described constructivism this way,

> Researchers recognize that their own background shapes their interpretation, and they 'position themselves' in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences (p. 25).

Creswell (2013) continues with social constructivism as a way that:

> (I)ndividuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences…These meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrow the meanings into a few categories or ideas (p. 24).

Again, this is in contrast to positivism which looks more at cause and effect, has an a priori thesis and tends to be reductionist, logical, empirical, and deterministic (Creswell, 2013). Constructivism is a lens that can fully account for the many experiences that may be found in the research, honoring varied perceptions and their origin as well as acknowledging the role and influence of the questioner (researcher) as well.

Critical Theory and Postmodernism

The researcher understands critical and postmodern orientations to mean wearing lenses of deconstruction and conducting an honest appraisal of the forces at work that affect, suppress, and influence behavior and experience. Creswell (2013) noted that for postmodernism, "the basic concept is that knowledge claims must be set within the conditions of the world today and in the multiple perspectives of class, race, gender, and other group affiliations" (p. 27). Similarly, critical theory (Freire, 2000; Giroux, 1988) looks at power structures, oppression, and often un-named social configurations to frame purported information or findings or research.

Both postmodernism and critical approaches blend well with constructivist ones in that they all take a self-aware eye noticing phenomenon and dynamics, allowing oft times

hidden, unspoken, and unseen forces and understandings to come forth. They allow for a more complex, nuanced and rich grasp of experience. Of the critical paradigm, Alvesson & Deetz (2006) working from Jeremier (1998) to summarize this orientation, see it in terms of researchers listening carefully to their subjects, refraining from speaking in their place and noticing socioeconomic variables that can reinforce inequality or power differences. Both the content of the research material and the cultural, political, and historical forces that may have helped shape it are important to this research.

An extension, more recently, to critical theory is Critical Race Theory (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, 2002). This more specifically focused lens on race and the myriad structures and experiences that have contributed to the creation of suppression, oppression, and difference between dominant ethnic cultures and people of color is an important lens to utilize as well. This is especially true, given the researcher's ethnic background of European-American and the majority of research subjects being Latino/a. Whether this was the case or not, the important aspect of this orientation is to allow analysis and awareness of race, power, and inequality as facets of the experience both in the research subjects' histories and the current research experience.

A Systems Approach

Systems thinking can mean many things depending on context, level of depth, and purpose behind its usage. For this research, it largely means the ability to step back from the discrete actions that make up the functioning of an organization and reflect both on the specific moments and techniques that could elicit change, as well as the meta-view of why and how the particular functioning occurs in the first place. Many useful techniques

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are outlined in literature from the Waters Foundation, originally sourced from Barry Richmond and colleagues (2000). They include: looking at multiple perspectives, checking results and changing actions if needed, being comfortable with questioning one's deep assumptions, seeing self as part of the system under study, and more. In particular, this research was conducted to determine the essential qualities of a school culture and climate where students can use the simple systems model of Detect-Select-Effect-Correct (Reckmeyer, 2015), as shown in Figure 1. The research effort breaks down this cycle into two stages: Stage 1A and B & Stage 2A and B. In the first part, Stage 1A, focus groups generate the "detect" data as perceptions and input is garnered through the compilation of results from numerous stakeholder groups at the chosen alternative education secondary school site. The result of the data analysis, Stage 1B, generate the "select" elements in the various domains of a FLOURISHing school culture and climate. Implementation, or "effect", Stage 2A, and the reanalysis of such an implementation, Stage 2B, or the "correct" portion of the cycle, is outside the current research effort, but instead is a continuation of the endeavor through the researcher's employment. Ultimately, this cycle generates a feedback loop of continuous improvement.
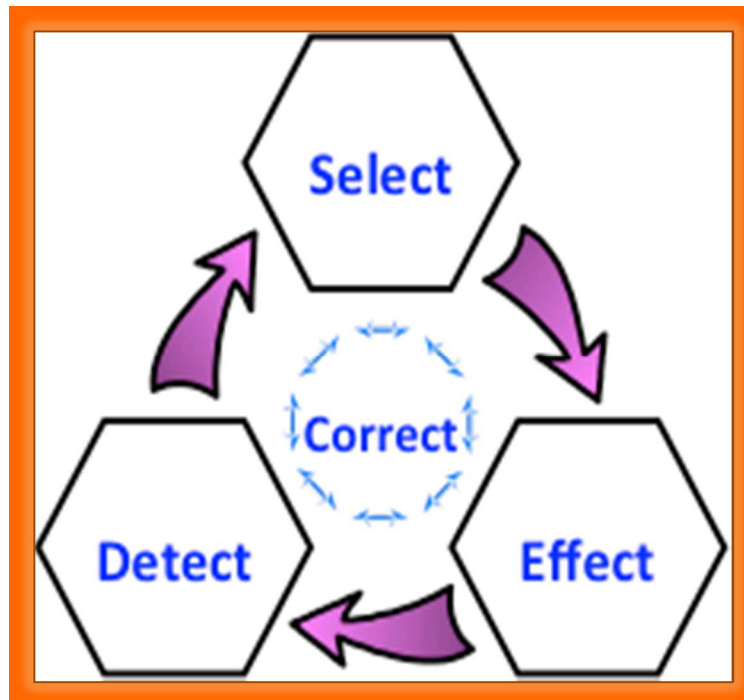
Figure 1. Systems theory of implementation (Adapted from Reckmeyer, 2015)

Meadows (2008) noted, "(p)ardigms are the sources of systems" (p. 163). This lens

acts as a backdrop to the research as key ingredients that are shared from stakeholders as

they described their belief of essential elements needed for a school culture and climate

where students can flourish.

Kegan and Lahey (2009, 2016) have written extensively about a path towards

paradigm transformation (both intrapersonally and organizationally). They defined

growth as moving through various levels of mindset, from the Socialized, to the Self-

Authoring, to the Self-Transforming. While there is a slight correlation to IQ, it is much

more about opportunities to use experience in a safe and supportive context for the

purpose of reflecting on the motivations for actions. They described these contextual

attributes in the workplace as "new incomes", referencing the sought after "personal growth" compensation, different from simple pay and hours improvements.

While this model may seem an obvious fit for staff in a school, it can often be missed in the tumult of tests, bureaucratic mandates, attendance, and discipline procedures, which can fill the time and mission of the education setting. Ideally, schools can become a Deliberately Developmental Organization (DDO), one where both the youth being served and those serving them are encouraged and supported in their growth in all aspects of their mindset, choices, actions, and information flows. Hence the goal of this research is to seek out what key aspects of a flourishing school culture and climate are described by all the stakeholders in that setting and compare it to both the academic literature and this organizational model. The systems approach of detecting and selecting frames what is discovered and utilized, with the final two aspects of effect and correct being studied another time.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Laker, 2015) was used as a strength-based lens worn as participants in the focus groups shared their insights, knowledge, and experiences. The facilitation did not inhibit negative information or criticisms, but ensured the perceptions of the desired or ideal school culture and climate attributes were attended to as well. In searching for key elements that make a school culture and climate where students can flourish, the healthy and supportive attributes need to be identified, not just their opposite. This happens by looking at what is working well, how things are successful and in ways that exceptions to rules are manifesting.

Positive and exceptional experiences can be found in systems even if pervasively there is

a negative reputation and belief about overall functioning. This is the view and language

of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Laker, 2015). This lens was

used in the focus group's questions to note where places and times of "pockets of hope"

(Burciaga, 2015) were formed, nurtured, and produced inspirational and positive

outcomes throughout the education setting in the Alternative High School context.

Focus Groups and Participatory Action Research (PAR)

In the research of perceptions of key stakeholders in an alternative education school,

focus groups were conducted that included Participatory Action Research methods

(Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; White et al., 2004). Participatory Action Research (PAR)

speaks to a process of studying a phenomenon with the collaboration of the people and

the setting being studied. There is debate about the exact definition of "collaboration"

and the extent to which those being researched participate in the design, implementation,

and analysis of the study. All, however, emphasize partnership, clear communication,

and a mechanism for inclusion with research subjects (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; White

et al., 2004).

Starting as Action Research with the work of Kurt Lewin (James, Milenkiewicz &

Buckman, 2008), the process was focused on "iterative cycles of investigation to improve

the efficiencies of organizations" (p. 9). Participatory, later added, stressed the group

learning and the idea of a community coming together to solve a shared problem or

creating a common understanding between all stakeholders.

The action portion of the approach speaks to planning both an implementation and research mode at the same time; a cycle of action and reflection occur toggling between the two to continually refine the plan pursued. Rather than wait and find out the results of the idea and plan, it both actualizes and contemplates all at once (Khanlou & Peter, 2005). Some focus group participants assisted in the dialogue and planning about how to use this information in their school setting. This model fits nicely with the constant and iterative focus group process of immediate analysis of data and adjusting as needed based on feedback from the participants. Altogether, the interactions and information flows were respectful, equalized, co-generated, and evolving. This orientation felt more ethical than other approaches as the researcher was not taking a stance as an outside observer, assuming some superior or separate expertise that could be used to craft outcomes without the input and intelligence of the context and people being studied.

Confounding Factors

In the alternative education school setting, there are dozens of confounding factors at play whenever one tries to look at discrete phenomenon, attempting to create a comprehensive map of experiences. For alternative education high school students, these elements might include what happened or is happening in the home, relationship issues, interactions with outside agencies and staff, previous history with particular individuals, feeling physically ill, losing or gaining a job, having undiagnosed learning disabilities, recent or current substance use, unexpected pregnancy, flaring up of a mental health condition, and more (Foley & Pang, 2006). For staff, parents, community members, and itinerant agency collaborators, a similar list could exist. Rather than try and control for

these interrelated variables, teasing them apart from others, they were seen as part of all possible motivations and histories that may inform the answers and perceptions given in the focus groups, as the research lens holds that no matter the reason, the perception one offers is valid, albeit certainly able to change with new information. This research was most interested in a particular set of stakeholder's perceptions of a school culture and climate where students can flourish at a certain alternative education high school. The reasoning behind their perceptions emerged as they were asked follow up questions when offering key ingredients or essential elements, but either way, their answers were noted and utilized with or without deeper reflections on the origin of the perception or belief. This process, again, represents a constructivist, appreciative inquiry approach to the responses and data given (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2001; Creswell, 2013; James et al., 2008; Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; White et al., 2004)

Current Study

The research site. A northern California county office of education and its Alternative Education Department opened up a new high school, replacing an existing one that had been operating for more than 20 years out of a rented church building complex. A new name, new location, and brand-new construction launched in the fall of 2016. Apart from the transformed physical changes, there was a desire to shift the way discipline and difficult behavior was addressed so that more students were able to stay on the campus, connected to the school and staff, and ultimately experiencing academic and socio-emotional success.

The Alternative Education Department tends to serve the most vulnerable population in the school system in the county. This is primarily because students enrolling often do so from experiences in the comprehensive system that forced or encouraged them to leave, such as disciplined behavior issues, substance use, gang involvement, mental health challenges, bullying, or academic deficiencies. Sometimes compounding these experiences is the comprehensive system's inability to be relevantly engaging academically or social-emotionally contributing to poor or failing grades, persistence and/or attendance . Against this backdrop, students in alternative education frequently come with learning disabilities, lower socio-economic status, and significant academic deficits or learning gaps in their school histories (Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Many staff at the chosen site were drawn to Alternative Education Programs (AEP) with an understanding of the complexity and history of the students. They brought a "counseling" oriented mindset and allowed, more than most school settings, space for the other life pressures and experiences the students often brought to the learning moments. Even so, a fair amount of professional development has been done for this department around the concepts of Trauma Informed Care, Restorative Practices, Conflict Resolution, and Social-Emotional Learning. As this new high school was launched, it was hoped that it would be a demonstration site for many of the ideas espoused by these professional development trainings and the principles represented in the eight domains of a school culture and climate where students can FLOURISH. As reported by the school administrators of this research setting, prior to the focus group administration, all staff opening the new school seemed to have a favorable attitude and interest in these concepts

and wanted to improve the lives of the students and themselves in a reflective manner by learning new tools and practices that were intended to help this effort.

The student body was more than 90% Latino/a and majority low SES (PowerSchool Data Report, 2016). They also had many of the qualities or histories mentioned above for typical AEP participants. There were often parents who preferred or required Spanish communication with the home. Some staff came from similar backgrounds, while many did not. Therefore, it was critical to pay attention to equity, power and racial differences, and how these impacted interactions.

The researcher's role at the school site was as an employee of the larger district, one with responsibilities for educational supportive services in the county, but not as direct supervisor of staff at the research school. The researcher knew many of the regular staff, some of the classified staff and collaborative agency personnel, but none of the students and families who were invited as focus group participants. There was no connection between participation in this study and job evaluations, benefits, or consequences. Participation was optional and the researcher made this clear via consent forms and individual discussions that the only benefit was in the form of giving feedback, which could lead to changes they perceived as improving the school culture and climate.

The sample. The sample included a representative subset of each of the stakeholders that engaged the school site. This included all adults and staff who interacted with the students who attended the site that were willing to participate in focus groups. In addition to the teachers and classified staff, collaborative agency personnel such as the public health workers, probation officers, and child welfare social workers

were invited to participate, along with administrative or supervisorial staff, and finally, family members and two cohorts of students. In total, seven stakeholder groups, for a total of 36 participants, were created with students being divided into 9th/10th and 11th/12th grade cohorts, as shown below:

- One Focus Group of 9th and 10th graders, 4 participants
- One Focus Group of 11th and 12th graders, 7 participants
- One Focus Group of Credentialed Teaching Staff, 5 participants
- One Focus Group of Classified Staff at the School Site, 7 participants
- One Focus Group of Supervisors at the School Site, 4 participants
- One Focus Group of Families of the School Site, 5 participants
- One Focus Group of Collaborative Agency Members, 4 participants

This school site opening was the first chance the researcher has seen in the more than 15 years working with the county office of education, where an overt and thoughtful part of its plan was about social-emotional health, as well as restorative and trauma sensitive practices. This has been embedded in all the AEP systems to one degree or another, but in this instance, it was a cornerstone of operations. It was also the largest school site in the system with more than 100 students when at full capacity. Many of the other sites could range from as little as 15 students to as many as 75. This larger school and the fact that it wanted to focus on many of the facets listed in a flourishing school culture and climate made it a rich research environment and was the primary reason for choosing this particular school site in the alternative education system.

The Specific Methods and Components of Data Collection

Focus Groups were the primary methodological tool used to research the perceptions of stakeholders regarding the essential elements and key ingredients of a school culture and climate where students could flourish. This is similar to a needs assessment and

focus groups lend themselves very well to the complex nature of exploring the opinions, thoughts, needs, and experiences of diverse sets of people in a dynamic environment. Krueger and Casey (2015) said it this way: "Focus groups have proven helpful mostly because they provide an interactive environment…(they) enable people to ponder, reflect, and listen to experiences and opinions of others. This interaction helps participants compare their own personal realities to those of others" (p. 13).

Each focus group was limited to seven people or less to maximize the ability of each member to share and complete the process in 75 minutes or less. The literature advises groups to be no larger than 10-12 people and no longer than two hours without significant breaks and food being provided (Krueger & Casey, 2015; Smit & Cilliers, 2006). Careful planning and skilled facilitation was used to create an environment that valued diversity of voice, equity in time, power and status, as well as honed in on clear and distinct preferences and ideas related to the questioning route and the research goals.

One planning technique was to make the groups homogeneous. Hence, the collections of people were most like each other as far as position, role, and development as much as possible. Ideally, as many groups would have been held as needed until a "saturation" point was noticed by the researcher, however, due to the limited amount of some of the group participants and the time constraints around others, there were a variety of stakeholder groups held, but each with only one set. Comparisons could still be made between focus group stakeholder roles (heterogeneous) as well as between the two subsets of students (9/10th graders & 11/12th graders) and two subsets of staff (teaching & classified) (homogeneous).

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Surveys (see Appendix A) were collected from each focus group participant asking about demographic data and some background information they felt comfortable sharing. This was added to the rich and complex descriptions that emerged from focus group discussions by including a historical and contextual element to the answers that arose from the groups. Surveys were anonymous and only connected to their particular group.

Focus group sessions occurred over a four-week period in the winter of 2016-17, with a consistent facilitator, the researcher, and one assistant facilitator who acted as note taker and summary provider. Flip charts were used during the focus groups to assure the rankings of the elements discussed were captured correctly. The focus groups were audio recorded and later transcribed verbatim. Following each session, a short debrief between the facilitator/researcher and the assistant facilitator occurred to capture the shared understanding and significant findings from each group using a debrief protocol (see Appendix B). These were also audio recorded.

Focus groups were a purposive sample from all available participants when everyone who qualified was not able to be included. For instance, all supervisory staff were in a focus group, whereas only a subset of the student population was included, even with two groups. Diversity sampling took place based on different genders, ethnicities, time involved at the school site, and for students, discipline and academic performance records. A team of school staff was responsible for initial identification of participants, keeping diversity as their key criteria, and representative sampling as their secondary one. If more than enough participants were identified, then a first ready, first come, first

served process began taking place until the group was full. This minimized selection bias on the part of the researcher and/or school site.

A participant screen was used to invite people for each homogeneous group (see Appendix C). The researcher, with assistance from the school emailed, called, and/or made direct contact with possible focus group attendees. During this process, the school staff or researcher explained the commitment, goal and process of participation in the research project and answered any questions that arose. After the diversity and representative categories were established, the first prospective participants to give consent, and assent when needed, in those categories (e.g., gender, ethnicity, time at the school site, discipline, and academic performance), made up the participants for that particular focus group. If others were interested after the group was full, a substitute list was created in the order of time and day consent/assent was given.   Written information in the form of the consent and assent forms and the survey and the questioning route were provided for review prior to agreeing to participate.

Adult consent forms were gathered for all those individuals over 18 years old, who were not students, selected for focus group participation. Additionally, parent/guardian consent forms and student assent forms were utilized for those youth participating in focus groups that were students (see Appendices D, E, and F respectively).

A questioning route was used for each focus group. It contained five types of questions: Opening, Introduction, Transition, Key, and Closing (see Appendix G). Additionally, one projective picture drawing activity was used in the middle of the group's questioning route. This added a different perspective to the questions, allowing

visual information to emerge about the topic (see Appendix H). All documents that

involved the participants were offered in English and Spanish to assure understanding,

equity, and comfort in the process. The parent focus group was also conducted in

Spanish.

Finally, elicited documents and artifacts, both from earlier in the school year, as well

as during the research project, were collected. Extant documents such as district Trauma

Informed Care (TIC) Expectations from their handbook, a district written JCCASAC

Journal Article on TIC, and the WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges)

TIC and school climate portions of a Mid-Cycle report were reviewed, along with newly

developed Local Control Accountability Plans and their pertinent goals and metrics. Less

obviously related materials were reviewed, such as suspension forms and board polices

around discipline (see Appendix I). To summarize, the focus group process unfolded in

the order with documents listed below:

1. Used Participant Screen for school generated focus group referrals
   (Phone/Email/ In-Person Script)
2. Used Purposive Sampling with Diversity and Representative Techniques to
   assign participants to focus groups
3. Attained Signed Adult and/or Parent/Guardian Consent Forms
4. Attained Signed Student Assent Forms
5. Gave Participants Background Survey
6. Conducted Focus Groups
7. Used Focus Group Questioning Route (see above)
8. Used Highlight and Ranking Notes with Assistant Facilitator in groups
9. Used Focus Group Debrief Log

Analysis of Data

Focus group transcripts, debrief logs, drawings, information from the surveys, and

extant artifacts were reviewed and/or coded for themes by both the primary researcher

and for some of the items, a second reader/coder. When this occurred, comparison of

memos, codes, and themes took place to increase the validity by using inter-rater

reliability methods. In particular, two coders were used to compare, contrast, and

determine the categorization of both the domain codes from the literature review found in

the transcripts and the emerging themes noted from the focus groups with the new

umbrella model that encompassed all the findings. Additionally, given the structure of

PAR, these themes and codes were offered back to some group members for clarification

and sense making, either in person or via written or digital summaries. Adjustments were

noted and reported in the final grouping of key elements and essential ingredients. A

coding software program called Dedoose was used for recording, memoing, and

analyzing the data.

It was not expected that the focus group data would necessarily be "generalizable",

but instead that the process and even the results would be "transferable". Krueger and

Casey (2015) put forth the notion that:

> The intent of focus groups is not to infer, but to understand, not to
> generalize, but to determine the range, and not to make statements about
> the population, but to provide insights about how people in the groups
> perceive a situation (p. 80).

To further bolster the validity of the process and findings in analysis, four critical

qualities were followed from the Classic Analysis Strategy put forth by Krueger and

Casey (2015). This process makes sure analysis is systematic, verifiable, sequential, and

consequential (or continuous). Systematic means that the analysis is planned out,

understandable, documented, and deliberate. A road map of where conclusions came

from can be traced back as needed. Verifiable means the researcher and coder(s) are

watching for their own biases, ensuring the trail of evidence through several layers of tools such as the debrief notes, transcripts, and coding criteria. Sequential refers to the process being logical from beginning to end, namely from the screening of participants to the conducting of surveys and focus groups to the debriefing and analysis of the data. Finally, the consequential nature of the work involves an on-going review of information that starts at the very beginning with first impressions and initial gathering of feedback, that in turn can shape and evolve the process as it goes forward (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Similarly, first and second coding, along with analytic memoing were practiced as outlined in such classic texts as Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook by Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña (2014) and Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques for Developing Grounded Theory by Corbin & Strauss (2014). Each described similar processes to that of Krueger & Casey (2015), highlighting the systematic, thoughtful, and iterative process of combing through data to reveal assumed and/or surprising patterns, theme,s and even theories. For instance, various methods to prioritize the analytic themes can be used, ones such as frequency, extensiveness, intensity, specificity, internal consistency and participant perception of importance. Traceable and deliberate decisions were made to account for and report on these and other decisive moments in the coding and analysis phases. Each data set or transcript was reviewed for each question along the lines of the constant comparative method created by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and incorporated into the classic analysis strategy described above.

As described at the outset and throughout the research paper, the totality of the project used lenses of constructivism and criticality all the while keeping in mind the

theoretical orientations and systems frameworks of Meadows (2008), Reckmeyer (2015), and Kegan & Lahey (2016), ever remembering the researcher's own positionality and the inclusiveness of Participatory Action Research.

Limitations of Proposed Data Collection Process

Because the study was somewhat enmeshed with staff development and student support services, as well as numerous school culture and climate initiatives, there may have been questions about its validity and/or credibility. To account for these questions, the researcher employed several strategies to ensure an ethical and trustworthy process, pulled from Creswell's (2013) list of best practices. First was triangulation, namely coordinating the focus groups, debrief notes and projective activity, extant artifacts and surveys to not only look for patterns but also for consistency and corroboration. Second was ensuring clarification of researcher bias and setting the context for understanding the approach and orientation to the topic and research. Finally, through the gathering of "rich" and "thick" descriptions of the experience as data, readers hopefully have enough information to imagine a transfer of these outcomes to other settings. The goal is that the research shows in multiple ways that whatever outcomes, findings, assertions, or tentative theories emerged, the process is seen as having been thorough, intensive, inclusive, ethical, and understandable.

Chapter 4 – Findings

Having completed the research at the designated Alternative Education High School,

what follows are the results based on the data provided by the stakeholder focus groups

conducted. The outcomes are presented with narratives and graphs representing first the

descriptors (focus group participants), both demographically and by their top essential

elements, indicated from the literature review choices by survey answers. Second is the

more complete analysis of the eight domains as found in the literature review and

revealed via coding the focus group transcripts. Third is a review of the emerging themes

of essential elements of a school culture and climate where students can flourish that

were above and beyond the literature's indications in the eight domains. Finally, taken

all together, a simpler, more cohesive umbrella of categories was discovered and utilized

to capture all essential elements found in the focus group answers and will be cross-

referenced with the original codes.

Following the completion of the focus groups, each was transcribed, then coded by

the primary researcher using three categories of codes (see Appendix J). The first

category included the eight domains found in the literature review (FLOURISH). The

second category was simply the questions from the questioning route. The third and final

category were the themes revealed that were not easily captured in the first category.

Extensive memoing throughout the coding process further enabled an iterative process

with all three categories and ultimately led to the formation of a new umbrella

conceptualization of the essential elements.

Demographics

Table 1 and related figures below show the average age and representative percent in the categories of gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and education level of each focus group cohort as self-reported in the initial survey administered prior to the questioning route process. One of the significant findings was all of the teachers were female, none chose the Mexican or Hispanic/Latino ethnicity category, while 100% of the students and parents chose either the Mexican or Hispanic/Latino ethnicity category. The supervisors were also dominated by White/Caucasian personnel at 75%, while the collaborative agency folks were the opposite with 75% Mexican or Hispanic/Latino. Finally, it was interesting to note that the 9th and 10th grade students labeled themselves 75% Mexican, while the 11th and 12th grade students chose the Hispanic/Latino verbiage. The researcher is not clear what this difference can be attributed to, but believes the actual ethnic difference of the two groups is not very different, triggering questions about why they chose different representative words to identify themselves at different ages.

Table 1

Self-Reported Age, Ethnicity and Gender

Focus Group Type	Sample Size n=36	Average Age (Years Old)	Ethnicity by Percent	Gender F or M
Students 9th & 10th Grade	4	15.25	75% Mexican 25% Hispanic/Latino	75% F 25% M
Students 11th & 12th Grade	7	17.14	75% Hispanic/Latino 25% Mexican	43% F 57% M
Credentialed Staff-Teachers	5	37.00	60% White/Caucasian 20% Declined to State 20% African American	100% F 0% M
Classified Staff – Office/Aides	7	46.71	43% Mexican 29% White/Caucasian 14% Hispanic/Latino 14% African American	57% F 43% M
Supervisors - Administration	4	45.00	75% White/Caucasian 25% Hispanic/Latino	50% F 50% M
Parents of Students	5	48.20	80% Mexican 20% Hispanic/Latino	60% F 40% M
Collaborative Agency Staff	4	38.00	50% Hispanic/Latino 25% Mexican 25% More Than One	50% F 50% M

As anticipated, based on the free and reduced lunch data of the school site, students and parents identified themselves as low or lower middle earners. Surprisingly, a high percentage (60%) of teachers also chose lower middle earners as their socio-economic status, as did a portion (25%) of the partner (collaborative agency) staff. Not surprising was that administrators (supervisors) indicated they were middle (50%) or

upper middle (50%) earners. More unexpected was that even some teachers identified as

upper middle earners (25%) and many classified staff (office workers/ aides) chose

middle earners (85%) as shown in Figure 2.
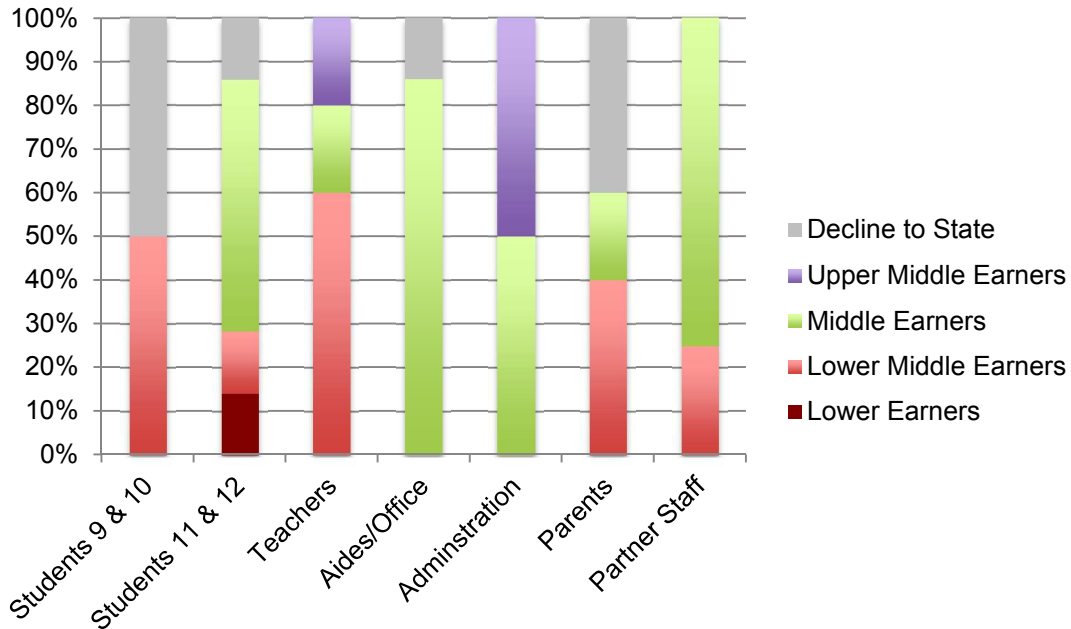
Figure 2. Self-reported socio-economic status

Finally, from the survey data collected and analyzed self-reported data, education

level revealed predicted outcomes with teachers, administrators, and partner staff

(collaborative agency personnel) showing the highest level of attainment: bachelor's,

master's and professional certifications. This makes sense given many of the jobs held

by these individuals mandate this level education and certification to even qualify for

consideration. Not unusual for the demographic, both in terms of geography and the

population of alternative education students, none of the parents reported any educational

attainment above middle school. All of the students, necessarily by their very enrollment,

as well as their answers, indicated some high school completion. This level alone already surpassed their parents' achievements.
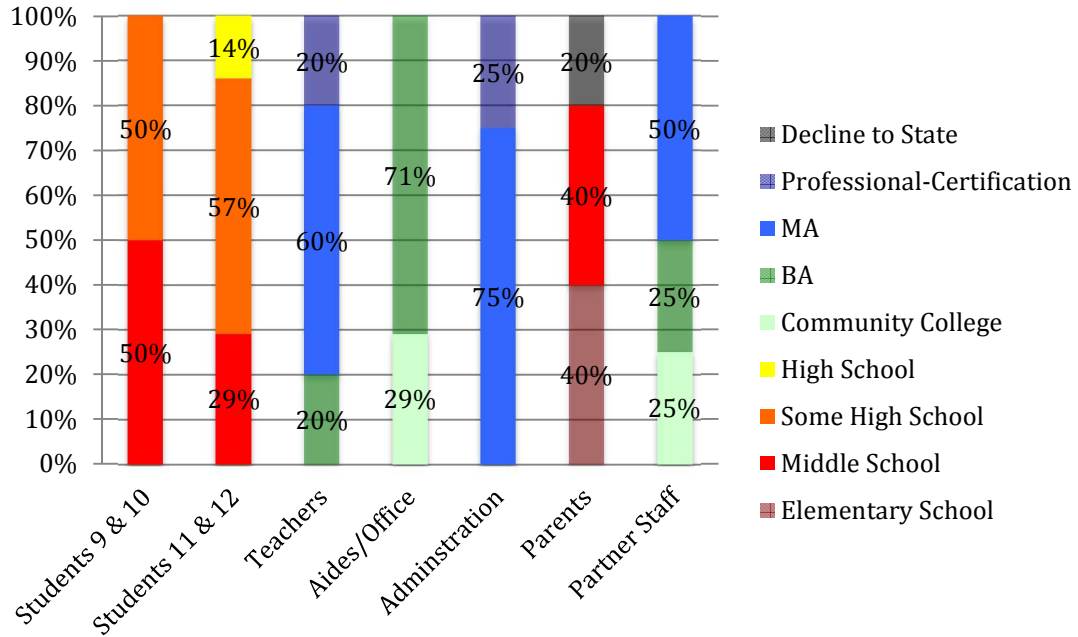
Figure 3. Self-reported highest education level completed

FLOURISH Categories

The focus group participants were asked in multiple ways which essential elements of a school culture and climate where students flourish, thrive, and grow were most important to them. The first mechanism and time for this question came during the initial survey given to them prior to the start of the questioning route. It was a "forced" choice to rank eight sentences that corresponded to the eight domains of FLOURISH (essential elements of this research found in the literature review). They did have a choice to write or create a new element or sentence if they so chose. Table 2 shows the responses representing their top choice and the percentage by each focus group type.

Table 2

Survey FLOURISH Categories Chosen by Focus Group Type

Focus Group Type	*Sample Size* *n=36*	*FLOURISH Codes* *Top Pick by Survey Self-Ranking*
Students 9th & 10th Grade	4	75% *chose* Humble 25% *chose* Interested in Growth
Students 11th & 12th Grade	7	29% *chose* Interested in Growth 14% *chose* Flexible 14% *chose* Learning Oriented 14% *chose* Organizationally Minded 14% *chose* Restorative 14% *chose* Student-Centered
Credentialed Staff - "Teachers"	5	80% *chose* Understanding 20% *chose* Learning Oriented
Classified "Staff" – Office/Aides	7	43% *chose* Student-Centered 28.5% *chose* Understanding 28.5% *chose* Learning Oriented
"Supervisors" - Administration	4	25% *chose* Humble 25% *chose* Understanding 25% *chose* Student-Centered 25% *chose* all as Equal
"Parents" of Students	5	40% *chose* Interested in Growth 20% *chose* Understanding 20% *chose* Humility 20% Did Not *Choose*
Collaborative "Partner" Agency Staff	4	25% *chose* Interested in Growth 25% *chose* Learning Oriented 25% *chose* Restorative 25% *chose* Resilience

While in some groups there was quite a spread of top choices, sometimes different for each and every person participating, other times there were strong leanings by certain cohorts. One such instance was with the credentialed, or teacher group. Eighty percent of them thought being "Understanding", understood in this context as trauma informed and sensitive, was the most important factor in the eight domains given. The other most significant finding from this exercise was that the youngest students believed being "Humble", understood in this context as practicing humility, empathy, and seeking understanding regarding differences in culture, gender, experience and age, was most important.

The same results were sought through the questioning route focus group process. Here, with questions, discussion and a brief explanation of each of the eight domains, the top choices most frequently referenced as most important were noted via the coding of the transcripts. Figure 4 displays both the top three coded excerpts from all focus groups combined, as well as the total number of coded excerpts for each of the eight domains from all focus groups combined.
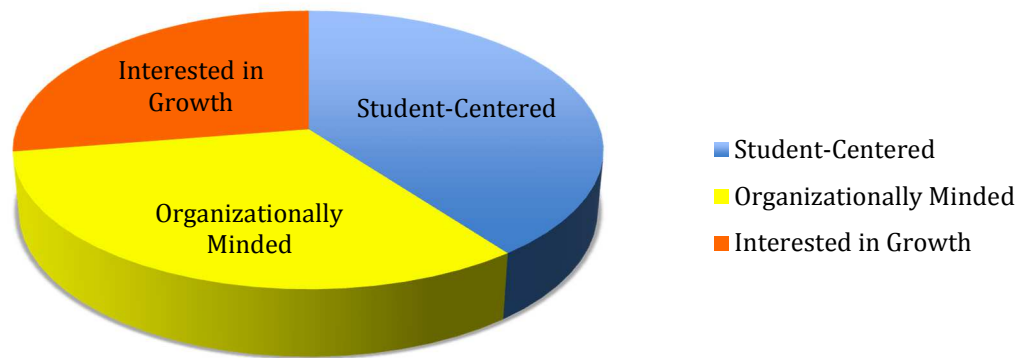
Figure 4. Top three domains from the transcript coding

Taken together as a total sample from the school's stakeholders, as represented by the

36 individuals, there is a very nearly even split in thirds around the top three essential

ingredients for a school culture and climate where students can FLOURISH (see Figure

5). The most mentioned domain was Student-Centered, which relates to a school that has

a rigorous, differentiated, equitable, and inclusive pedagogy using practices such as

Project Based Learning (PBL) and where staff value and include student voice, input, and

learning interests. Coming in second place was the Interested in Growth domain which

indicates a school that values making mistakes, being vulnerable, and taking healthy risks

with pedagogical practice in place that promote finding the balance between

disengagement and overwhelm. Finally, as a close third, Organizationally Minded was

chosen, which points to a school that views each student and staff holistically with

systems thinking and tools employed to create policies and practices for the students,

staff, and physical environment that keep the whole in mind. The other domains less

frequently selected or indicated by mention in the focus group transcripts have more to do with social-emotional learning, restorative practices, trauma informed care, cultural humility, building resilience, and protective factors. It would appear, as a collected group voice for the school, participants were asking for a school culture and climate that emphasized what might be classified as optimized student-centered learning for the whole child. This could mean that the environment and tasks are youth driven by interest and learning modality, the balance between physical activity, mental activity, and emotional activity is achieved and all of this is individually calibrated for the unique needs of each student.
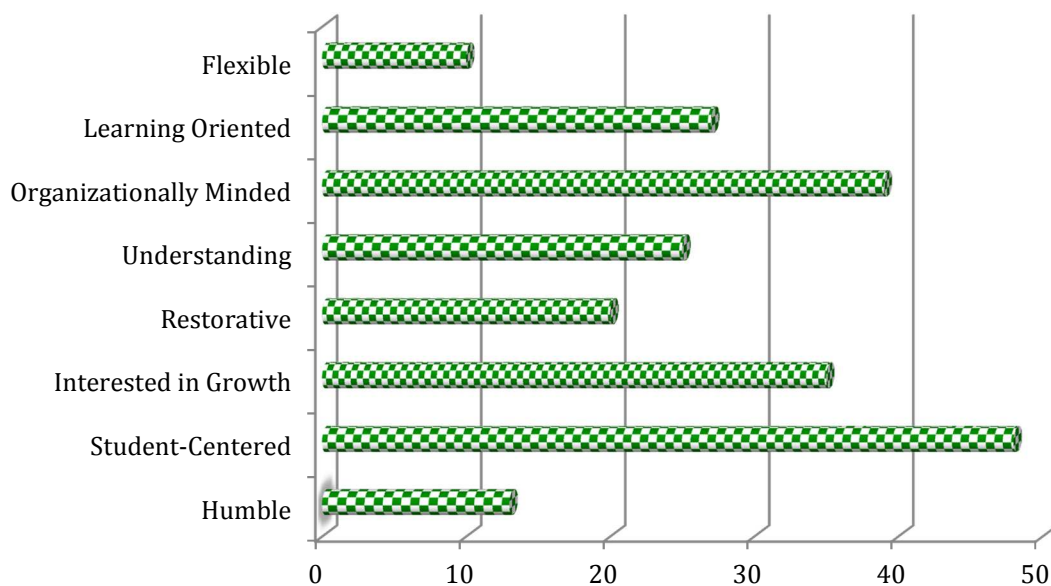
Figure 5. Domains by number of transcript excerpt codes

Emerging Themes

In addition to the FLOURISH categories of essential elements of a school culture and climate where students can grow and thrive, numerous new elements or themes arose in

the process of coding each transcript. While the eight literature review domains might have subsumed them, seen above, they appeared different enough to warrant their own labeling. Rather than automatically earmark them as sub-codes of the eight domains, they were set aside to generate further insight via memoing and analysis with other researchers. *Appendix K* is a display of the 28 themes that came from the focus group transcript analysis with an expanded definition, listed with the number of times they were coded, in effect ordering these elements from most pervasive to least. Additionally noted, is the focus group that the specific theme was most prevalent within, and if equal among more than one group, both were listed.

Many of the new themes were noted less than a half dozen times, and while important, were not close in quantity to the most referenced ones. The less frequently generated themes included: Competition, Time for Process, and Arts. The highest ranking emerging themes, clearly above all else, were Relationships as Key and Capacity – People's Internal Resources. Between these two groups were interesting trends in those categories that received 6-17 counts. In this grouping, parents valued Respect, students in 9th and 10th grade prioritized Play and Sports, collaborative partner staff sought Physical Safety and the students in 11th and 12th grade focused on Career and Life Skills, which was also the third highest emerging code overall.

Surprisingly, the two top coded emerging themes, Relationships as Key and Capacity – People's Internal Resources, were used most by the supervisors focus group. The surprise may come from the credentialed and classified staff, whom in their focus group answers often relayed a feeling of overwhelm and a need for more time, resources, and

support to do their jobs well. The fact that the supervisors group spoke of Relationships and Capacity more than any other group indicates that they also highly valued these qualities and therefore were willing to work towards manifesting them as part of the school culture and climate.

The 5Rs

A vigorous dialogue and iterative process occurred between the researcher and the second coder/assistant focus group facilitator in the consolidation of codes into a new smaller umbrella rubric. Here the inter-rater reliability scale was very high (more than 80% in each case - see Figure 6) in matching each of the eight domains and all 28 of the emerging themes into a new rubric, namely the Cycle of the 5Rs (Resources, Regulation, Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor), which was inspired by, and expanded upon, the work of Likona & Davidson (2005), Perry (2006, 2014) and Daggett (2005) (see Appendix L). Their theories and models lay as groundwork within the Alternative Education School System, and combined with the new findings of this study, produced a more comprehensive and dynamic model that captured all of the elements combined into one. The road map to how each connects is discussed next and continues the logical and sequential work of the analysis model used.
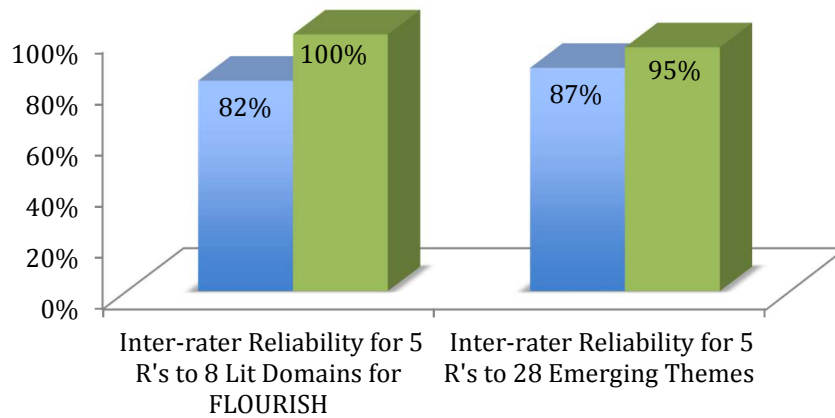
Figure 6. Inter-rater reliability: Coding literature review domains & emerging themes to 5Rs

Two key iterative results emerged. First, all of the 28 emerging themes, as well as all of the eight domains found in the literature review could be captured in the 3Rs as outlined by Daggett (2005) if two more were added; in particular Resources and Regulation (see Appendix L). Second, all 5Rs seemed to form a cycle and were together greater than their parts, with the order being important as a building block for the next experience. This order came to light in the analysis by both the primary researcher and the second coder/assistant facilitator when reviewing the focus group answers about the essential elements of a school culture and climate where students can flourish, grow, and thrive.

There was an assumption by the researcher when conducting the literature review and the questioning route that a foundational layer of support was already in place in each of the domains listed in FLOURISH. When discussed, in and by, the focus groups, and the underlying necessities for a school to flourish were not found, whether they be time,

attention, money, presence, food, logistics, or other elements, the group then chose that item as essential too – creating many of the 28 new themes. This is akin to Maslow's (1943) Hierarchy of Needs which notes basic survival and necessity issues have to be taken care of before higher level functioning and development in the areas of psychological growth and self-actualization can occur. Mirroring this sentiment, Perry (2006) spoke of one's biology also needing to be attended to before higher brain functions come online. Both theories inspired the realization that the 5Rs needed to be in a certain order, namely Resources, Regulation, Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor in terms of priority being met to enable the next one to occur optimally (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The 5Rs order and cyclic process

The 5Rs Cycle: A New Rubric for Essential Elements

   Resources. According to the focus group stakeholder answers, represented throughout all seven cohorts, Resources included not only adequate budgets and the

ability to buy needed equipment, pay staff well, and provide equity of experience for all

students, but also the ideas that adults and youth alike have access to time, skills, and

structures that allow them be their best selves when they interact with each other.

According to their responses, this may look like reduced student-teacher ratios, shorter

work hours, optional activities that restore oneself when feeling psycho-bio-socially

dysregulated. Table 3 presents a sampling of quotes as evidence and further explanation

of this crucial school culture and climate element.

Table 3

Focus Group Quotes for the Essential Element "Resources"

Focus Group Participant Type	*"Resources" Quotes*
Collaborative Partner Staff	"The student to teacher ratio is appropriate. We have mental health. We have everything—everything that's located at the school. If you need probation, if you need PD, if you need pro-social, extracurricular, everything should be there at the one-stop-shop."
Credentialed Teaching Staff	"(I)n order to stay aligned, you have to—I guess my hill, too, is self-care. In order to stay aligned and really hold fast, you have to have the internal resources. You have to be able to bring your best self. If our shared vision is in integrity, we're teaching kids integrity. I have to show up and have integrity on a daily basis. That's not easy. We need the internal resources. We need the community around us. Always helping us stay accountable."
Supervisors	"I think what's missing is built into the workday an opportunity and expectation that the key people that are on the frontline with the kids have a time to deescalate, to de-stress, to prepare so that they can be more rigorous to train and learn so that they can become more sensitive to students needs and have developed a better understanding of how they actually present to kids. Our ratio of preparation back time to on time is just way outta whack in this country."

Regulation. Regulation is the next step in the cycle of the 5Rs and continues the idea from Resources of having adequate capacity to engage others in the school setting. This time, according to the stakeholders' focus group responses, it was more about internal resources than external ones. As reviewed previously in the literature as well, when a person is dysregulated, their brain is no longer in a state of readiness to learn or inter-relate, instead they are regressed into a fight, flight, or freeze response, and the staff found attending to this state was a crucial element in creating a school culture and climate where students can flourish, thrive, and grow. They noted the importance of developing students' functioning and self-regulation in the school context before prioritizing endeavors such as discipline, education, or socializing. Participants noted that this process could be operationalized by having education, training, and practices in the area of trauma informed and restorative processes and by ensuring that all school personnel understand the signs, symptoms and repair of dysregulated youth and adults. Table 4 supports and further defines this second essential school culture and climate element.

Table 4

Focus Group Quotes for the Essential Element "Regulation"

Focus Group Participant Type	*"Regulation" Quotes*
9th and 10th Graders	"Last time, I had a problem with this girl, and I didn't do anything. I just walked away and played sports, cuz that's the only thing that could keep my mind off of it. I have playing basketball and volleyball to use as a distraction, get a fresh mind."
Collaborative Partner Staff	"If we're not even looking at the consistency, you know, trying to preserve their school placements, we're just adding to that continuous trauma that they're already experiencing. We're not adding to expanding their social emotional growth. We're not meeting them where they're at. Looking at that, we're just stripping them away of that probably tiny consistency they had."
Supervisors	"A student who arrived last week outta dress code with a cell phone. One of the office staff tried to redirect him and get him to do the right thing in a very kind and low voice and just really, 'Hey, you know what you have to do.' He wouldn't. He asked to call his dad. Actually he lied and said he didn't have a phone, and then he pulled it out. There wasn't a big reaction. She gave him the phone to call his dad to ask him what—to bring him some dress code or whatever. Dad couldn't come. She got me. I was like, 'Hey, come on into my office. Let's talk about this for a minute.' Again, low voices, calm. I ended up sitting with him for about a half an hour. He told me all this stuff that was going on in his life. Then I had this 16-year-old boy crying in my office and kind of rocking himself and telling him about his sister who had got a DUI over the weekend. His main thing he was worried about walking home in the rain. All these things that you're talking about in FLOURISH—I think whoever intercepts that kid—you have to have those things and the time and the support from your administration and enough people on the team to go, 'I can't do anything else right now. I need 30 minutes with this boy'."

Relationships. As Perry (2006, 2014) and others (Siegel, 2010; van der Kolk, 2014) research indicates: a regulated person is able to enter into a connected relationship and build the foundation for dialogue and exploration. Until regulated, the relationship is primarily about finding safety and surviving. Relationship activity is certainly woven throughout the entire process and dynamics of a school culture and climate where students can flourish as described in the focus group participants' answers, but is placed third in the 5Rs Cycle because, according to the majority of study respondents, without adequate resources for people to have what they need to stay out of crisis functioning, and without the skills and space to regulate themselves and others, the relationships can actually turn toxic rather than supportive. Taken from focus group excerpts, Relationships, in this context, were defined as interpersonal interactions that value, respect, and support each person involved, seeing the uniqueness and strengths that reside within. Operationally, this is made up of many small and large interchanges throughout the day, both building upon and returning to a resourced and regulated foundation. Table 5 presents a sampling of quotes as evidence and further detailing of this third key ingredient for a school culture and climate where students can flourish.

Table 5

Focus Group Quotes for the Essential Element "Relationships"

Focus Group Participant Type	*"Relationship" Quotes*
Parents	"To have a good relationship with the students and that they feel confident to be able to study. To be able to communicate with others, with teachers. To have a good attendance at school, because many times the boys do not want to go to school because they treat them poorly, or they see an attitude like the one I just said, with the teachers or something, but when there is a good attitude in the school. They willingly come and do not miss."
11th and 12th Graders	(What is important is) "Someone motivating to do your work, helping you grow. Someone supervising you, just to make sure you're safe or something. Someone just there that if you have hard times or something, they help you out, like counselors, something like that."
Classified Staff	"I remember sometimes when students, they're not here, the next day when they come, and I ask them, 'Why you was not here?' They get surprised because they say, "Did you notice?' I go, 'Yeah. Yeah. I know. Yeah. I missed you yesterday.' 'Really?' When it lasts four days, 'I already forgot how you look.' They're like, 'Really?' I go, 'Yeah. I miss you. I need you here. I need you to be here and get through high school. I don't want you to be a super super senior.' Now I can see they finally in the school, they learn, and they really talk to me. They talk to me."

Relevance. According the stakeholders at the alternative education high school, the fourth most important component of a school culture and climate where students can flourish is Relevance. Like all the 5Rs this part of the umbrella rubric for all themes captures a number of sub-themes. Per the responses by focus group participants it can include the student-centered pedagogical approach that lets students find and pursue their

own interests, lessons and pathways, community involvement with teaching, real-life problems and projects to study and tackle and opportunities to travel, experiment, explore and discover new areas of study and career options. Table 6 presents a sampling of quotes as evidence and further explanation of this crucial school culture and climate element.

Table 6

Focus Group Quotes for the Essential Element "Relevance"

Focus Group Participant Type	*"Relevance" Quotes*
Credential Teaching Staff	"I'm thinking about flexibility and being able to follow the energy or the heartbeat of what is bringing the most engagement and the most life and the most joy into a school. Being able to have the creative freedom as an educator or as a staff member to stop and revolve around what's happening over here, if that's where the students want to go, and that's where they feel most alive, and that's where they feel also challenged."
11th and 12th Graders	"I'd kinda like want to say something else. Give them more of an option for different—if they wanna pursue something, have a class there for them so they could get the basics of it done because if someone wants a mechanics class and they know nothing and they don't have the resources or the place to go, but it's something that they really like doing, then maybe schools should give them that option so they could make the money cuz they say going to school makes money, right?"
Collaborative Partner Staff	"(S)tudent-centered really came up for me, because I am a probation officer. I did have a student at one point directed by the court to write an essay. It was about marijuana. It was— the way that the essay was going wasn't what I really wanted to hear or to support. Sometimes, the adults don't agree with what the students want to learn about because it's changing. We were talking about that earlier with piercings and tattoos, marijuana, stuff like that. Sometimes to get them to do that academic writing or that academic math that we do, we have to be a little bit more open minded and let them choose what they want."

Rigor. The final R in the 5Rs Cycle Rubric, Rigor, as relayed by the stakeholder focus group answers is similar to the Interested in Growth domain from the literature review. In particular, the research that related to being optimally stressed (Scott, 2009), and in the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1987). The skill of calibrating this engagement was critical according to the respondents as each student will have their own metrics, aspirations and challenges, which may even change on a regular basis. Practicing this in a school culture and climate where students can flourish, per the transcript excerpts, would entail the school staff, policies, and practices all converging to support the 5Rs, since they report that rigor can only come at the end of the cycle when students feel resourced, regulated, connected, and engaged. Then with the help of the teaching community, the bar can be raised and the student, like a securely attached child, will venture forth and make mistakes and try again in an effort to develop mastery or new skills. This cycle is setting the foundation for growth mindset, building resilience and protective factors, and practicing trauma informed care all at once. To give more detail about underlying responses, Table 7 presents a sampling of quotes for the fifth R, Rigor's attributes.

Table 7

Focus Group Quotes for the Essential Element "Rigor"

Focus Group Participant Type	*"Rigor" Quotes*
Credential Teaching Staff	"I think it can work different ways. In our day program, we've talked about it being a subset of our class, where we regularly pull out up to five students to work with those that are needing extra support. Then on the flip side, those that are bored and that need more academic challenge. You're grouping students together based on where they are academically to help them succeed. It's as simple as that."
Supervisors	"The classrooms have to be filled with meaning and high expectations."
11th and 12th Graders	"Discipline…(is)… extremely important. You can't just expect even yourself to do something if you don't already have that— that you've already taught yourself pretty much to do a certain thing, especially since the brain is so lazy and stuff and it wants its quick fixes of dopamine. You need the discipline."
Collaborative Partner Staff	"Well, once again from the social work perspective, sometimes we tend to look at everybody the same way. How can we mold and create a plan for this person, to help them not necessarily go to a university like partner number two mentioned, but if they want to go to a vocational or training school. What kind of tools, skills, are we providing to them? FLOURISH, like looking at the school culture and climate, how can we combine those to help meet every youth, not just a specific group."

The Cycle of a Healthy System

The stages need to be cyclical per the stakeholders reporting, especially by the daily staff respondents (credentialed and classified staff), because it is often the case that in an attempt to experiment and reach new heights, bumps along the way occur, sending a student back through the Rs to find the resources, regulation, relationships and engagement that will hopefully return them to the rigor they were pursuing. This may

happen over a long period of time or several times per day. How that happens is the meta-layer of the experience, calling for mindful and reflective awareness of each person's actions within this process or school culture. Additionally, as was often indicated by focus group answers, many of the same needs the students have in navigating this 5 R cycle are shared by the staff as they navigate it as well alongside them in a parallel process, even as they are helping others. In the end, as a consolidation of the many stakeholder themes generated by the focus groups along with the literature review domains, these 5Rs capture the essential elements of a school culture and climate where students can grow, thrive and FLOURISH, and one that produces youth and young adults who are smart, good, and ready, which is the ultimate aim of the alternative education school system as expressed by their values and written out in their expected school wide learning results ESLRs).

Appendix L is a chart mapping a crosswalk that shows which of the 5Rs cover the emerging themes and the original eight domains as found in the literature (FLOURISH). Many in both categories fell under multiple Rs since the later categorization is broader than the first two, hence it being called an umbrella representation of all the codes and elements found from the focus groups and the literature.

To conclude, the results of the research support including both the literature review findings of the eight domains of FLOURISH as an acronym, as well as the numerous emerging themes, in a representation of essential elements that create a school culture and climate where students can flourish. All of these can fall under a new simpler umbrella

of the "5Rs" (Relationships, Regulation, Resources, Relevance, and Rigor), operating in a

cycle, which builds on each other and repeats as needed.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions

Clearly this research is a starting point, not a summative or exhaustive report on the essential elements of a school culture and climate where students can flourish. Much of the literature review and the eight domains of FLOURISH were supported in the focus group findings, along with new and important elements that emerged from the transcript analysis. These two large sets of data and research, taken together, and building upon the work of Daggett (2005), Likona (2005), Perry (2006, 2014) and their varied models of 3Rs, 2Rs and 6Rs respectively generated a larger umbrella rubric, The 5Rs Cycle, that captured their work and all 36 identified essential elements found by this research (see Table 8). These 5Rs, ideally occurring in order and cycling continuously as needed (Resources, Regulation, Relationships, Relevance, and Rigor) seem to have the potential to transform a school's culture and climate into one that supports students to flourish, grow, and thrive according the stakeholder's input via focus groups answers. Operationally, this suggests that schools must have adequately resourced staff and facilities, enabling all members of the school community to stay regulated, develop meaningful relationships and create curriculum that feels relevant to students and is calibrated for their specific capacity for learning new information and skills.

Table 8

Comparison of the Varied "Rs" Frameworks

2 (or 4th & 5th) Rs *Likona (2005)*	3Rs *Daggett (2017)*	6Rs *Perry (2006)*	5Rs Cycle *Paynter (2017)*
1. (Reading)	1. Rigor	1. Relational	1. Resources
2. (Writing)	2. Relevance	2. Relevant	2. Regulation
3. (Arithmetic)	3. Relationship	3. Repetitive	3. Relationships
4. Respect		4. Rewarding	4. Relevance
5. Responsibility		5. Rhythmic	5. Rigor
		6. Respectful	

Since the secondary research questions were not asked directly of the focus group participants, yet many of the stakeholder's answers led to implications and information pertaining to them, they are addressed in this final chapter. These questions had to do with leadership, equity and evaluating the myriad program offerings for sale or use in this milieu, as described in the list below.

Secondary Research Questions - (Implications)

a. What are the leadership implications in the findings, especially related to creating a Deliberately Developmental Organization and/or systems level response?

b. What are the equity or social justice implications that emerge from the findings, especially involving disrupting the school to prison pipeline?

c. How are the primary themes captured by the perceptions of the focus groups represented in the myriad prevention and intervention programs offered to the educational system in the form of school culture and climate initiatives, including the FLOURISH definition offered in this research? Is anything different or missing?

Implications

    Leadership of a learning institution for all. One of the biggest takeaways in terms of thinking in systems was that the internal and external experience of the front line staff has a direct and significant impact on the experience of the students. Time and time again, from the teaching, classified, student, and even supervisor groups, the notion arose that the staff at the school must feel regulated, supported, and resourced in order to fully help students feel the very same way. Staff and students are interconnected and can swing each other in an upward or downward spiral. If staff feel heard, feel part of the creation and understanding of how things function, have adequate time to replenish themselves psycho-social-emotional-physically, then they are better able to help students feel connected, valued, understood, and settled at school. Hence, students likely will be more educationally engaged and successful, which in turn helps fuel the staff's own engagement and connection. Conversely, a staff member who is tired, feels unsupported, does not have time to replenish their internal resources, and therefore can get easily triggered or dysregulated by maladaptive student behavior, may escalate a mildly difficult situation into a more severe encounter involving discipline, suspensions, expulsions, and even law enforcement activity. This junction can be seen as a critical moment in the relationship between the student and the school and staff.

    These critical moments in a vulnerable student's life, consisting of how the staff member responds to their behavior, can truly have an impact on the trajectory they travel for weeks, months, or years. Keeping them in school and connected to an adult could be the difference between graduating and thriving in work or getting influenced by other

forces which may lead to crime, drug use, or incarceration. Therefore, school leaders at the local site and district level have an urgency to manage, and advocate for, resources of time, money, and operational latitude so staff may respond to critical moments in a manner that keeps students connected to relationships, regulated in their functioning, and interested in continuing the endeavor of learning and growing. This advocacy is by no means easy, given the context of budgets that often are inadequate to the needs of the school site and a larger bureaucratic education system that delivers mandates and administrative work from the federal, state, county, and district office levels according to school funding data at the state and national levels and the various education department laws, regulations, and reporting requirements. Part of the solution may simply be including all the stakeholders, at least those employed by the school, in the problem solving activities which make up the decisions around resources, ratios, professional development, and the generation of rules and pedagogy. This one cultural shift, may lead to the many others noted, which in turn can create the climate of a school. Again, while perhaps separate in origin and description theoretically, for this research and most of the stakeholder responses, the perception and language of both school culture and school climate were blended. In implementing the desired framework, as represented by the focus group answers and later the 5Rs model, separating how school culture and school climates change could be useful from a management and systems shift perspective.

DDOs: One management framework possibility. Returning to the work of Kegan and Lahey (2016) and their term and framework of Deliberately Developmental Organizations (DDOs), local site and district school leaders could use tenets of the model

to support the realization of the 5Rs. In this model, the prime goal of the business or entity is enmeshed with the effort to create a process and atmosphere that is growth oriented for the employee. This framework of seeing the growth of each worker as important as the product, which in schools is the growth of students, can create a working environment that reprioritizes decisions about resources, schedules, and outcomes based on establishing and operationalizing the 5Rs. This is due to the stakeholder feedback that indicated taking care of the staff was a necessary part of taking care of the students. From this viewpoint, providing a work environment that is rich in things workers need to thrive in their job, operating in workloads that are optimized for them staying regulated and present, and rich in connected relationships with their co-workers can set them up for their own growth, which allows them to provide the same for the students. They are then better able to create and deliver a tailored curriculum that adds relevance for the learner and calibrates the rigor of the expectation to match the student's highest ability at the moment. This creates a climate and culture that relays the message that the purpose of being in the educational institution is the development of the people there, *all* the people there.

Equity and social justice. Another prominent theme that emerged from most every focus group was the desire for each student to be seen as unique, special, and understood with regard to their past histories and particular needs and dreams for the future; possibly akin to how a parent treats their child as described in a securely attached relationship (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978; Bowlby, 1969). To reiterate the progression of the 5Rs, it is imperative, based on this research data, that enough resources are in place

in the form of time, attention, and physical needs that all staff may be regulated and able to provide this deep level of relationship. Once that is in place, fine tuning the specifics of lesson planning and learning goals can add the relevance and rigor that will allow optimized academic growth. Taken together, the hope is that a student will blossom, or flourish, both socially-emotionally and intellectually.

While the classroom is not a social work or counseling setting in the traditional sense, it can still be therapeutic and sensitive to the issues around trauma, resilience, and social-emotional development. This research project asked about perceptions of a school culture and climate where students can flourish. As noted by the stakeholder answers, the presence of this kind of environment could impact in very significant ways the amount of youth who end up in more intensive and institutional settings, which in turn can shape the direction of their lives for decades. Ultimately, it may reduce the number of students caught in the school to prison pipeline by interrupting the critical moments that contribute to this trajectory. This interruption happens through a school culture and climate that has resourced and regulated relationships with uniquely designed curriculum for relevance and rigor.

As reported by some of the stakeholders of this research effort, this particular alternative education setting, while often being much more sensitive to an individual's needs than most comprehensive settings, can still be somewhat culturally and psycho-social-emotionally insensitive. They further noted that using this knowledge with awareness about how to take responsibility for it when it arises and to speak openly about

inequities based on race, privilege, societal structures, or other factors can help shape a school culture and climate where students can flourish.

Even more specifically, some focus group participants hoped that by including cultural humility and responsiveness (one of the eight FLOURISH domains from the literature review), racial, ethnic, economic and cultural injustices, including "micro-aggressions" and their lasting effects can be part of the changes that occur at the school setting. This could manifest in ways to honor and uplift cultural heritage; strengths from these sources could be claimed and utilized for internal and external resources, which would be the opposite experience of the "subtractive schooling" process Valenzuela (2010) wrote about.

These efforts, along with all the major themes and subthemes that emerged from the literature and focus group research, and later captured in the 5Rs Cycle, are offered as ways to bring equity to the schooling experience for youth, especially for the historically vulnerable student population that attends the alternative education setting (Foley & Pang, 2006; Katsiyannis & Williams, 1998). These students are the most at-risk for sliding into the school to prison pipeline and therefore the stakes are even higher than at traditional comprehensive educational settings (Jung et al., 2015). Disrupting this trajectory is a key practice towards providing equity in the school, community and world at large.

A Program Yardstick: SEL & academic success; prevention & intervention

Another implication for the results of this research is to use the 5Rs as a rubric for evaluating the presence of essential qualities or elements that a program offers in the

realm of school culture and climate. Many of the commercial and non-profit products offered to schools often do not include explicit tools or language around setting up resources, ensuring regulation of the student and staff psycho-biology or prioritizing the quality and type of relationship as has been described in this research. Alternately, pedagogical and curricular products may focus on one of these areas but do not connect all the linkages needed to attain the desired educational goals. These goals, conversely may be achieved through the 5Rs by a making the learning relevant and rigorous following enough resources, regulated attention, and supportive relationships.

Similarly, the 5Rs model could be used to blend discussion about prevention and intervention. While the difference is a useful distinction in some programs, the actual boundary between the two may be difficult to discern. Creating a school culture and climate where students can flourish using the 5Rs could form the basis of a preventative model as well as an intervention method for many behavioral and academic issues. As some of the focus group participants remarked, if a student is connected in relationships, regulated and engaged in the lesson, this experience replaces the need to act out or find another expression for their interests. Engaged students who are excited by school-based interactions are eager to learn, replacing prior patterns of truancy and maladaptive functioning with attendance and social-emotional-academic learning. When issues do arise, the cycle of resourcing and regulating them and returning them to a feeling of being connected via restorative or trauma informed practices acts as an intervention, even though a separate referral did not occur sending them to another program or agency. Hence, the prevention and intervention could weave together seamlessly in the 5Rs cycle.

Participatory Action Research

According to Participatory Action Research (Ozanne & Saatcioglu, 2008; White et al., 2004), part of the methodology for research can include relaying the findings to the participants and/or including them in the analysis phase. A representative from most of the focus groups was consulted about the final themes and results making up the essential elements of a school culture where students can flourish. There was excited agreement about the listing of all the elements that emerged from the literature and focus group input, as well as the idea of the 5Rs. Additionally, there was a fair amount of skepticism about the reality of being able to implement such a "dream" for an educational setting. This hesitancy arose from key concerns about student-teacher ratios, monetary resources, work hours, sufficient time for comprehensive communication, practices of transparency in decision-making, and more.

To address these concerns and provide the information to a larger audience, the researcher summarized the key themes that emerged from the focus groups and highlighted key concerns from the transcript analysis. This much shorter document will be presented to the school's stakeholders, either at a school community meeting, and/or at staff development trainings. The researcher has committed, in his separate work hat (Stage 2A & B from Chapter 3), to help facilitate the discussion of these findings with the staff at the school site. At the very least, it is proposed and implied that these findings will generate a lively and passionate dialogue about the school culture and climate and ways to move in the direction of the ideal as represented by the 5Rs, even if it is not feasible to include all the elements currently or in the future.

Further Research

Since the sample was fairly small, 36 individual stakeholders, and because the setting was a particular type of educational institution, an alternative education high school, there is a lot of room to expand this project. It would be helpful to know if these same concerns and themes were identified as essential elements within a much larger comprehensive high school. Similarly, asking if these same elements hold true across grade levels in middle and elementary programs and/or asking if they change with each developmental phase of the student could be helpful. Knowing whether these same elements are the ones identified as essential in varied demographic populations would also be interesting. In other words, in more affluent schools, does the community or family provide many of the elements identified by the stakeholders in this research, or do they also find a need for all the themes and subthemes ultimately captured in 5Rs Cycle? Finally, is there any difference between private schools, charter schools, and the public schools and which elements those stakeholders may determine as essential for a school culture and climate where students flourish? Given the current push towards vouchers, school choice and the privatization of education, and the debate about equity and opportunity that arise within those policies, it would be enlightening to know what differences may exist in stakeholder identified essential elements.

Logistically, for future research plans, it is recommended to make the questions as simple as possible. Even with much review, students and staff alike were not always clear on some of the distinctions in the questioning route utilized. Therefore, it is recommended to keep the question perhaps even to one sentence and to use language that

is universally understood. For example, if this researcher were to conduct a larger, broader study, he may reduce the question to: "What helps a student succeed at school". The same 5Rs may have been produced from such a question but the process of asking and recording and coding would be much simpler.

Limitations

Finally, for most educational research, the primary accepted goal of school endeavors and interventions is considered academic success. It is proposed that with increased awareness and implementation of the key elements of a school culture and climate where students can flourish, more students may stay enrolled, engaged, and connected to adults in a meaningful way, which may decrease discipline and agency interventions, and lead to more persistent and successful outcomes, academically and social-emotionally. To truly track and determine the effects of the 5Rs on student outcomes would take a longitudinal study that this research could not accommodate at this time, so this study depended on the perceptions of these facets as reported in the focus groups, surveys, and artifacts. A longitudinal study of a whole high school cohort over four years would expand this research by measuring the distinct effects of each factor identified as essential by stakeholders within the alternative school.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Background Questionnaire - *English and Spanish*

Background Questionnaire
SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Group Participants
Anonymous – Please DO NOT write your name

1) Age: _____

   (Write Number)

2) Gender: Female   Male
   (Circle One)

3) Your ethnic and racial background:

   (Circle the one most identified with)

   African-American, Black

   Asian

   White Caucasian – Non Hispanic

   Hispanic or Latino

   Mexican

   American Indian, Alaskan Native

   Middle Eastern

   More than one race

   Unknown or not reported

   Decline to answer

4) What level of school have you completed?

   (Circle One)

   Elementary School
   Middle School
   Some High School
   High School
   Community College
   Bachelors Degree
   Masters Degree
   Doctorate Degree
   Professional Certification or Training

5) Would you consider yourself and family, in terms of income and class:

    (Circle One)

        Non Earners – but helped by programs and/or community/family

        Lower Earners

        Lower Middle Earners

        Middle Earners

        Upper Middle Earners

        Upper Earners

        Decline to Answer

6) How important do you believe attending school is for young people?

    (Circle One)

        Not very important

        Slightly important

        Moderately important

        Fairly important

        Extremely important

7) What do you think is the most important thing a school can do for students?

    (Please rank in the order of importance to you 1-)

        Help them build protective factors and become more resilient

        Help them grow socially & emotionally

        Help them think globally and systemically

        Help them increase their academic knowledge in a way that is centered on their interests and exploration

        Ensure they feel safe and learn how to self-regulate (keep themselves calm)

        Help them restore relationships and learn conflict resolution

        Help them learn in a way that is optimized for their ability (not too easy or too hard)

        Help them understand equity and learn cultural humility and tolerance

        Other? Please write in:

Cuestionario de antecedentes
Programa de Ed SJSU
Cultura de la escuela y el clima Participantes del grupo de enfoque Anónimo
POR FAVOR NO escriba su nombre

1) Edad:
     (Escriba el número)

2) Género: Mujer   Hombre
     (Un circulo)

3) Tu origen étnico y racial:
     (Círculo con el más identificado con)

>   Afroamericano, Negro Asiático
>   Blanco Caucásico - No Hispano
>   Hispano o latino Mexicano
>   Indio Americano, Nativo de Alaska
>   Medio este
>   Más de una carrera
>   Desconocido o no reportado
>   Negarse a contestar

4) ¿Qué nivel de escuela has completado?
     (Un circulo)

>   Escuela primaria
>   Escuela intermedia
>   Algún instituto
>   Escuela secundaria
>   Colegio comunitario
>   Licenciatura
>   Maestría
>   Doctorado
>   Certificación o capacitación profesional

5)   ¿Te considerarías a ti mismo ya tu familia, en términos de ingresos y clase:
(Un circulo)

           Sin Sueldo - pero ayudado por programas y / o comunidad / familia
           Ingresos Bajos
           Personas con bajos ingresos medios
           Ganadores intermedios
           Trabajadores de nivel medio superior
           Ganadores superiores
           Negarse a contestar

6) ¿Qué tan importante crees que asistir a la escuela es para los jóvenes?
    (Un circulo)

           No es muy importante
           Un poco importante
           Moderadamente importante
           Bastante importante
           Extremadamente importante

7)   ¿Cuál crees que es lo más importante que una escuela puede hacer por los estudiantes?
(Por favor clasifíquese en el orden de importancia para usted 1-8)

           Ayúdelos a construir factores protectores ya volverse más resistentes
           Ayúdelos a crecer social y emocionalmente
           Ayudarles a pensar global y sistemáticamente
           Ayudarles a aumentar sus conocimientos académicos de una manera centrada en sus intereses y exploración
           Asegúrese de que se sientan seguros y aprenda a auto-regularse (mantenerse tranquilo)
           Ayudarles a restaurar las relaciones y aprender la resolución de conflictos
           Ayudarles a aprender de una manera que esté optimizada para su habilidad (no demasiado fácil o demasiado difícil)
           Ayudarles a entender la equidad y aprender la humildad cultural y la tolerancia
           ¿Otro? Por favor escriba en:

Focus Group Debrief Protocol
SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Group
Focus Group Facilitator Debrief Protocol

*Focus Group Stakeholder Type:*_____

*Number of Participants Present:*_____

*Researchers/Facilitators:*_____

Descriptive Notes *Asst. Facilitator* ***During Session***	***Reflective Notes*** *Facilitator & Asst. Facilitator* ***Post Session***
Physical setting, quotes, appearances, sketches, events, activities, etc.	*Connections, hunches, interpretations, insights, ideas, theoretical seeds or linkages.*
Opening	
Introduction	
Transition	
Key Qs	
Activity	
Closing	

Appendix C: Participant Screening Tool - *English and Spanish*

Participant Screening Tool
SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Group Recruitment

Name of Person:

Agency/Role/Grade:

Date:

Hi, my name is Michael Paynter, and I'm a student at San Jose State University. As part of my studies, I am researching things that make a school feel safe and welcoming and one that kids feels connected and happy to attend. I'm very interested in learning about the way Sequoia Schools operates and how it feels to work and go to school here.

I'll be asking a number of people to join small focus groups to answer these questions from students to families to staff. This will be an important way to give feedback, as it will be shared with all the people who help create the rules and a report will be created so everyone can see the outcomes – with all individual comments remaining confidential.

Are you willing to participate? If there are more folks than I have space to add in the groups, we will choose randomly from everyone who is interested. Either way, you can still be part of the receiving of the final report.

Yes_____Willing to Participate

No_____Not Willing to Participate

Contact Information:

Phone Number:

Address:

Needs Guardian Consent? _____Yes_____No Contact Date:

Name:

Phone Number:

Address:

Herramienta de selección de participantes
SJSU EdD Programa
Cultura y clima escolar Grupo de enfoque Reclutamiento

Nombre de la persona:

Agencia / Función / Grado:

Fecha:

Hola, mi nombre es Michael Paynter (or Celeste Gutirrez), y soy un estudiante en San Jose State University. Como parte de mis estudios, estoy investigando cosas que hacen que una escuela se sienta segura y acogedora y que los niños se sientan conectados y felices de asistir. Estoy muy interesado en aprender acerca de cómo funciona Sequoia Schools y cómo se siente trabajar e ir a la escuela aquí.

Voy a pedir a un número de personas que se unan a pequeños grupos de discusión para responder a estas preguntas de los estudiantes a los padres al personal a los socios de la comunidad. Esta será una manera importante de dar retroalimentación, ya que será compartida con todas las personas que ayudan a crear las reglas en la escuela y un informe se creará para que todos puedan ver los resultados - con todos los comentarios individuales confidenciales para que nadie La información es siempre reconocible. No hay absolutamente ninguna obligación de participar y ninguna consecuencia negativa vendrá de la disminución.

¿Está usted dispuesto a participar? De cualquier manera, todavía puede formar parte del grupo que recibe el informe final.

Sí_____Deseo participar
No_____No dispuesto a participar

Información del contacto:

Número de teléfono:
Dirección:

Necesita el consentimiento del tutor? _____Si_____No Fecha de contacto:

Nombre:

Teléfono: _____¿Igual que Menor?

Dirección: _____¿Igual que Menor?

Appendix D: Adult Consent Forms – *English and Spanish*

Adult Consent Form - SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Group Recruitment

What is the research?

You have been asked to participate in a research project by being part of a focus group. The research is sponsored by San Jose State University and has a purpose of asking for the opinions and experiences of all the types of people that come to Sequoia Schools. This includes the students, the staff, families and other agencies. The goal is to help describe from their viewpoints what does or would make the school a great place to attend, particularly regarding the school culture and climate.

Why have I been asked to take part in a focus group?

You have been asked because your role is an important one to get feedback from. Both the students and the adults have valuable information to share about their experiences and the research will be more complete if all stakeholder groups are involved.

Voluntary Participation

This discussion (focus group) is voluntary – you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do not take part, it will have no affect on your job or connection to the school. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, they do not have to be answered. You may leave the group and/or withdraw permission at any time for any reason.

Risks and Benefits

We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study that are greater than you would encounter in daily life. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time. There are no direct personal benefits for taking part in this research. You may benefit if the feedback generated changes the school culture in a manner that is helpful to you. Otherwise, the insights given will help the researcher as they seek insight on the topic to inform this specific school site and the knowledge base for all education research.

Audio Recording

The discussion will be audio recorded to ensure that we have accurately captured the comments of each individual. Your privacy will be protected. No names will be used in any report. The discussion will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recording will

only be available to the research team. The recordings will be stored in a secure location and will be erased when the analysis is completed.

Questions

If have any questions regarding this study, you can call: Michael Paynter at 831-466-5729.
Complaints about the research may be presented to Elena Klaw Phd.D. at 408-924-6961.
For questions about participant's rights or if you feel you have been harmed in this study, please on contact Alena Filip, SJSU Human Protections Analyst, at 408-924-2479.

Signatures

If you agree to these procedures, please put a check next to the Yes below and sign the form:

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

_____Yes, I agree to participate in the focus group.

Date:_____

Name:_____

Signature_____

Researcher Statement: I certify that the participant, or their parent or guardian, have been given adequate time to about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Name:_____

Signature_____Date_____

Formulario de consentimiento para adultos - SJSU EdD Program
Cultura y clima escolar Grupo de enfoque Reclutamiento

¿Cuál es la investigación?

Se le ha pedido participar en un proyecto de investigación al formar parte de un grupo de enfoque. La investigación es patrocinada por la Universidad Estatal de San José y tiene el propósito de solicitar las opiniones y experiencias de todos los tipos de personas que vienen a las escuelas de Sequoia. Esto incluye a los estudiantes, el personal, las familias y otras agencias. El objetivo es ayudar a describir desde sus puntos de vista lo que hace o hará que la escuela sea un gran lugar para asistir, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la cultura y el clima de la escuela.

¿Por qué me han pedido participar en un grupo de enfoque?

Se le ha preguntado porque su papel es importante para obtener resultados. Tanto los estudiantes como los adultos tienen información valiosa para compartir acerca de sus experiencias y la investigación será más completa si todos los grupos interesados están involucrados.

Participación voluntaria

Esta discusión (grupo focal) es voluntaria - usted no tiene que tomar parte si no quiere. Si usted no participa, no tendrá ningún efecto en su trabajo o efecto con la escuela. Si alguna de las preguntas te hace sentir incómodo, no tienen que ser contestadas. Usted puede dejar el grupo y / o retirar el permiso en cualquier momento por cualquier razón.

Riesgos y Beneficios

No creemos que haya riesgos involucrados en participar en este estudio que sean mayores de lo que encontraría en la vida diaria. Este estudio puede incluir riesgos que son desconocidos en este momento. No hay beneficios personales directos para participar en esta investigación. Usted puede beneficiarse si la resultados generados cambia la cultura de la escuela de una manera que es útil para usted. De lo contrario, las ideas dadas ayudarán al investigador a buscar información sobre el tema para informar a esta escuela específica y la base de conocimientos para toda la investigación educativa.

Grabación de audio

La discusión será grabada en audio para asegurar que hemos capturado con precisión los comentarios de cada individuo. Su privacidad estará protegida. No se utilizarán nombres en ningún informe. La discusión será estrictamente confidencial. La grabación de audio sólo estará disponible para el equipo de investigación. Las grabaciones se almacenarán en un lugar seguro y se borrarán cuando se complete el análisis.

Preguntas

Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio, puede llamar a: Michael Paynter al 831-466-5729.

Las quejas sobre la investigación pueden ser presentadas a Elena Klaw Phd.D. Al 408-924-6961.

Si tiene preguntas sobre los derechos de los participantes o si considera que ha sido perjudicado en este estudio, por favor comuníquese con Alena Filip, Analista de Protección Humana de SJSU, al 408-924-2479.

Firmas

Si usted está de acuerdo con estos procedimientos, por favor, coloque un cheque junto al Sí abajo y firme el formulario:

Su firma indica que voluntariamente ha aceptado participar en el estudio, que se le han explicado los detalles del estudio, que le han dado tiempo para leer este documento y que sus preguntas han sido contestadas. Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para sus registros.

_____Sí, estoy de acuerdo en participar en el grupo de enfoque.

Fecha:_____

Nombre:_____

Firma_____

Declaración del investigador: Yo certifico que el participante, o sus padres o guardián, se les ha dado tiempo suficiente para sobre el estudio y hacer preguntas. En mi opinión, el participante entiende sus derechos y el propósito, los riesgos, los beneficios y los procedimientos de la investigación y ha aceptado voluntariamente participar.

Nombre:_____

Fecha de firma_____

Fecha:_____

Appendix E: Parent/Guardian Consent Forms - *English and Spanish*

Parent/Guardian Consent Form - SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Group Recruitment

What is the research?

Your child has been asked to participate in a research project by being part of a focus group. The research is sponsored by San Jose State University and has a purpose of asking for the opinions and experiences of all the types of people that come to Sequoia Schools. This includes the students, the staff, families and other agencies. The goal is to help describe from their viewpoints what does or would make the school a great place to attend, particularly regarding the school culture and climate.

Why has my child been asked to take part in a focus group?

Your child has been asked because their role is an important one to get feedback from. Both the students and the adults have valuable information to share about their experiences and the research will be more complete if all stakeholder groups are involved.

Voluntary Participation

This discussion (focus group) is voluntary – your child does not have to take part if you do not want them to. If they do not take part, it will have no affect on their status, grades, enrollment or connection to the school. If any of the questions make them feel uncomfortable, they do not have to be answered. They may leave the group and/or withdraw permission at any time for any reason. You may also withdraw permission at any time for any reason.

Risks and Benefits

We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study that are greater than they would encounter in daily life. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time. There are no direct personal benefits for taking part in this research. They may benefit if the feedback generated changes the school culture in a manner that is helpful to them. Otherwise, the insights given will help the researchers as they seek insight on the topic to inform this specific school site and the knowledge base for all education research.

Audio Recording

The discussion will be audio recorded to ensure that we have accurately captured the comments of each individual. Their privacy will be protected. No names will be used in

any report. The discussion will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recording will only be available to the research team. The recordings will be stored in a secure location and will be erased when the analysis is completed.

Questions

If have any questions regarding this study, you can call: Michael Paynter at 831-466-5729.
Complaints about the research may be presented to Elena Klaw Phd.D. at 408-924-6961.
For questions about participant's rights or if you feel you have been harmed in this study, please on contact Alena Filip, SJSU Human Protections Analyst, at 408-924-2479.

Signatures

If you agree to these procedures, please put a check next to the Yes below and sign the form:

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to allow your child to be part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you and your child, that you have been given the time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

____Yes, I agree to participate in the focus group.
     Date:_____

Name of Child or Minor:_____Name of Parent or Guardian_____

Relationship to Child or
Minor_____Signature_____

Researcher Statement: I certify that the participant, or their parent or guardian, have been given adequate time to about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Name:_____

Signature_____Date_____

¿Cuál es la investigación?
A su hijo se le ha pedido participar en un proyecto de investigación al formar parte de un grupo de enfoque. La investigación es patrocinada por la Universidad Estatal de San José y tiene el propósito de solicitar las opiniones y experiencias de todos los tipos de personas que vienen a las escuelas de Sequoia. Esto incluye a los estudiantes, el personal, las familias y otras agencias. El objetivo es ayudar a describir desde sus puntos de vista lo que hace o hará que la escuela sea un gran lugar para asistir, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la cultura y el clima de la escuela.

¿Por qué se le ha pedido a mi niño que participe en un grupo de enfoque?
Se le ha preguntado a su hijo porque su papel es importante para obtener retroalimentación. Tanto los estudiantes como los adultos tienen información valiosa para compartir acerca de sus experiencias y la investigación será más completa si todos los grupos interesados están involucrados.

Participación voluntaria
Esta discusión (grupo de enfoque) es voluntaria - su hijo no tiene que participar si no quiere que lo hagan. Si no toman parte, no tendrá ningún efecto en su estado, grados, inscripción o conexión a la escuela. Si alguna de las preguntas los hace sentir incómodos, no tienen que ser contestados. Pueden abandonar el grupo y / o retirar el permiso en cualquier momento por cualquier motivo. También puede retirar el permiso en cualquier momento por cualquier motivo.

Riesgos y Beneficios
No creemos que haya riesgos involucrados en participar en este estudio que sean mayores de los que encontrarían en la vida cotidiana. Este estudio puede incluir riesgos que son desconocidos en este momento. No hay beneficios personales directos para participar en esta investigación. Ellos pueden beneficiarse si la retroalimentación generada cambia la cultura de la escuela de una manera que es útil para ellos. De lo contrario, las ideas dadas ayudarán a los investigadores a buscar información sobre el tema para informar a este sitio escolar específico y la base de conocimientos para toda la investigación educativa.

Grabación de audio
La discusión será grabada en audio para asegurar que hemos capturado con precisión los comentarios de cada individuo. Su privacidad estará protegida. No se utilizarán nombres en ningún informe. La discusión será estrictamente confidencial. La grabación de audio sólo estará disponible para el equipo de investigación. Las grabaciones se almacenarán en un lugar seguro y se borrarán cuando se complete el análisis.

Preguntas

Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio, puede llamar a: Michael Paynter al 831-466-5729.

Las quejas sobre la investigación pueden ser presentadas a Elena Klaw Phd.D. Al 408-924-6961.

Si tiene preguntas sobre los derechos de los participantes o si considera que ha sido perjudicado en este estudio, por favor comuníquese con Alena Filip, Analista de Protección Humana de SJSU, al 408-924-2479.

Firmas

Si usted está de acuerdo con estos procedimientos, por favor, coloque un cheque junto al Sí abajo y firme el formulario:

Su firma indica que usted voluntariamente acepta que su hijo participe en el estudio, que los detalles del estudio se le hayan explicado a usted ya su hijo, que se le ha dado el tiempo para leer este documento y que sus preguntas Ha sido contestada. Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para sus registros.

____Sí, estoy de acuerdo en participar en el grupo de enfoque.
Fecha:_____

Nombre del Niño o Menor: _____ Nombre del Padre o Guardián_____

Relación con el Niño o Menor _____
Firma_____

Declaración del investigador: Yo certifico que el participante, o sus padres o guardián, se les ha dado tiempo suficiente para sobre el estudio y hacer preguntas. En mi opinión, el participante entiende sus derechos y el propósito, los riesgos, los beneficios y los procedimientos de la investigación y ha aceptado voluntariamente participar.

Nombre:_____

Fecha de firma_____

Fecha:_____

Appendix F: Minor Assent Forms – *English and Spanish*

Minor Assent Form *-* SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Group Recruitment

What is the research?

You have been asked to participate in a research project by being part of a focus group. The research is sponsored by San Jose State University and has a purpose of asking for the opinions and experiences of all the types of people that come to Sequoia Schools. This includes the students, the staff, families and other agencies. The goal is to help describe from their viewpoints what does or would make the school a great place to attend, particularly regarding the school culture and climate.

Why have I been asked to take part in a focus group?

You have been asked because your role is an important one to get feedback from. Both the students and the adults have valuable information to share about their experiences and the research will be more complete if all stakeholder groups are involved.

Voluntary Participation

This discussion (focus group) is voluntary – you do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you do not take part, it will have no affect on your status, grades, enrollment or connection to the school. If any of the questions make you feel uncomfortable, they do not have to be answered. You may leave the group and/or withdraw permission at any time for any reason.

Risks and Benefits

We do not think any risks are involved in taking part in this study that are greater than you would encounter in daily life. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time. There are no direct personal benefits for taking part in this research. You may benefit if the feedback generated changes the school culture in a manner that is helpful to you. Otherwise, the insights given will help the researcher as they seek insight on the topic to inform this specific school site and the knowledge base for all education research.

Audio Recording

The discussion will be audio recorded to ensure that we have accurately captured the comments of each individual. Your privacy will be protected. No names will be used in any report. The discussion will be kept strictly confidential. The audio recording will

only be available to the research team. The recordings will be stored in a secure location and will be erased when the analysis is completed.

Questions

> If have any questions regarding this study, you can call: Michael Paynter at 831-466-5729.
> Complaints about the research may be presented to Elena Klaw Phd.D. at 408-924-6961.
> For questions about participant's rights or if you feel you have been harmed in this study, please on contact Alena Filip, SJSU Human Protections Analyst, at 408-924-2479.

Signatures

If you agree to these procedures, please put a check next to the Yes below and sign the form:

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to be part of the study, that the details of the study have been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read this document, and that your questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of this consent form for your records.

____Yes, I agree to participate in the focus group.
    Date:_____

Name:_____

Signature_____

Researcher Statement: I certify that the participant, or their parent or guardian, have been given adequate time to about the study and ask questions. It is my opinion that the participant understands his/her rights and the purpose, risks, benefits and procedures of the research and has voluntarily agreed to participate.

Name:_____

Signature_____Date_____

¿Cuál es la investigación?

Se le ha pedido participar en un proyecto de investigación al formar parte de un grupo de enfoque. La investigación es patrocinada por la Universidad Estatal de San José y tiene el propósito de solicitar las opiniones y experiencias de todos los tipos de personas que vienen a las escuelas de Sequoia. Esto incluye a los estudiantes, el personal, las familias y otras agencias. El objetivo es ayudar a describir desde sus puntos de vista lo que hace o hará que la escuela sea un gran lugar para asistir, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la cultura y el clima de la escuela.

¿Por qué me han pedido participar en un grupo de enfoque?

Se le ha preguntado porque su papel es importante para obtener retroalimentación. Tanto los estudiantes como los adultos tienen información valiosa para compartir acerca de sus experiencias y la investigación será más completa si todos los grupos interesados están involucrados.

Participación voluntaria

Esta discusión (grupo focal) es voluntaria - usted no tiene que tomar parte si no quiere. Si usted no participa, no tendrá ningún efecto sobre su estado, calificaciones, inscripción o conexión a la escuela. Si alguna de las preguntas te hace sentir incómodo, no tienen que ser contestadas. Usted puede dejar el grupo y / o retirar el permiso en cualquier momento por cualquier razón.

Riesgos y Beneficios

No creemos que haya riesgos involucrados en participar en este estudio que sean mayores de lo que encontraría en la vida diaria. Este estudio puede incluir riesgos que son desconocidos en este momento. No hay beneficios personales directos para participar en esta investigación. Usted puede beneficiarse si la retroalimentación generada cambia la cultura de la escuela de una manera que es útil para usted. De lo contrario, las ideas dadas ayudarán al investigador a buscar información sobre el tema para informar a esta escuela específica y la base de conocimientos para toda la investigación educativa.

Grabación de audio

La discusión será grabada en audio para asegurar que hemos capturado con precisión los comentarios de cada individuo. Su privacidad estará protegida. No se utilizarán nombres en ningún informe. La discusión será estrictamente confidencial. La grabación de audio

sólo estará disponible para el equipo de investigación. Las grabaciones se almacenarán en un lugar seguro y se borrarán cuando se complete el análisis.

Preguntas

Si tiene preguntas sobre este estudio, puede llamar a: Michael Paynter al 831-466-5729.

Las quejas sobre la investigación pueden ser presentadas a Elena Klaw Phd.D. Al 408-924-6961.

Si tiene preguntas sobre los derechos de los participantes o si considera que ha sido perjudicado en este estudio, por favor comuníquese con Alena Filip, Analista de Protección Humana de SJSU, al 408-924-2479.

Firmas

Si usted está de acuerdo con estos procedimientos, por favor, coloque un cheque junto al Sí abajo y firme el formulario:

Su firma indica que voluntariamente ha aceptado participar en el estudio, que se le han explicado los detalles del estudio, que le han dado tiempo para leer este documento y que sus preguntas han sido contestadas. Usted recibirá una copia de este formulario de consentimiento para sus registros.

_____Sí, estoy de acuerdo en participar en el grupo de enfoque.

Fecha:_____

Nombre:_____

Firma_____

Declaración del investigador: Yo certifico que el participante, o sus padres o guardián, se les ha dado tiempo suficiente para sobre el estudio y hacer preguntas. En mi opinión, el participante entiende sus derechos y el propósito, los riesgos, los beneficios y los procedimientos de la investigación y ha aceptado voluntariamente participar.

Nombre:_____

Fecha de firma_____

Fecha:_____

Appendix G: Questioning Route – *English and Spanish*

Questioning Route
SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Groups

Opening –

1) Please tell us your name, how long you have been at this school and one of your favorite things to do. 5 min.

Introduction –

2) When you hear the term "School Culture" or "School Climate" what comes to mind? 5 min.

Transition –

3) What do you think is meant by a school culture and climate where students can flourish? 5 min.

Brief review of 8 domains of a "Flourishing" as developed by researcher.
-Use flip chart to show and explain

Key Qs –

4) What are some essential (important) ingredients you think or feel would create a school culture and climate where students can flourish? (i.e. Aspects of the school's operation that help students learn, grow and succeed) [CRQ I] 7 min.

5) Do you think there might be some particular operations in the school that are examples of the essential ingredients put into action? [CRQ II] 5 min.

6) Can you recall a time at the school that you personally experienced (firsthand or witnessed) some of these key aspects related to the essential ingredients of a school culture where students can flourish? [CRQ III] 5 min.

7) Was there a time you personally experienced or felt the opposite of these key ingredients? [CRQ IV] 5 min.

8) What factors (actions, attitudes, polices and/or practices,) help support these key experiences and essential ingredients at the school? [III] 8 min.

9) What factors (actions, attitudes, polices and/or practices,) get in the way of these key experiences and essential ingredients at the school? [IV] 7 min.

Insert Activity– See Appendix H 8 min.

<u>*Ending –*</u>

10) *(Post Summary by Asst. Facilitator)* Have we missed anything important in our list of key experiences or essential ingredients or the factors that support or inhibit (get in the way of) them? [I & II] 5 min.

11) If you could only make sure one key experience, essential ingredient or factor of the school culture and climate was guaranteed to happen, which would it be? (Magic Wand Q) [I & II] 5 min.-*Review Flip Chart Answers, circle or mark most important ones*

70 minutes total.

Ruta de preguntas
SJSU EdD Programa
Cultura y clima de la escuela Grupos de enfoque

Apertura -

1)   Por favor díganos su nombre, cuánto tiempo ha estado en esta escuela y una de sus cosas favoritas para hacer. 5 minutos.

Introducción -

2)   Cuando escuchas el término "Cultura Escolar" o "Clima Escolar" ¿qué te viene a la mente? 5 minutos.

Transición -

3)   ¿Qué crees que se entiende por cultura y clima escolar donde los estudiantes pueden florecer? 5 minutos.

Breve revisión de 8 dominios de un "Flourishing" como desarrollado por el investigador.
-Utilice el rotafolio para mostrar y explicar

Clave Qs -

4)   ¿Cuáles son algunos ingredientes esenciales (importantes) que piensas o sientas que crearían una cultura escolar y un clima donde los estudiantes puedan florecer? (Es decir, los aspectos de la operación de la escuela que ayudan a los estudiantes a aprender, crecer y tener éxito) [CRQ I] 7 min.

5)   ¿Cree usted que podría haber algunas operaciones en particular en la escuela que son ejemplos de los ingredientes esenciales puestos en acción? [CRQ II] 5 min.

6)   ¿Puede recordar una vez en la escuela que experimentó (de primera mano o presenciado) algunos de estos aspectos clave relacionados con los ingredientes esenciales de una cultura escolar donde los estudiantes pueden florecer? [CRQ III] 5 min.

7)   ¿Hubo un tiempo en que experimentaste o sentías lo contrario de estos ingredientes clave? [CRQ IV] 5 min.

8)   ¿Qué factores (acciones, actitudes, políticas y / o prácticas) ayudan a apoyar estas experiencias clave e ingredientes esenciales en la escuela? [III] 8 min.

9)   ¿Qué factores (acciones, actitudes, políticas y / o prácticas) interfieren en estas experiencias clave e ingredientes esenciales en la escuela? [IV] 7 min.

Insertar Actividad- Ver Apéndice H *8 min.*

Finalizando –

10)   (Respuesta de Asst. Facilitador) ¿Hemos perdido algo importante en nuestra lista de experiencias clave o ingredientes esenciales o los factores que apoyan o inhiben (obstaculizan) a ellos? [I y II] 5 min.
11)   Si sólo pudiera asegurarse de que una experiencia clave, el ingrediente esencial o factor de la cultura de la escuela y el clima se garantizó que suceda, ¿cuál sería? (Magic Wand Q) [I & II] 5 min.-*Revise Flip Chart Respuestas, marque o marque los más importantes*

70 minutos en total.

Appendix H: Projective Drawing Activity - *English and Spanish*

Projective Drawing Activity
SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Focus Groups

Activity

Supplies Needed:

- Large sheets of paper for drawing
- Pencils and Colored Pencils

Picture Drawing Prompt: Please create a picture of your ideal school building. Inside the building, please draw three things happening that make it a healthy, safe and supportive place to be: A school culture and climate where students are flourishing. Now rate them 1,2,3 with 1 being the most important thing and 2 & 3 following in importance. (Block building and stick figures ok☺)

Please describe your picture to the group.

Probing/Extending Phrases:

- Can you tell me more about that?
- How do you know that?
- What do you mean by that?
- Can you say more?
- Have others had this experience?
- Does anyone feel the same, or different?

Actividad de dibujo
SJSU EdD Programa
Cultura y clima de la escuela Grupos de enfoque

Actividad

Provisiones necesarias:

- Grandes hojas de papel para dibujar
- Lápices y lápices de colores

Creación de dibujo de imagen: Por favor, crear una imagen de su edificio de la escuela ideal. Dentro del edificio, por favor dibuje tres cosas que lo convierten en un lugar saludable, seguro y de apoyo. Ahora clasifíqueles 1, 2,3 con 1 siendo lo más importante y 2 y 3 siguiendo en importancia. (Edificio de bloques y figuras de palos ok)

Describa su imagen al grupo.

Sondar / extender frases:

¿Puede decirme más sobre eso?
¿Cómo sabes eso?
¿Qué quiere decir con eso?
¿Puede decir más?
¿Han tenido otros esta experiencia?
¿Alguien se siente igual, o diferente?

Appendix I: Extant Document List

Extant Document List
SJSU EdD Program
School Culture & Climate Research

List of Extant Documents Reviewed

1. Trauma Informed Care (TIC) Expectations from their handbook

2. District written JCCASAC Journal Article on TIC

3. WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges): Mid-Cycle report - TIC and school climate portions of the report

4. Local Control Accountability Plans (LCAPS) and their pertinent goals and metrics

5. Referral and suspension forms

6. Board polices about discipline and/or school climate

7. Other local policies created for the new school site

Appendix J: Three Categories of Codes Used in Analysis

FLOURISH – Literature Review Codes	Questioning Route Codes	Emerging Theme Codes
1. Flexible	1. *First Associations of School Culture and Climate*	1. Relationships as Key
2. Learning Oriented	2. *First Associations of the term Flourish*	2. Capacity – People's Internal Resources
3. Organizationally Minded	3. *Time Connected School*	3. Career and Life Skills Focus
4. Understanding	4. *Essential Elements - General*	4. Sports
5. Restorative	5. *Essential Elements - Operations*	5. Students Seen as Unique and Special
6. Interested in Growth	6. *Essential Elements – Negative Experiences*	6. Rules-Natural Consequences in Place
7. 7.Student-Centered	7. *Essential Elements – Positive Experiences*	7. Physical Safety
8. Humble	8. *Inhibiting Factors*	8. Respect
	9. *Supportive Factors*	9. Having a Sense of Belonging
	10. *"Top Three" Elements from Drawing Activity*	10. Basic Needs Taken Care of
	11. *"Magic Wand" Answers*	11. Play
		12. Person-Centered Environment
		13. Communication

		14. Global Understanding,
		15. Seeing Future Strengths
		16. Transparency
		17. Time for Process
		18. Competition
		19. Equity
		20. Arts
		21. Resources
		22. Collaboration
		23. Community Connected
		24. Vision
		25. Mindfulness
		26. Pride
		27. Role Models
		28. Practice

Appendix K: Emerging Themes Found with Number of Excerpts and Top Focus Group Prevalence

Emerging Theme	No. of Excerpts (Times Coded)	Focus Group Where Theme Found Most Prevalent
Relationships as Key *(Positive, Supportive & Authentic Interactions)*	60	Supervisors
Capacity – People's Internal Resources *(Time and Space to Refuel; Workload Reasonable)*	32	Supervisors
Career and Life Skills Focus *(Students Learn "Life Hacks" & Relevant Skills)*	17	Students 11th & 12th
Sports *(Time, Resources & Frequency for Lots of Sports)*	15	Students 9th & 10th
Students Seen as Unique and Special *(Each Student is Understood Individually)*	11	Parents
Rules-Natural Consequences in Place *(Everyone Knows What to Expect)*	11	Parents & Teachers
Physical Safety *(No One is Worried About Being Harmed)*	10	Partners
Respect *(In Both Directions)*	10	Parents
Having a Sense of Belonging *(Students Feel Connected and Ownership to School)*	9	Supervisors
Basic Needs Taken Care of *(Food, Transportation, Medicine, Etc.)*	7	Supervisors
Play *(Games, Sports, Learning Activities)*	6	Students 9th & 10th
Person-Centered Environment *(Not Just Student-Centered – Same for All Present)*	5	Teachers

Communication *(Time & Effort to Keep Everyone on the Same Page)*	5	Teachers & Staff
Global Understanding *(Travel, Field Trips, Cultural Understanding)*	5	Students
Seeing Future Strengths *(Having High Expectations with Support & Hope)*	5	Supervisors
Transparency *(Expectations are Clear and Plans are Shared)*	3	Teachers
Time for Process *(Space for Ritual, Closure, Celebration of Events)*	3	Teachers
Competition *(Motivation via Earned Achievement & Recognition)*	3	Students 11th & 12th
Equity *(Inclusion for All)*	3	Staff
Arts *(Enrichment Experiences)*	3	Supervisors
Resources (For All People at the School Site for All Needs!)	3	Teachers
Collaboration (All Combinations of Students & Staff)	2	Teachers
Community Connected (Extending the School Campus; Leveraging Both)	2	Teachers & Partners
Vision *(Stakeholder Inclusive, Alignment of Resources & Purpose)*	2	Teachers
Mindfulness *(Time for Reflection & Planning of Thoughtful Responses)*	2	Staff & Partners
Pride *(Both Intrapersonally & for the School Site)*	1	Partners

Role Models *(Especially Ones Students Can See Themselves In)*	1	Partners
Practice *(Repetition, Consistency and Discipline)*	1	Staff

Appendix L: Crosswalk of 8 Domains from Literature Review (FLOURISH) and 28 Emerging Themes with the 5Rs

8 FLOURISH Domains (Green) & 28 Emerging Themes (Orange)	5Rs
Flexible Building up of protective factors/Assets; Increasing resilience	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
Learning Oriented Social & Emotional learning and perseverance	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships 4. Relevance
Organizationally Minded Holistic & systems thinking with policies, people & environment	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
Understanding Sensitivity to the effects of trauma and stressors of students	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
Restorative Restorative justice and practices	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
Interested in Growth Optimal Stress, ZPD and having a growth mindset	4. Relevance 5. Rigor
Student-Centered Differentiated, Equitable and Inclusive Pedagogy	3. Relationships 4. Relevance

Humble Curiosity about culture, gender, equity, systems, power	2. Regulation 3. Relationships
1. Relationships as Key *(Positive, Supportive & Authentic Interactions)*	3. Relationships
2. Capacity – People's Internal Resources *(Time and Space to Refuel; Workload Reasonable)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
3. Career and Life Skills Focus *(Students Learn "Life Hacks" & Relevant Skills)*	4. Relevance
4. Sports *(Time, Resources & Frequency for Lots of Sports)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation
5. Students Seen as Unique and Special *(Each Student is Understood Individually)*	3. Relationships
6. Rules-Natural Consequences in Place *(Everyone Knows What to Expect)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
7. Physical Safety *(No One is Worried About Being Harmed)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
8. Respect *(In Both Directions)*	2. Regulation 3. Relationships
9. Having a Sense of Belonging *(Students Feel Connected and Ownership to School)*	3. Relationships

10. Basic Needs Taken Care of *(Food, Transportation, Medicine, Etc.)*	1. Resources
11. Play *(Games, Sports, Learning Activities)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation
12. Person-Centered Environment *(Not Just Student-Centered – Same for All Present)*	1. Resources 3. Relationships
13. Communication *(Time & Effort to Keep Everyone on the Same Page)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships
14. Global Understanding *(Travel, Field Trips, Cultural Understanding)*	4. Relevance
15. Seeing Future Strengths *(Having High Expectations with Support & Hope)*	3. Relationships 5. Rigor
16. Transparency *(Expectations are Clear and Plans are Shared)*	2. Regulation
17. Time for Process *(Space for Ritual, Closure, Celebration of Events)*	1. Resources
18. Competition *(Motivation via Earned Achievement & Recognition)*	5. Rigor
19. Equity *(Inclusion for All)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation 3. Relationships

20. Arts *(Enrichment Experiences)*	1. Resources 4. Relevance
21. Resources (For All People at the School Site for All Needs!)	1. Resources
22. Collaboration (All Combinations of Students & Staff)	3. Relationships
23. Community Connected (Extending the School Campus; Leveraging Both)	1. Resources 3. Relationships
24. Vision *(Stakeholder Inclusive, Alignment of Resources & Purpose)*	4. Relevance
25. Mindfulness *(Time for Reflection & Planning of Thoughtful Responses)*	1. Resources 2. Regulation
26. Pride *(Both Intrapersonally & for the School Site)*	3. Relationships
27. Role Models *(Especially Ones Students Can See Themselves In)*	3. Relationships 4. Relevance
28. Practice *(Repetition, Consistency and Discipline)*	5. Rigor